



MY ADVENTURES ON  
THE AUSTRALIAN  
GOLDFIELDS

WILLIAM CRAIG



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GOLDFIELDS

BY

W. CRAIG

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# TO MY WIFE

BY WHOSE DESIRE

THESE REMINISCENCES WERE WRITTEN





## PREFACE.



ALTHOUGH my mind has often gone back over the events which befell me on the Australian goldfields in the early fifties, I might never have set them down in writing but for the accident of my coming across an account of Captain Melville the bushranger, in which, not by any means for the first time, the character of that singular man was so grossly misrepresented that little persuasion was needed to induce me to put on record my very different impressions. As I mused upon my meeting with him, other memories belonging to those distant days came crowding up, and these, too, I was tempted to record. By friends whose judgment is not, I hope, too much influenced by partiality, it has been represented to me that the reminiscences which thus came

to be written might not be without interest to a wider circle of readers than that for which they were first intended, and so I trust it may prove to be.

W. C.

*Invercargill, New Zealand.*

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# MY ADVENTURES

ON THE

## AUSTRALIAN GOLDFIELDS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### MY ARRIVAL IN AUSTRALIA FELIX.

“YES, that’s the land for me! A continent in itself, inhabited by only a few civilised beings and wild aborigines, while millions of acres of good land are waiting settlement by people of the right stamp. A country possessing a genial climate and unlimited resources; while, more attractive than all, rumours are afloat that rich goldfields have been discovered in several parts of it. Who knows but that it may yet turn out a second California? Irrespective of gold, there is elbow room there. Here the struggle for existence becomes keener each year. Under the Southern Cross there is room for all, nor need one vex one’s soul about conventionalities.”

Such were my thoughts in the year 1851, after reading Major Mitchell’s interesting work on the climate and resources of Australia Felix.

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The picture I drew in my mind of the place had an exhilarating effect. Although I had not arrived at the full age of manhood, I yearned to know more of the world and human nature than I could glean in my limited environment, and in a second-hand way from book lore. It is only those with similar aspirations and fondness for change who can appreciate as I did a four months' voyage in genial latitudes, or can enter into the feelings that possessed me when I found myself within sight of the land of my day-dreams. Next day, in company with two other vessels, crowded with passengers like our own, we anchored inside Port Phillip Heads.

From the pilot who came aboard outside the Heads, we learnt that gold discoveries were being made daily, that nearly all the Civil servants had resigned, and that soldiers were doing police duty until the latter service should be reorganised. Almost all the able-bodied male population of Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania had thrown up their occupations and left for the diggings. About fifty ships were lying in Hobson's Bay almost deserted, and in many cases were in possession of caretakers. Seamen were offered £40 and £50 for the run to England, and even for that consideration could not be got. The officials of the gaol, the hospital, and other public institutions had gone off with the rest, and in these places

likewise Tommy Atkins was doing duty. That was a bad time for soldiers in Melbourne. For the exceptionally responsible and uncongenial work thrust upon them they received but little extra compensation, and it was only fear of the heavy penalty attached to desertion that prevented them joining *en masse* in the wild rush to the gold-fields. As it was, some fifteen of them had braved consequences a fortnight before, and had managed to escape, while the corporal's guard sent in pursuit had not up to this time returned. It was suspected, indeed, that the pursuers had followed the example of their quarry and taken to gold hunting.

We also learnt that just prior to the gold discoveries, trade and commerce throughout Australia had been in a very depressed condition, and that intense anxiety had prevailed everywhere. Cattle and sheep had been dying in thousands, wool had been almost unsaleable, and money so scarce, in Adelaide especially, that tokens and paper money issued by a private company (the South Australian Land Company) became media of exchange. Then was heard the talismanic cry that the richest goldfield yet discovered was being opened up at Ballarat, in the Port Phillip district, and as a result everyone was filled with hope and expectation. All who could raise sufficient money to pay their way were soon *en route* for the new

#### 4 ADVENTURES ON THE GOLDFIELDS.

El Dorado. Houses and land were sold—especially in South Australia—for a quarter of their value; indeed, in some cases these were exchanged for a horse and dray to convey the former owners and their belongings to the field; and within a month after the receipt of the news, of its population of from twelve to fifteen thousand, Adelaide had scarcely an able-bodied man left.

All this, and much more, the pilot told us while we were waiting for a breeze to start us for Williamstown. His story created a profound longing on the part of almost all on board, the sailors included, to find the shortest way to Ballarat.

Owing to the battering the ship had received in rounding the Cape of Good Hope, her sides required cleaning and painting, and a quarter boat was lowered and four men were told off for the service. While preparation for the work was being made, one of the men was observed speaking in low, earnest tones to a ship's apprentice. Shortly afterwards the latter ascended the main rigging and appeared to be scanning the country surrounding Port Phillip Heads. Then, hastily descending, he joined the boat's crew, and with a farewell cheer to the onlookers they at once pulled lustily for land!

It was the second officer's watch at this time, but he was not to be seen about the decks. On



search being made, he was discovered in the steerage with a young lady passenger to whom he had become attached during the voyage. The men knew the officer's weakness, and, suspecting that he would be having his customary interview with his inamorata, had sent the boy accomplice aloft to take observations. His report being satisfactory, they had at once cut the painter and cleared for the shore.

Naturally the master was irritated at the loss of his boat, and he threatened to deduct her value from the wages of the amorous second officer. The delinquent, however, took the matter quite unconcernedly, merely replying that the captain could charge him with half a dozen boats if he would accept an I O U for them.

This answer was a striking contrast to the respectful demeanour observed by the officers towards the master during the passage, and denoted that lawful authority aboard the ship had come to an abrupt termination. Indeed, a sudden spirit of independence seemed to possess all who had listened to the pilot's story. He had given us to understand that, under existing conditions in Victoria, "Jack was as good as his master, and in many cases better."

Next morning most of the passengers were on deck at daybreak, and a little later we had a great surprise.

After the departure of the boat the day before, the rest of the crew were seen to be holding counsel on the forecastle deck, and, contrary to their usual custom, they would not allow the passengers in that quarter. It was evident that another conspiracy was being hatched, but no one anticipated the outcome of it.

The first consequence of the plot was that oars, a sail, bags of provisions, and some cases of spirits were placed aboard the remaining quarter boat. It was again the second officer's watch, and he appeared to be superintending the operations. When the boat had been equipped and provisioned, the blocks were greased to prevent noise, the boat was lowered, and all hands went aboard except the captain, the chief officer, and one seaman. The two former were asleep, and the seaman had decided to return with the ship.

But now the master was aroused by the noise on deck, and put in an appearance as the oars were being shipped. He could not realise at once that his men were deserting *en bloc* until the second officer said he hoped shortly to see him on the diggings. At this greeting he recovered his senses; and, rushing to the cabin, brought out a number of firearms he had loaded the previous evening. The boat was at this time some fifty yards from the ship, the men lying on their oars. He demanded that they should return to duty, or

he would fire upon them. At this threat one of the crew announced himself as the ringleader, and heroically requested to be the first victim. Others took exception to their mate's generous loyalty, and decided that all or none should be sacrificed.

The captain was evidently loth to fire at unarmed men, and gave them five minutes to decide whether or not they would comply with his mandate. The only response was a general request to "Fire away!" while one coarse fellow who had given much trouble during the voyage offered his breech as a target. Their indifference to the captain's threats had a very simple explanation: the second officer had taken the precaution to pour water down the barrels of the firearms and to remove the caps.

On discovering this artifice, the captain became furious, and used language more forcible than we had heard from him during the whole voyage. After a while, however, he cooled down, and the whole affair appeared to be so far outside his previous experience that he could not help being amused. Perceiving that he was returning to his customary good humour, one of the men commenced to reason with him. "Look here, old man, if you were like us chaps, working for 40s. a month, would you go back in that old hooker, and gold lying about in every direction, waiting

to be picked up? We'll see yourself on the diggings a week after the ship arrives."

The captain did not think it worth while to argue the point, and, resignedly lighting a cigar, he retired to his cabin.

A case of brandy was then opened by the men, and "health and happiness" was drunk to all aboard, while the second officer asked that the skipper should be reminded not to forget to debit him with the value of the boats and of the cases of spirits. Then with three hearty cheers they took to their oars, and went up the bay, all joining in a song that had become familiar to us when pumping during the voyage—

Oh, fare you well, my own Mary Ann,  
Fare you well for awhile.

Here was a nice state of things! A large ship, with only the captain, the chief officer, one sailor, and the passengers' cook to do the work of twenty-five men, and, worse luck, a dead calm on! Needless to say, it was not a happy day for any of us. In this emergency even Dick Robb, the ship's humorist, who had been the life and soul of all our social gatherings on the passage out, failed us.

As I shall have to refer to Dick later on, I will describe what manner of man he was.

No entertainment could be carried on satisfac-

torily without his assistance. From the time he awoke until he went to bed he was either practising jokes at the expense of somebody or other, or whistling and singing some old English song. The serious-minded, or those possessing some peculiarity of character or of appearance, were the special objects of his sallies of wit. Two things about him gave his jests point. He could convulse us with laughter, but he was never known to smile himself, though by his eyes it could be seen that he relished the success of his joke. Another of his oddities was that he never entered upon one of his jests without whistling a few bars of some old-fashioned English song. Dick's faculty of humour was a thing to envy. Many a time in the after years, when alone in the bush, far away from the haunts of men, with no sound to break the dreary stillness, have I longed to hear some of his witty sayings and join in the hearty laugh with which they were greeted. Although our roads in life diverged shortly after our arrival, nearly half a century has not erased from memory the many pleasant hours we spent together, and the friendship that grew out of them.

The morning following the desertion of the crew, to the great delight of all on board, a landman's breeze sprang up. The pilot took charge of the ship, the captain the wheel, and a number of passengers who had learned the "ropes" on

the voyage out assisted in making sail. Willing hands manned the windlass, the anchor was weighed, and to Dick Robb's song of

When first we went a-waggonin'  
A-waggonin' did go,  
Drive on my lads, hi ho !

and accompanied by two other ships, we were soon slipping up to our port.

Mooring opposite Williamstown early in the evening, we there found, as the pilot had stated, dozens of ships lying without crews, and many others only partly manned. The latter were anchored in lonely places in the bay, whence escapes would be difficult. A number of these deserted vessels had ultimately to take as crews disappointed landmen who had come out as passengers only a few months before. They had spent their all on the goldfields without success, and, being unfit for the hard life of a colonist, had returned to Melbourne. Nothing offering there to suit them, they gladly availed themselves of the chance of getting back to the Old Country. Victoria was well rid of them. Material of a sterner mould was required there at that juncture.

Shortly after the ship was moored we had ocular proof of the richness of the goldfields, and of the reckless manner in which some people exhibited their wealth. A small steamer hove alongside on

her way from Williamstown to Sandridge, and one of her crowd of passengers on board immediately attracted our attention. He was a tall, sallow-faced man, dressed in the orthodox style of an English gentleman—a long black frock-coat and a stove-pipe hat. At first sight he was taken for a Customs official or some other Government functionary. He appeared to have been drinking heavily, and in an aggressive manner swaggered about the boat, rudely pushing people out of his way. He soon drew upon himself the full attention of our amusing shipmate. The old, familiar whistle was heard, and we knew that the strange creature referred to would have a bad time while the steamer remained alongside.

In an authoritative way he was hailed by Robb. "Now, you long ghost with the bell-topper, what did you pay for that coat? It's a Houndsditcher!"

The sally was greeted with laughter from all who heard it. The person addressed appeared at first amazed at being thus accosted, and then fiercely surveyed his interlocutor. This display of irritation was just what Robb wanted. He went on with his banter to the great amusement of all on board the two vessels. For some time the man did not know what line to take; but when accused by Robb of being a deserter and an escaped convict, in a furious mood he climbed up the side of our ship with the evident intention of

committing assault and battery. Robb, however, swarmed up the rigging, whence he fired volley after volley of ridicule, until the whistle sounded for passengers to get aboard the steamer.

As a parting shot, he inquired if the hat, which was defiantly tilted on the back of the man's head, also came from Houndsditch, and if he was willing to sell it. The reply was that there was not a blank new chum on board who had enough money to purchase the hat. Then, taking it off, the man extracted from it a large roll of bank-notes ranging in value from £5 to £100. Ostentatiously brandishing the bundle so that all could see its value, he replaced it in the hat, and then offered the lot for sale—placing a reserve of £1,000 upon it.

As no bid was forthcoming, he addressed the querist in the rigging: "Now, what do you think of the Petticoat Lane stove-pipe? That's part of three weeks' work at Forest Creek; and if you can do as well in the same time, you may wear any hat you like without caring where it comes from."

Although as much surprised as the other passengers, Robb, in his usual imperturbable style, assured the man, "on the honour of an English country gentleman," that he meant Regent Street instead of Houndsditch, and then innocently inquired if he wanted a mate. The angry one



vouchsafed no reply, but as he descended the ship's side it could be seen from the relaxed corners of his mouth that even he had caught the infection of Robb's mirth-provoking humour.

Next morning one of the steamboats came alongside for the passengers, and we were soon coursing up to Melbourne.

To the many thousands who are now weekly passing up and down the Yarra, it may be a surprise to learn that in 1852 the river was not in places more than 20 ft. to 25 ft. wide, and in some parts the ti-ti scrub could be touched from the deck of the steamer. Victorians may well feel proud of the improvements made in their waterway to Melbourne, as large English mail steamers can now lie comfortably alongside Melbourne wharves.

It was not many hours before the lighters containing the passengers' luggage and effects arrived at Cole's wharf—as primitive a structure as can well be imagined—and having decided to go up country, and feeling that there was little probability of my belongings being of any use to me for years, I brought them outside the sheds, and turned for the nonce an unlicensed auctioneer. Cole's wharf was then a busy part of the town, and there were always a number of Melbourne residents to be met with in the immediate vicinity. Inviting them to roll up for bargains, I displayed my outfit, and, banishing sentiment, soon disposed

of everything at excellent prices. I must have been among the last who practised this method of realising on luggage, as shortly afterwards the sales were stopped. The auctioneers felt that encroachments were being made on their preserves, and interfered to prevent them. Out of these passengers' goods sales the Jews made large profits. They were the principal buyers, and many of the wealthy Melbourne Israelites of to-day in this way laid the foundations of their fortunes. It was at one of these sales, no doubt, that our visitor in Hobson's Bay procured his remarkable outfit, instead of at Houndsditch, as Dick Robb wickedly suggested.

No lengthy description of life in Melbourne in the early fifties is needed in these recollections, but I am bound to say that the darkest picture of the city as it was then is not materially overdrawn. In no other town of a similar size that has hitherto existed could there have been as much crime and reckless prodigality as there was in Melbourne for three or four years after the gold discoveries. For several days after my arrival there might have been seen an open carriage, drawn by a superb pair of horses, driven at break-neck pace through the main streets by a sailor dressed in an orthodox man-of-war suit, his hat and sleeves decorated with ribbons. A number of his mates, similarly attired, accompanied by

coarse-looking specimens of feminine frailty—the latter attired in the most costly and garish-hued clothing—occupied seats in the body of the vehicle. The gold ornaments on the women would have been sufficient to start a jeweller's shop with. A Union Jack floated at the rear of the carriage, while one of the Jack Tars acted as postillion. On another occasion I saw an inebriated digger lavishly dispensing gratuitous champagne in the street to passers-by from a number of cases that lay beside him. Nor is there any romancing in the stories that have been told of men eating £5 and even £10 notes in sandwiches out of mere ostentatious prodigality. These were only some of the ways in which those who participated in the first rich gold harvest spent their gains. Men appeared to vie with each other as to who should get quit of their easily acquired wealth with the greatest celerity. These exhibitions attracted but little attention, however. Everyone appeared to have caught the fever badly, and everyone was too busy with his own private affairs to heed them. But those who recklessly displayed their riches were usually not long in coming to grief. The thieves, garotters, and loafers who haunted the place seldom lost sight of them until they were effectually cleaned out, and many fortunate diggers from Ballarat, Forest Creek, and Bendigo, who had brought thousands

of pounds' worth of gold to Melbourne, returned in a few weeks to the fields without means to pay for a meal of food or a night's lodging, and were entirely dependent on the generosity of other travellers.

It was risky for any respectable person to be out of doors after darkness had set in. There were no police on duty during the night, the streets being simply patrolled by a corporal's guard of soldiers every two hours; but these were almost useless to prevent the wholesale crime that prevailed.

Nothing was so amusing as the nondescript appearance of the police force that had been brought into existence by the changed conditions of the colony. With the exception of the helmet, they were mostly clad in the garments they wore aboard ship, and they were of all sizes and ages. The organised force that had done duty up to the time of the gold discoveries had cleared out to a man, and the Government had perforce to accept the services of men who were altogether unfitted for the onerous duties they were expected to perform. Any of the new arrivals who presented written recommendations to the heads of the Civil Service from influential people in the Mother Country, could reckon upon obtaining a billet in the police force. Among these was one of our shipmates known as Ned. He had studied for

the law, but in physique and *moral* he was eminently unsuitable for the rough-and-tumble life of a Melbourne policeman. He was the personification of mildness, was short in stature, and inclined to corpulency. Crossing Princes Bridge one morning, I observed a number of people scurrying up Swanston Street to where a crowd was assembled, and, proceeding in the same direction, I came upon five policeman—Ned among them—who were endeavouring to convey a stalwart inebriate to the watch-house. It was a most unsuitable service for my excellent friend. He prudently left to his mates the more arduous part of the task, and contented himself with endeavouring to assist in the rear, by propelling the prisoner in the direction of the lock-up. At that stage of the proceedings I came upon the scene, and my astonishment was so great at seeing my old friend wearing a constable's hat, and engaged in what I knew to be uncongenial work, that I could not resist the temptation to address him. But I was immediately cut short by a loud-voiced reminder that he was on "duty"—and then in a whisper he asked me to meet him in the evening at the Post Office corner. He had scarcely finished when a sound resembling that from the drop-kick of a footballer was heard, and in a moment poor Ned lay prostrate on mother earth. Finding he could not release his arms, and realising that an enemy

astern was within firing range, the prisoner had landed a heavily-shod foot on his abdomen. It was evident from the pallor that overspread his countenance and from his moans that the career of my legal friend as a guardian of the peace had been brought to an abrupt and ignominious termination. He was assisted into a butcher's cart that happened to be passing, and he reached the police station half an hour before the man he had been assisting to arrest.

## CHAPTER II.

## ON THE WAY TO THE UPPER WIMMERA.

WITH all the enticements then held out for a man to settle down to business pursuits in Melbourne, the place had no charms for me, and I decided to proceed up country. Learning that large numbers of recent arrivals who had visited the diggings had become impoverished and disgusted with life there, I decided to join a party who were required for a sheep station on the Upper Wimmera, instead of making at once for the gold-fields. The remuneration agreed upon was small considering the times, but as a set-off I should, while getting acclimatised, be able to revel in the romantic pastoral life I had read of before leaving Britain.

An average lifetime has passed since those days, and it is time to forgive and forget the shortcomings of the man for whom I engaged "to shear, wash, and press his wool." He may not have been so bad as he appeared to me, or was painted by others, and as I might give pain to some of his relatives, I will refrain from recording his name or expressing the feelings I entertained to-

wards him during the short time I was with him. Yet my narrative would be incomplete without reference to a trying experience at his hands.

The first stage of our journey was only a few miles from Melbourne. Here final preparations were made for our trip, which was expected to be of some three weeks' duration. We camped in a belt of red gum on the north side of the city. There were two teams of ten bullocks each, and both drays were heavily laden with general station requisites. In addition to these were the belongings of the fifteen men who composed the party—mostly new arrivals.

After the bullocks had been unyoked and despatched back to the yards for their night's provender, preparations were made for the first meal under our contract. No water was procurable where we camped, and some half a dozen of us returned to the city for a supply. They stated that they had to proceed to the Yarra river for it, thus having to travel some six miles for the night's and the morning's requirements. All were young and vigorous men, however, and the journey was thought little of.

We were informed by our employer, whom I will call Donald Cumrae, that cooking utensils, flour, corned beef, and tea would be found under the dray cover. All were discovered there except the tea, and the party were soon engaged in



active preparations for our evening repast. On being informed that the tea could not be found, Cumrae remembered that he had removed it to the other dray, and described just where it was. The only light to guide us in the search was the reflection of the camp-fire; but after some delay in removing casks and cases, we discovered what we supposed to be the box we were in quest of.

Unfortunately for my reputation, I volunteered to superintend the liquid portion of the repast, and, supposing from its appearance that the beef had lain many months in its briny bath, or was probably part of surplus stores from some recently-arrived passenger ship, the thought obtruded itself that, as water was scarce, thirst would be best assuaged by making the tea extra strong. Accordingly, without consulting any judgment but my own, I took nearly a pound weight from the box, emptied it into the camp kettle, and allowed ample time to simmer, so as to thoroughly extract its essential properties.

All appeared to enjoy the meal. As surmised, the beef was effectually pickle-soaked, but as a set-off the tea had a strong and pungent flavour. We had a free hand to deal with the stores—at least for that night—and I feel bound to say that none of those present consulted the interests of their employer, as they were convinced he would

get full value out of them for the remuneration they were to receive.

Supper being concluded, most of the men commenced smoking, and one of them was relating an incident that had occurred the previous day in Melbourne, when suddenly he stopped short, his pipe fell from his mouth, and a sickly pallor overspread his countenance. Glancing at other members of the party, I found that all exhibited similar symptoms; and then I also began to experience a queerish sensation. Smoking ceased simultaneously; the faces of all bore an anxious expression; eyes assumed a glassy appearance and seemed to be looking down on noses; while the hand of each man rested significantly over the abdominal region.

In a low, scared tone, one who appeared to be the least affected asked: "What is it, boys?"

"It looks like a case of poisoning," moaned another.

"Perhaps it's the water," whispered a third.

This hint led to an examination of the contents of the camp kettle. The liquid had been entirely drained from it by the thirsty crowd, and, taking a handful of the leaves, I wonderingly inspected them. No tea that I had previously seen or heard of resembled what was presented to view, and I concluded that some grievous mistake had been made either by Cumrae or by myself. The leaves were as large as young cabbage plants, quite as

green, and smelt offensively. On handing some of them to one of the party, the riddle was apparently solved by his ready exclamation :

“ Good Lord ! it’s medicine for the sheep we’ve been boiling and drinking ! ”

Matters now began to look serious. Some were groaning from incessant spasmodic torture, while others unobtrusively limped into the background, as if desirous to endure their sufferings apart from vulgar gaze. Although ill myself, I determined to do what I could for the men, having been the innocent cause of the mischief.

Cumrae was rolled up in a pair of blue blankets and a ’possum rug some twenty yards distant from the fire, and appeared to be sound asleep. Tottering towards him, I informed him that the men had all turned seriously ill, and inquired if there had been any arsenic in the kettle, having heard that it was in frequent use on stations for scab and foot-rot in sheep.

“ Arsenic ! ” he exclaimed, not entirely suppressing a look of exultation. “ Do you mean to say that I want to poison you ? ”

“ No, ” I replied ; “ but we thought some mistake might have occurred. ”

“ Mistake be blowed ! ” he snapped.

“ Well, what is it we have been boiling for tea ? ” I inquired, exhibiting some of the leaves from the kettle.

“Oh, I see,” he replied, after examining them, and laughing vociferously. “Why, you’ve been dosing yourselves with my *special* instead of the black tea.”

“Is the *special* dangerous?” I apprehensively inquired.

“No; if you had used it moderately,” he responded, “but the fact is you have all been eating and drinking too much, and the result is the penalty you are now undergoing. There was a box of black tea there as well as the *special*, and you broached the wrong one. However, you will be all right in the morning by taking a stiff nip of brandy with a shake of pepper in it.”

“Oh!” was my somewhat dubious rejoinder, as I began to ponder over his apparent callousness to our sufferings, and was about to add to the exclamation when he roughly interjected:

“You may ‘O’ and ‘P’ as much as you like, but the fact remains that you have been using my rations to excess.”

These words revealed the character of our employer in a new light, and, after briefly meditating over them, it flashed upon me that it would be wise to delay for a time my contemplated visit to the Upper Wimmera. After all, there was some truth in the accusation of eating and drinking too much—of that description of food.

On explaining to my companions the result of

the interview, some of them, considering the state of their health, indulged in more profanity than might have been expected ; but they readily agreed to a trial of the brandy-and-pepper remedy. A " whip round " was accordingly made for the purchase of the former, and the saddle horse that was always kept ready to look after the bullocks was brought into requisition to procure the liquor. The pepper, we were informed by Cumrae, could be found in the dray ; but after the recent experience, searching for provisions in the dark was unanimously tabooed.

The man despatched for the liquor soon returned, and considerable benefit resulted to those who freely partook of it. Still, the night was a truly miserable one, and few besides Cumrae enjoyed the rest so essential for next day's journey. Exclamations of distress were heard in every direction. I have especially in mind one member of the party who appeared to have been severely bitten. His ejaculations were wonderfully suggestive of physical torture. " Oh, tare-an-ages ! " " Oh, blur-an-ouns ! " and other odd expletives were incessantly emitted from him. As I write, that strange night-scene is again vividly presented to mind—

A-moaning and a-groaning in the camp—

A-howling and a-growling, and a ramp and a tramp,  
To the titillating twitching of each cramp—

while during moments of alleviation withering invectives were profusely hurled at sheep-owners in general and at Cumrae in particular, and scorching anathemas were solemnly invoked on the unfortunate cook who had brewed the special tea.

No cooking was resorted to the following morning, nor indeed was any attempt made to gather up the fragments of the previous night's repast until a stern reminder was issued by Cumrae that he "never permitted waste." All the victims appeared more fitted for medical treatment than for the twenty miles' tramp that would be the length of our day's journey. Our morning fare was light and stimulating—brandy and pepper—and silent, weak, and dejected, but withal deeply reflective, we limply and languidly followed the teams as they wended their way northwards.

It should be here explained that later on I learned that there were two descriptions of tea used for sheep station rations at that period. The "black" tea referred to was composed of the stalks of the plant chopped into small pieces, and known as "posts and rails," while Cumrae's "special" was the produce of a coarser description that grew luxuriantly in rank ground in China. By a judicious mixture of the two a cheap and not unpleasant beverage could be provided; but the "special," taken alone, in large quantity, acted as an irritant. Even that, however, does not seem

to me to account for the effect the brew had on all who partook of it.

I thought the mistake I had made in my first attempt at manufacturing tea might have been regarded by my companions in a lenient spirit. I regret to say, however, that almost all the party evinced a desire to ostracise me, and during the remainder of the time I was in their society I felt that I was an object of suspicion. However, I was so much occupied with my own sufferings that their feelings towards me gave me but little concern during the three days it took us to reach Bacchus Marsh—some thirty-five miles on our way to the station.

Here the weather changed for the worse. Heavy rains set in, the ground became soft and spongy, and our progress was necessarily slow and tedious. About two miles north of the Marsh both drays got bogged, and as it took some time to unload and convey the contents to higher ground, we camped for the night. Some of the stronger members of the party appeared to be recovering from their recent illness, but others still exhibited signs of weakness, and few had partaken of satisfying food since starting.

About dusk, when preparing for the nightly "shakedown," five well-mounted men rode up to the drays. From their address and general appearance it was evident they were not accustomed

to physical toil. One, who appeared to act as leader, inquired of Cumrae whether we were "going up" or "coming down." On receiving the required information, he voluntarily stated that we might imagine his company were bushrangers, but he assured us that there was not an armed man amongst them. As none of our party had openly hinted a suspicion on the subject, the character of the new arrivals could not be mistaken, even by "new chums."

Cumrae informed the man that no doubt was entertained of their honesty, and, after some commonplace remarks, they lighted their pipes and rode off in the direction of Ballarat.

The question as to "going up" or "coming down" attracted my curiosity, and I learned later on that wayfarers were more in danger when coming from goldfields or stations than in travelling thereto. In the former case they had generally gold receipts, cheques, or money, while in the latter they usually had next to nothing.

It was not an uncommon thing in those days for "road agents" to take into the bush anyone who had gold receipts or cheques, bind him to a tree and place a sentinel over him, and then despatch one of their number to Melbourne either to cash the cheque or to get possession of the gold by giving up the receipt.

Our suspicions that we had encountered a gang



of highwaymen were confirmed next morning. A little before noon we sighted a spring-cart *en route* for Melbourne, in which were seated a man and a woman who informed us that they had come from Ballarat, and had been bailed up at their camp the previous night by five men answering the description of our recent visitors. The robbers had taken from them about five pounds' weight of gold, and what money and valuables they possessed, with the exception of an old silver watch, which the woman said had been given to her by a near relative before she left the Old Country. The victims had been in the colonies several years, and had used more freedom with the robbers than a new hand would have cared to do. The woman had roundly abused them, and they then deprived her of the watch. Finding, however, that it was of little value, one of them ascended a tall gum tree, and, having hung it on one of the topmost branches, informed her that she might have it if she cared to climb for it. The watch was recovered after the freebooters had taken their departure, but the pair were naturally much ruffled at their losses. The woman especially gave vent to her feelings in unrecordable language. The man was silent, but vicious-looking.

The weather having cleared up next morning, most of the hands were busy loading up for the day's journey. Even now a few of us were still

suffering from the effects of Cumrae's "special," and unfit to render much assistance with the heavy goods. To do our employer justice, he was, physically, a magnificent specimen of manhood—tall, straight, muscular, and in the prime of life. The eyes were the most faulty part of his features. They were shifty and cunning, and a student of physiognomy would have discerned that cupidity was one of his leading characteristics. But one could see also that he would make a good uphill fight in the battle of life, and be a desirable acquisition to a country where pioneer work had to be done. I had begun to entertain a higher opinion of him after seeing the clever way in which he handled the bullocks when difficult ground had to be got over, and the careless, hardy fashion in which he would roll himself up in his rug and, without any other shelter, take his night's rest.

On this particular morning I had been assisting for some time to load up, and was taking a brief rest when, pointing to a 200-lb. bag of flour, he ordered me, with an assumption of superiority that grated on my feelings, to "heave it on the dray."

Seeing that I had scarcely tasted food for three days, I informed him that it was a feat of strength I was incapable of performing in my then condition.

"What!" he exclaimed, "not able to lift that

bag of flour! Why, you've eaten a bag of my flour since you left Melbourne."

This was almost akin to the proverbial last straw on the camel's back. One by one the illusions I had so fondly cherished regarding Australia Felix were melting away. I began to see life as it really existed, and was set pondering the advisability of delaying my visit to the Upper Wimmera. I felt that I should not get along amicably with Cumrae, and concluded that it would be well for us to part before further unpleasantness occurred.

A couple of hours after starting, and when nearing the Werribee, we sighted a flock of sheep tended by an old shepherd, who, when I came up to him, inquired where we were bound for.

"To Cumrae's station on the Wimmera," I answered.

"Oh, you're goin' there, are you?" he replied. "Well, you'll never go anywhere that you'll more bitterly regret." The speaker emphasised what he said by a grating chuckle, and added, "Oh, don't I know him!"

Here was the very man I wanted, and I resolved to elicit what information I could regarding my employer, and the kind of work in which I would be engaged. Forgetting for the moment that I was in Golden Australia, I offered the old man a donation to buy tobacco with. In an indignant

manner he informed me that if I called at his hut he would make me a present of as much tobacco as I could use for a month. He soon toned down, however, when he learned that I had just arrived from the Old Country, and did not know the customs of the place, and readily gave me all the information I required. Briefly, it was to the effect that Cumrae's was the hardest-worked station in the country; that the "grub" was poor; that the working hours were long and the duties heavy; and that, whenever there was the slightest cause for complaint, or if a man became ill, his wages were docked. He (the shepherd) had been there one season, knew all about Cumrae, and considered him one of the greatest tyrants unhung. He could only get "new chums" to go to the place—no old hands would venture near it.

"Take my word for it," he added, solemnly shaking his head, "Cumrae will get the full value of his money out of every one of you when you get up there." Then, after a searching glance, he remarked: "You don't look as if you were fit for much hard work—anything wrong with you?"

On explaining the mistake made relative to the tea, and the effect it produced upon all of us, the old man again laughed long and loud.

"Mistake be blowed—it's the old game!" he continued. "Why, he's done the same thing over and over again to people. The tea was 'doctored.'

He did it to save the grub. There is not half as much food consumed up there as on other stations. He won't poison people out and out, but he knows the sort of thing to cure a healthy appetite. I was knocked up myself for a fortnight at his place through the same trick. For months afterwards I could scarcely look at food, and of course he docked the time I was ill off my wages when leaving. You will rue it, young fellow, if you go up there."

The speaker appeared to be truthful. I could not see what object he had in being otherwise. I had met with parsimonious people, but to adulterate food for such a reason during the prosperous times that then prevailed in Victoria appeared to me the acme of meanness.

The shepherd's story effectually knocked out of me all the romance I had so fondly indulged regarding pastoral pursuits, and I determined that the contract I had entered into with Donald Cumrae should be *ad finem* before another twenty-four hours had gone by.

I intimated to my informant the decision I had arrived at, and inquired if a job could be found in that neighbourhood. He assured me there would be no difficulty, at all events, in getting a billet as good as the one I had taken, and said that I could remain at his place until I was recruited and fit for work.

Pointing to a hill some three miles distant, he stated that his hut lay at the foot of it, and that the home station was two miles to the right.

When parting, after returning thanks for his information and proffered hospitality, I intimated that he might expect me the following day. Our roads in life, however, diverged, and I never met the old man again.

## CHAPTER III.

## A SURVEY PARTY.

ON returning to the drays, I communicated my news to one of my companions who I thought could be relied upon, and invited him to accompany me in my flight, and become my mate. He acquiesced, so, having after camping that evening placed our belongings in a convenient position, about midnight, when everything around the camp was quiet, Johnny and I conveyed them without observation to the highest piece of ground in the neighbourhood, and placed them under an overhanging rock that we had marked out during daylight as a safe repository.

After partaking of breakfast the following morning, we sauntered some little distance from the camp. No notice was taken of our movements, the preparations for the day's journey, as usual, occupying the attention of the men until a start was made. Allowing them to proceed about half an hour on the journey, we made for the eminence where our effects had been deposited, and there watched the drays and our late companions winding round the hills. As the last one disappeared, and the raucous voice of Cumrae grew fainter and fainter as he urged on his teams, a lonely feeling

crept over us, and for some time we were absorbed in pensive thoughts, from which some misgiving was not absent.

But these gloomy forebodings were soon effectually dispelled in a manner the least expected. Although silence reigned supreme, and no habitation could be discerned in any direction, suddenly, without the slightest warning, our whole surroundings appeared to be alive with human revelry. Simultaneously peal after peal of what appeared like mockery of our dispirited frame of mind broke from the throats of a flock of laughing jackasses in the tree against which we were reclining. It was the first time we had heard that most remarkable of all Australian birds, and the human-like way in which they enjoyed their scrimmage for what appeared to be a large iguana was irresistible. Our companions whom we had just parted with, Cumrae, his bullocks and station, were instantly forgotten, and we both laughed as heartily and enjoyed the fun as much as our sturdy little friends overhead. At once our spirits revived. We felt it to be too late to undo what had been done, and as the distant reports of the bullock-whips became still fainter, we knew we were safe from pursuit, and we decided to face the future and accept what it had in store for us.

In this mood we made up our "swags"—each some 60 lb. in weight—and fastened them on our



shoulders, and soon we were retracing the ground we had traversed the previous day.

Towards evening we arrived at the head station the shepherd had described to us, and inquired of one of the owners if hands were wanted. The answer was in the negative, but he informed us that a messenger was then in the place from a gentleman who was employed by the Government in surveying land in the Pentland Hills, and a roadline to Ballarat. Three hands were required for the service in place of men who had just left for the diggings, and we were advised to see him at once, as such employment would be more suitable for new arrivals than station work. We decided to adopt the suggestion, and, after partaking of much-needed refreshment that was kindly offered, we departed in company with the messenger for the survey camp, situated on the Werribee, some three miles from the station we had just visited. We arrived there about seven in the evening, and were at once engaged on satisfactory terms, and directed to the men's tent, located some six chains from the surveyor's.

Our abode was a roomy waterproof tent, fitted up with rough bunks. It was an unexpected luxury to be permitted to lie on dry Tasmanian palings after sleeping on the damp ground and being exposed to piercing cold winds. The cook, who gave us a hearty welcome, assured us we

should have easy billets and a pleasant time as long as we remained at the camp. That he was an "old hand" could not be doubted. Among his other accomplishments I elicited that he had a fair knowledge of the treatment to be followed in cases of accident and sickness. This induced me to relate the particulars of my recent illness, and he at once volunteered to cure me in a few days. Before retiring at night, and the first thing in the morning, he administered a potion composed of raw flour mixed with the liquor of stewed gum leaves, a little iron rust being added. This had a wonderfully healing effect, and gave me an experience which I found exceedingly useful in after years, when water was scarce and unfit for consumption, and large numbers of miners succumbed to abdominal ailments.

One more hand being required to complete the full muster of men necessary for the work we were to engage in, the first few days of our life in the Werribee camp were spent in comparative idleness, and I had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the characteristics of the two men who were in possession of our abode when we arrived, and with whom, as fate would have it, I was to be associated for a considerable period. One was the messenger who accompanied us from the station, the other the cook who had been so useful to us. As I shall have to say

much about them in future chapters, I will here briefly describe them.

The first-mentioned was a native of Glasgow, about twenty-four years of age, and a runaway sailor. He was known to us as McInnes, and was employed as a "rouseabout," or generally useful sort of man at the camp, but was not required to take part in the survey duties. He appeared to be what is known as a "gomerall" in Scotland, and a "boochal" in Ireland. He was slop-built, and from the slovenly way in which he dragged his legs along the ground, one might conclude that, beyond the possession of a full share of bodily strength, he would be of little use aboard ship in emergencies, and that life at sea under rigid disciplinarians would not be an enjoyable one for him. It seemed that his highest ambition was to become a proficient bullock-puncher. The only qualification he lacked for the occupation was inability to swear. To do him justice, I never heard him use profane language, except on an occasion that will be mentioned further on. He spoke little, and smoked much, and, according to my then immature ideas of human nature, he was composed of main strength, laziness, and stupidity.

Our cook was a Londoner, between forty and fifty years of age, rather below the middle height, muscularly built, singularly active in his move-

ments, and was known to us as Dan Burns. That name, I learned afterwards, was an alias. He had been an associate of a notorious character named "Black Douglas," the leader of a gang of desperadoes who a short time before this had been in collision with the police. All of them were captured with the exception of Douglas, who escaped after a desperate resistance in which two of the troopers were severely wounded. Later on, in company with Burns, he was engaged in a drunken brawl at an hotel in Melbourne, and was at the time I write of under arrest for maltreating a digger whom he and Burns had robbed of a large sum of money. Burns, being less noticeable in appearance, had succeeded in escaping from Melbourne. Having got as far as Ballan, he heard of the want of hands at the surveyor's camp, and had been engaged as cook only a few days before our arrival there. As our tent was in a bend of the creek some half-mile from the main thoroughfare, he could not have got to a much safer place of concealment. He was clean shaven when I first met him, and bore unmistakable evidence of having done his term "on t'other side." After we had become somewhat confidential, concluding that he had nothing to fear from new chums, he confessed that he had completed his seven years of convict life. Curiosity led me to inquire what he was sent out for, and the reply was that it was

for "marrying two wives." That and political offences were regarded by most old hands as venial breaches of the law, and they were not then considered in Australia sufficiently serious to prevent the offenders from mixing in respectable society after completing their sentences.

I had reason to believe, however, a few months later that the advent of Dan Burns in Van Diemen's Land was the result of a graver offence than that mentioned. I never learnt its exact nature; but, whatever it may have been, I am free to say that he was an entertaining companion in the solitary life we were then leading. One was never weary of listening to his recitals of convict society in the colony, and his amusing stories of his bush life and adventures after he had obtained his ticket-of-leave. He appeared to take kindly to me from the first, and treated me with special consideration. As even then I somewhat disliked him, the only reason I could assign for the preference shown me was that I was a silent but interested listener of his experiences—desirous as I was to acquire as much knowledge as possible of a country in which I intended to permanently reside.

Burns had done the last few years of penal servitude when Sir John Franklin was Governor of Van Diemen's Land. Being a handy man, and obsequious when it suited his purpose, he attracted Sir John's notice, and was taken into his

service. The stories he had to tell were of absorbing interest. He told us, for example, that shortly after the first settlement of Tasmania (1812) both colonists as well as convicts were in a starving condition, and many of the better conducted convicts were let loose to provide for themselves in the best way they could. Most of these took to the bush, where they were soon joined by a number of escaped incorrigibles with stolen firearms. Then followed heinous outrages on the almost defenceless natives, who retaliated by burning solitary homesteads and murdering the occupants. Hence ceaseless hostilities between the two races were carried on for some fifteen years. Several of the governors endeavoured to stay the work of decimation, but the white population—composed principally of convicts, soldiers, and whaling and sealing seamen—set the law at defiance, and without let or hindrance carried on the work of extermination.

The major portion of the white population of Van Diemen's Land at that time shrank from no crime, and in not a few instances they resorted even to cannibalism when in dire straits for food. From these and other causes it came about that, out of an estimated population of over a hundred thousand natives when the first convict ships arrived, there remained twenty years later only some two hundred and fifty. These were transported

to an island in the Straits, but no particular interest was taken in their welfare, and strong drink effectually civilised them off the face of the earth. The last of the ill-fated race was a woman named Truagani, but known to the colonists as Lalla Rookh.

To do Burns justice, he displayed some slight feeling of humanity when not under the influence of liquor. Referring to a particularly atrocious crime on the part of one of his fellow convicts, he assured us that he was "not so bad as some of the coves on t'other side," throwing his hand over in a southerly direction, and then went on to describe the proceedings of an escaped convict. A man who objected to being despoiled of his wife he immediately shot, and, after severing the head from the trunk, fastened it with a cord round the unfortunate woman's neck, and so drove her with blows to his lair. Attempting to escape, she was brained with a tomahawk and decapitated, and the fiend then nailed the two heads to the trunk of a tree, a few feet above the fire at which he cooked his food, and there they were found a little later when his capture was effected.

One thing about Burns which I little liked was his quick, furtive glances at those who were listening to his stories. An involuntary feeling of mistrust took possession of me, and, try as I might to stifle it, it grew stronger day by day as I knew

more of his past life and better understood his character.

After a few days' sojourn at our new abode, it was suggested by my mate, Johnny, that we should accompany Burns to the diggings, where he stated he intended to go at the end of his month with the surveyor, and I was induced, somewhat unwillingly, to acquiesce in the arrangement, for even at that early period of our acquaintance I had a presentiment that no good would come of it.

A few days after our arrival an additional hand was engaged, and the party being now complete, our duties fairly commenced. The new arrival, whom I will call Fred Stukeley, was in some respects an acquisition to our society. He was educated and intelligent. Like thousands of others, he had thrown up a good position as a senior clerk in a Government office in London to engage in gold-seeking. When he joined us he had been in the colony some three months. After landing he proceeded to Ballarat, where he assisted in sinking several deep shafts, and at the same time sank all the capital he possessed. He was on his return to Melbourne when he fell in with our chief, the surveyor, who at once engaged him. Poor Stukeley! I have him before my mind's eye now, as, with dilapidated clothing, footsore, weary, and hungry, he staggered into our tent, and ravenously devoured the food placed



before him. He was one of many I have met in Australia who, having parted with the substance for the shadow, and lacking the qualities essential for the battle of life in a new colony, became demoralised, and were glad to accept any light employment that offered.

Of such men the bar-tenders, billiard-markers, and "boots" of the larger hotels were then principally composed. Their culture and refinement soon became obliterated by contact with the coarse rowdyism of the great mass of those who resorted to these places. It was no uncommon thing to see men who had taken degrees in British universities, and who could talk intelligently about art and literature, or science, acting as "boots" or ostlers for rough miners, whose only advantages were muscular strength, colonial experience, and the possession of wealth acquired on the goldfields. Reared in luxury, and never having known what physical toil was before they arrived in the colony, men like Stukeley, when they had spent their all, lost heart. Thence their descent in the social scale became rapid. Over-indulgence in strong drink followed, and then almost every vestige of self-respect vanished. A few of them took to stone-breaking, to the police force, or to work on the roads. Some of these afterwards became useful colonists, and a few of them even attained to high positions. But, strange

though it may appear, it was the educated and refined of the immigrants from Britain who mainly augmented the ranks of the pariahs and criminal classes of Melbourne.

It was not, however, solely to acquire wealth that Stukeley left the Old Country and came to Australia. His frequent fits of dejection and heavy sighs when he thought his tent-mates slept, and the occasional mention of an Alice in his dreams, prompted me, when we became on confidential terms, to invite him to tell his story. It seemed that an attachment had sprung up between him and a young woman in humble life in London. Their marriage had been prohibited by his relatives. Angry words followed between father and son, and he threw up his appointment and joined the crowd that was daily leaving for the Antipodes.

In a few weeks Stukeley and I parted, and five months later, on my return to Melbourne, I saw him presiding at a fruit stall at the corner of Bourke and Elizabeth streets. He informed me that he had only stopped a month with the surveyor after we left, for he could not stand the coarse people who had become his tent-mates after our departure. With the little money he had earned he had purchased the fruit stand. He could not complain of business, he said, but it was the degradation of the occupation that preyed

upon his mind. He was then negotiating for the sale of his stall, and intended to accept an offer made by a neighbouring hotelkeeper who wanted to engage him as a waiter.

Such were the ups and downs of thousands of men like Stukeley in Victoria during the early fifties.

But to return to my life in the survey camp. Suitable shelter, food, and outdoor employment soon restored my mate and me to our wonted health and vigour; still the desire to be on the goldfields became a paramount consideration.

The nearest township to our location (Ballan) contained then only a store, a grog shanty, and a blacksmith's shop, and was distant some five miles. Thither Dan Burns, our cook, tramped each Saturday, returning the following night, generally more or less inebriated. On his second trip, he related that he had been in the company of two men who had in their possession several pounds' weight of gold, taken from newly-discovered ground, distant some twenty-five miles. They had come down to procure additional working tools, and to sell the gold. All Burns's tact could not elicit from them the locality of the new field, beyond that it was in the Jim Crow ranges. He learned from them, however, that there were only a few men there, that all were doing fairly well, and that their object in keeping the secret was to enable

them to work out, before a rush set in, a rich piece of ground that they had been engaged upon. The information put us all on the *qui vive*, and action was speedily taken to provide the necessary diggers' outfit.

Although the two miners had been "shepherded" by the residents of Ballan, they had taken their departure from the place in the middle of the night, and had not left the slightest trace of the course they had followed. Their reticence and their secret mode of leaving created the impression that rich ground had been broken, and we were naturally anxious to be among the early arrivals there. But although every effort was made by Burns to procure further information, no additional intelligence could be gleaned.

About a week remained of the time we had decided to continue at the camp, when a couple of incidents occurred, apparently of trivial importance, but which raised, as it were, the curtain upon the true characters of Burns and McInnes.

Located as we were in proximity to the then principal highway to Ballarat, where good horse feed was procurable, the place was commonly used as a camping ground by the teams and parties of diggers going up or coming down. For the sake of procuring firewood, two men (a West Indian black and a Britisher) had lighted a fire against the hollow trunk of a tree, over which

they were boiling a billy of water. The negro was sitting on the log smoking, and his hand rested over a small vent-hole. The heat and smoke made matters lively for a black snake that had found a home for itself inside the log, and it had got half its length through the opening when a movement of the man's hand caused it to fasten on one of his fingers. His scream of terror and pain brought all our party to the spot. Burns took in the situation in a moment. He saw the snake still trying to wriggle through the hole, and despatched it in a moment with a tomahawk. Then, with wonderful celerity, he tied a piece of cord tightly above the injured part of the bitten finger to prevent the poison from circulating, and coolly informed the terrified negro that he had a bare half hour to live unless he submitted to amputation.

The information and the manner in which it was conveyed made a powerful impression on the sufferer. His every feature exhibited the signs of a lost man: he lost the power of speech; his skin, from ebony, turned to dark-grey, and his eyes became almost entirely white and unnaturally dilated. He quickly realised, however, the truth of what had been said, and unhesitatingly submitted to the operation. He was instructed to rest the poisoned finger on the log, and to turn his head in the direction of a hill near by. He had scarcely done so when the finger was lopped

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off close to where the ligature had been tied. Fear and shock caused faintness, and most of us thought that fatal results would ensue; but Burns composedly assured us that he would soon "fix the beggar up." After firmly binding up the finger so as to prevent loss of blood, he despatched a man to one of the provision teams camped in the vicinity for a bottle of spirits. About a quarter of it was given raw to the patient, and the surgeon followed suit with a similar dose, to ward off, as he put it, the effluvium of snake poison and a fit of nervousness. Like almost all the liquors that then found their way to the diggings, it was adulterated, but it was none the less efficacious in producing the desired results; and after keeping his patient walking about without cessation for an hour, and finding that he did not evince any inclination to sleep, Burns informed him that he was safe, and might take to the road as soon as he liked.

The negro and his mate had nearly disappeared from view over an adjoining hill, when Burns coo-ee'd for their return. On their approach he administered another dose of brandy to the patient, and, after finishing the rest of the liquor himself, he pointed to the amputated digit, and informed the poor fellow that he had forgotten part of his property. Being almost as black as the charred log on which it rested, it had been unnoticed in

the interest taken in its owner's recovery, and the earnestness with which the man regarded it for some moments was intensely amusing to Burns and McInnes. The features of the latter, usually as impassive as a Chinaman's, were lit up by a broad grin when the negro, evidently annoyed at the diversion his pain and loss afforded, petulantly cast the severed member into the fire and silently resumed his journey.

Although promptitude, nerve, and skill were displayed by Burns in this emergency, there was an amount of brutish ferocity exhibited in his every movement that further unfavourably impressed me with his character, and somehow I felt that he would take human life with as much *sangfroid* as he had evinced in his surgical operation.

The second incident referred to occurred shortly afterwards. Burns and McInnes's month with the surveyor expired a few days before ours, and they erected their tent about a quarter of a mile distant to await our release from duty. Our employer owned two horses, one of which, named Charlie—an aged and docile beast—Burns had often expressed a desire to become possessed of to “hump his swag,” as he put it, to the diggings. The surveyor entertained doubts about Burns's honesty, and on learning that we were about to proceed to the diggings with him, en-

deavoured to dissuade us against that course. Further, he charged us to keep a sharp look-out for the horses, and instructed us to see that they were hobbled each night, and to fasten a bell to the neck of one of them.

Notwithstanding these precautions, on the morning of the day we were leaving, Charlie was missed. The owner was promptly informed of his loss, and a vigorous search was instituted in the neighbourhood for him, but without success. Our service expired at noon, but we decided to remain if necessary all day to give further assistance. We had been considerably treated by our employer, and that was the least return we could make. Accordingly, after breakfast we left the camp in different directions. Mine led towards the camp where Burns and McInnes were located, and to the query if they had seen the horse, or heard his bell during the night, they answered in the negative. I then proceeded in the direction of a hill some two miles distant, and on ascending it I discovered Charlie standing quietly in a gully, fastened by a rope to a sapling. In grazing he had, I conjectured, wound the rope around its trunk, and thus became a fixture. The hobbles were still intact, but the bell was gone. I was pleased at being thus useful to the surveyor, as I had scruples that we had not treated him fairly in leaving him at so short notice, and with the know-



ledge that it might be some time before he could replace us.

On returning to camp I again passed Burns and McInnes, both of whom appeared highly displeased. Burns's face wore that vicious expression that I had often previously observed, and it then dawned upon me that he had something to do with planting Charlie, and that in addition to his numerous other failings he was a horse thief. The surveyor was highly gratified to have his horse back, and on my explaining where I had found him, he was satisfied that Burns had stolen him during the night. He further said that he knew Burns to be a bad lot the first time he saw him, and would never have engaged him if he could have got a trustworthy person to do his work, and he again warned us that we were acting imprudently in going to the diggings with him. As, however, I was drawn still more towards gold-mining after hearing of the new field that had been opened up at Jim Crow, I refused to remain another month at the camp, as he wanted me to do.

In the afternoon we rejoined Burns and McInnes, and I was received by the former with an ominously sinister expression. As, however, I had decided to get clear of him at the first favourable chance that occurred, his unfriendly demeanour gave me but slight concern.

## CHAPTER IV.

## AN ADVENTURE IN THE BULLAROOK FOREST.

NEXT morning we made for Ballan, and being unable to get any information about the Jim Crow "find," concluded that we had better make for Ballarat. In the evening, however, when we had just finished our meal, two men on horseback emerged from the bush, rode up to our fire, and dismounted to light their pipes. One of them inquired where we were bound for, and, on learning our destination, he warned us that unless we had plenty of money Ballarat was no place for us. He had recently visited the field, and found over twenty thousand men upon it. The shallow ground was either all taken up or worked out, and although the deep leads were surprisingly rich, they were very narrow, and afforded profitable work for only a limited number of people, and at least ten thousand men were not making a living there.

From the speaker's accent I suspected that he was a native of a county I had resided in for some years in the fatherland. Questioning him on the subject, I found that not only was this so, but also

that he knew many of my personal friends there. After we had had some talk about mutual acquaintances, he became communicative and friendly; and on learning that I had only recently arrived in the colony, said that for auld lang syne's sake he would lay me on to a good thing. Then, to our surprise and pleasure, he imparted to us the very information we were so desirous to obtain—the locality of the auriferous ground in the Jim Crow country. He and his companion had been working there for six weeks, and they were then on their way to Melbourne to bring some friends to it. The place was a good day's journey from Ballan, and was known as Spring Creek. Gold was widely distributed there; all were doing well; and any man willing to work could win from one to three ounces a day.

The news thus opportunely received created fresh hope in all our party. Even Burns thawed somewhat in his demeanour, and became sociable for the first time since the incident of the surveyor's horse.

Shortly after daylight next morning we struck camp, and took the direction to Spring Creek which had been pointed out by our visitor. Our route lay for some eighteen miles through Bullarook Forest—then one of the most densely timbered and least known parts of the colony. Little traffic had passed through it, and, as no rain had

fallen for several weeks, after proceeding some five miles we completely lost the footprints of the horses which our informants had ridden.

Bullarook at that time was a favourite haunt of wild cattle, and we noticed their tracks leading in many directions. Following the plainest of these tracks, we plodded on for several hours, but as the hoof impressions crossed and re-crossed each other, we began to fear that we should not see Spring Creek so soon as we had expected. It was a fine bright morning when we left Ballan, but now we had no sun to guide us. No cheery light penetrated through the dense foliage of the tree-tops. We appeared, in fact, to be passing under an immense vault, supported on lofty timber piles. It was a region of perpetual twilight, and we could barely see the track we were following. As it was impossible for two to walk abreast, we kept in single file.

Burns, whom we looked to as our guide, led the way, and, being well in the rear, I could see that he was taking no definite course; in fact, he seemed to me to be describing circles. I did not tell him of this, for his bearing suggested that he was in a dangerously irritable mood. Each of us had a sixty-pound "swag," and the close atmosphere and the rank smell of decayed vegetable matter would have been trying to men even without such an encumbrance.

Hoping that we should at least come across some creek where wild cattle were accustomed to make for water, we floundered on until late in the afternoon, when we unexpectedly emerged into an open space where a number of trees had been felled. A deserted hut stood in the centre, and in a hollow in close proximity to it we found, to our delight, a stream of ice-cold crystal water oozing from under an immense granite boulder. It was an opportune discovery. Our nine hours' journey under such conditions had told heavily upon us, and from the sickly hue on our faces it was evident that even an old hand like Burns would not have enjoyed for many days immunity from fever.

From various indications we saw that illicit distillation had been carried on at this spot up to a short time before our arrival. Except for its unhealthy position, it was in all respects suitable for the work. Illegal manufacture of spirituous liquor was at that time common in timbered country where good water was procurable; but the authorities had too much in hand in connection with the management of the goldfields to give the subject the attention it received a few years later.

Unwilling to increase the weight of our burdens, we had started from Ballan with a limited commissariat. Except tea and sugar, we had provided ourselves with only sufficient fare for one

good meal, confident that we should reach the station that evening. Notwithstanding a suggestion that it would be well to reserve a portion of our stock in case we got bushed for any length of time, a majority now favoured the idea of a good "square meal," and of taking our chance for next day's supplies. This was Burns's suggestion, and he easily persuaded the other two to fall in with his views. Accordingly the whole of the scanty stock of solid food we had brought with us was consumed that evening, and we decided to camp there until next morning. That night we had a smoke for "supper." Few can understand the amount of solid comfort and consolation derivable from a plug of tobacco and a pipe by men in the position in which we now found ourselves. The soothing influence of the narcotic enabled us calmly to overhaul our awkward situation, and ultimately we decided to retrace our journey of the previous day, in hope of again coming upon the footprints of the horses.

Early next morning, with empty stomachs, we again took to the sombre shades of the forest. For some miles we were enabled to keep in view our tracks of the previous day. But the morning was cloudy, and it became more and more difficult to distinguish them, and about an hour after starting all traces of them were lost. Burns then lost confidence, and had no resource but to make for the

widest opening. When the captain "loses his head" the crew generally become demoralised. Such was our case. Soon we became conscious that we were in a perilous predicament. It was necessary, however, to keep moving—the knowledge that we had no food was a powerful stimulant to activity—even although we had no definite point to make for. In this way, resting at short intervals, most of the day passed. Twenty-four hours had elapsed since our last meal, and we had done exhausting work. No water had been met with since we left camp; our position was becoming more dangerous; but there was nothing we could do but light a fire and rest until morning.

Having a small quantity of sugar still left—moistened through heat to a condition of paste—we equally divided it. But, as might be supposed, it availed not to satisfy our intolerable thirst. To moisten our parched throats we chewed the leaves of some young eucalyptus saplings; but this only intensified our sufferings, for, from the gummy nature of the leaves, our tongues became almost glued to the palates. No refreshing rest was vouchsafed to us that night, and feverish snatches of sleep were all that we could obtain.

There was no absence of life in the forest. After darkness set in, the doleful howl of the dingo, the screams of flying foxes and opossums, and the porcine grunts of wombats were heard in every

direction, and if we had had either a dog or a gun we could have subsisted for some time. The only weapons in our possession were a pair of single-barrelled pistols, and with these we essayed to shoot a wombat that came close to where we were lying, and appeared amazed at the strange intruders on its domain. But it was more angered than harmed at the discharge, and with a hoarse growl it scuttled into the shades of the forest.

I judged that we had lain around the fire some nine or ten hours, when the notes of animal life ceased and a dim light began to steal under the leafy canopy, denoting the dawn of another day. The only sounds then to be heard were the heavy, feverish breathings of my companions, and their uneasy movements. Suddenly a distant shrill note broke upon my ears. At first I thought it was the usual morning call of the laughing jackass, and paid little attention to it. But after several repetitions at regular intervals, there suddenly flashed through my brain visions of home, kindred, and childhood. I started upright, and all my senses were strained to hear the sound again. Nor was it long in coming. The clear clarion notes of chanticleer again reverberated through the arches of the forest, and I knew that we were spared the terrible fate which had overtaken so many unfortunates who had been benighted and lost in the Australian bush, and which I had been anticipating



for some hours. None of the other members of the party had heard the sounds. Indeed, with the exception of Burns, they had apparently sunk into a state of hopeless lethargy, and I think would have preferred to die quietly there rather than again face the ordeal of the two previous days.

Drawing off their coverings, I signed to them to listen. There was no mistaking the resonant notes—now answering each other from two different quarters—and fresh life and energy were immediately restored to all of us. Burns volunteered to make for the direction whence the notes proceeded. Nearly two hours elapsed, and we were again beginning to feel anxious when the sound of footsteps reassured us, and he appeared with a bag of eatables, and, what was of much greater value to us, a can of water. Ah! that revivifying drink of pure, cold, fresh water! No beverage that had ever passed the lips of any of us could have afforded refreshment and delight equal to that which we experienced as we thus quenched our burning, feverish thirst.

Few who have not passed through an experience akin to ours can comprehend what hunger and thirst in their true sense are. Nearly forty hours had elapsed since we had tasted solid food, and we had undergone an immense amount of fatigue and anxiety, while most of the time we had also been without water. In open country we could

have sustained life much longer, but it was the close, poisonous atmosphere we had been inhaling that told so heavily upon us, creating as it did intense physical prostration and an inordinate thirst.

After all these years I sometimes live through that experience again, and it comes home to me as vividly as though it occurred but yesterday. My first sensations, after realising the slight chance we had of extricating ourselves from our gloomy surroundings, were feelings of weariness and faintness. These were succeeded by efforts to produce saliva wherewith to moisten the parched mouth and throat. Towards evening of the second day the tongue began to swell, and, after chewing the gum leaves, a mucous secretion settled in the mouth and throat that completely prevented articulation. Then followed a buzzing in the ears, and a dreamy feeling possessed me that an abundance of pure water was within reach, but that I was unable to partake of it—the disordered mind conjuring up a phantasm of what it had been dwelling on throughout the day. Suffering intensely throughout the last night, but still endeavouring to retain my senses, I began, as morning approached, to prepare myself for what appeared inevitable death, when hope once more dawned. This was a turning point of my life; for after a brief mental review of what I had suf-

ferred and the meagre prospect that existed of my surviving a third day, more serious thoughts of death and eternity than I had previously entertained took possession of me, and I then and there covenanted to endeavour to be better prepared for my final summons from this life.

But although a terrible experience, it was, after all, the sort of tonic the average man requires for the battle of life, and it had the effect, too, of awakening sympathy with the hungry, shelterless hosts of humanity to be met with in all large cities, especially in the Old World.

Only those circumstanced as we had been can understand what the timely supplies meant to us. While partaking of them we learned from Burns that, as I had suspected, we were back again at Ballan, and that for two days we had been traveling in circles in the forest. He further stated that another party had come through from Spring Creek, and that the site of the new field was now known in the township.

Where we had spent the previous miserable night was not more than a quarter of a mile from our old camp, and with renewed strength we speedily emerged from our dark and gloomy environment to behold again with pleasure and heartfelt gratitude God's cloudless azure sky.

For the three following days we remained in camp effecting internal and external repairs, and

then once more took to the track through the forest. This time we had no difficulty in finding our way. Rain had fallen, and hoof marks were easily discernible. About noon we came upon two miners enjoying a smoke after their mid-day meal. They were on their way from the newly-discovered ground in Jim Crow, and although reticent as to the success they had met with there, they encouraged us by saying that it was a good "poor man's diggings."

Early in the evening we sighted the home station, where we liberally regaled ourselves with milk and other delicacies—treats that some of us had not enjoyed since leaving the Old Country. The owner of the place was a man about fifty years of age, and had evidently been a long time in the colony. He appeared to keep a close watch on the movements of Burns. Judging from the way in which he regarded him, I concluded he had either seen him before, or had suspicions as to his true character. He seemed to exhibit the professional keenness of a detective watching a "suspect." We received directions from him how to find Spring Creek, but were informed that we need not go so far to obtain gold, as about three miles from the station we should cross another creek, which, if we followed it down for some distance, would lead us to fresh auriferous ground that had been opened up within the last few weeks.

It was almost solely in the possession of Irishmen (friends and relatives of a neighbouring runholder), and, as far as he could learn, all were doing well.

We decided to make for this place in preference to Spring Creek, and after resting a short time we followed a sheep track that brought us to the crossing referred to, and there camped for the night.

## CHAPTER V.

## MY FIRST SEARCH FOR GOLD.

HAVING erected the tent, I commenced my first attempt at gold-seeking. Wherever soil was taken from the banks or the bed of the creek I found gold, though not sufficient to enable a man to make what was then regarded as wages—an ounce a day; but noticing that the further I searched up the creek the gold became coarser, I decided to make further trial in that direction next morning.

The knowledge that we had a goldfield almost to ourselves, and that fair remuneration at least could be obtained for our toil, together with our picturesque and novel surroundings, and the booming sounds of large herds of kangaroo bounding down the side of the steep ranges to water at the creek, kept most of us awake the greater part of the night.

The site of the thriving town of Daylesford—with its banks, newspapers, imposing public edifices, and direct railway communication with all parts of Victoria—was, at the period of which I write, the haunt of wild cattle, kangaroos, and

dingoes. One might have worked for a full month in the lonely gullies and creeks without seeing a human being except the owner of the station, from whom we purchased food supplies. It was a valuable piece of country—healthy, open-timbered, with an abundance of feed for sheep and cattle, and even in midsummer a bountiful supply of pure water could be had. In addition to these advantages, gold could be obtained almost everywhere that would yield an industrious man from £10 to £20, and even £50, a week. There were no “jewellers’ shops” as on Ballarat, Bendigo, Forest Creek, and other places; but, to compensate, the precious metal was widely distributed, and anyone willing to work could have made a handsome competency there in a year or two. I was fortunate in my prospecting operations, seldom bottoming a shaft without getting from it a satisfactory show of gold. But, strange as it may appear, it was the encouragement met with in these searches that prevented me from reaping my full share of the advantages so freely afforded. It being new ground, I felt that a rush might set in any day, and, instead of settling down steadily to work and following up the good prospects obtained, I was ever looking for something better—a case of the old adage, “Much would fain have more.” Before my arrival I had no information to guide me in systematically searching for gold,

beyond a description of the method adopted in California which I cut from an old newspaper, and had carefully preserved.

On the morning after my arrival I was out at daybreak, and having once more read the instructions referred to, which told me among other things that wherever slate bars ran across water-courses in auriferous country a search should be instituted, I wended my way up the creek with shovel, dish, and pick.

I have in mind now that first walk up Sailor Creek flats. It was a lovely morning. Nature was clothed in her most enchanting spring attire. The sweet scent of wattle-bloom pervaded the air, and thousands of wild ducks, cockatoos, magpies, lowries, and almost every other description of Australian fauna, were revelling in the trees or on the edges of the creek. Small wonder that I felt happy and hopeful! What a contrast to the place a few years later, when countless mounds of yellow soil had taken the place of the green swards I traversed that morning, and crime, revelry, drunkenness, and blasphemy desecrated its attractive surroundings!

I had travelled about half a mile from our camp along the margin of the creek when I came upon a steep gully—the hills closing well in to each other, and the flat narrowing. Here I noted the face of a slate reef protruding through the



side of the opposite bank, and apparently cut across, as if for ages it had been subjected to the action of water. I instinctively felt that if gold was obtainable anywhere it would be here. Nor was I mistaken. The first panful of earth produced nearly half an ounce, and in about an hour I had washed out nearly six pounds' worth. It is needless to say that I was highly elated with my first fortunate discovery. I thought myself more sagacious than my companions, and was a much more important person in my own estimation than when I arose in the morning—a piece of pleasant self-conceit that cost heavily later on.

With elastic steps I returned to the camp, where I received effusive congratulations—especially from Burns—on my discovery.

We lost no time in taking advantage of it. During the next ten days, by simple panning operations, we obtained over four pounds' weight of gold, and could have done better had we been possessed of suitable mining tools. These, however, were not procurable, and we were compelled to abandon the best of our ground, and keep to shallow workings in the bed of the creek.

During the time mentioned neither Burns nor McInnes appeared to make any systematic search for the treasure that lay so abundantly around us, and was so easily procurable. The former tried a few prospects near the quarter where we

had camped, but McInnes made no effort in any direction beyond assisting to cook our simple diet. In a lazy, expressionless way he would loll on the ground before the fire each night, smoking, and, except an occasional inquiry as to how our claim was turning out, neither joined in our conversation nor apparently took the slightest interest in the object that had brought us to the place, through dire perils and hardships. He would not even take advantage of promising indications I had met with a few chains from where we wrought, and which I communicated to him as well as to Dan Burns.

This indifference created a suspicion that they had not come to the field to do honest work, and, after consultation on their movements, Johnny and I decided to secrete our gold in some place away from the tent. Thus each night one of us ascended a small hill close at hand, and on a signal being given that neither Burns nor McInnes was in view, the other would hide the treasure—contained in a round, tight-covered wooden box—either in a hole prepared for the purpose or by placing it under a boulder in the creek.

So time wore on until a fortnight after our arrival at the creek, when, to our surprise, McInnes apprised us that he was going back to Ballan next morning. He would prefer, he said, to work on a station, and had been promised a bullock-

driver's billet by a runholder in the neighbourhood of that town before he left.

Next day was to be our last at the terrace workings. We had done well there, and the two idlers were aware of it. In the evening, while clearing off the day's yield preparatory to placing it in the box, I expressed regret that McInnes was leaving. Although he was unsociable and ungainly in his movements, I entertained a less unfavourable opinion of him than of Burns. We always considered him honest, and, isolated as we were, I felt that we should miss him, and be more lonely than ever.

Thus we conversed about the pair for some minutes, and were about to deposit our gold in the hiding-place we had settled on when the sound of footsteps on the opposite range attracted my attention, and glancing in that direction I discovered McInnes hastily retreating to a piece of scrub some six chains distant. In a moment it flashed upon me that he had been acting the spy, that a conspiracy was on foot to plunder us, and that McInnes was not the innocent we had taken him to be.

Hastily ascending the range to his hiding-place, I found him lying on his back apparently asleep. To the question what was his business there, he replied confusedly that he was "only having a last look around before he left." Then

it dawned upon me that a partnership had been entered into between the precious pair to rob us, and I suspected that Burns also was in our vicinity. Under that impression I ascended the hill a little higher, and discovered him behind a gum tree rooting the ground with a sheath-knife, as if fossicking. On putting a similar question to him, he replied that he thought a quartz reef might be about the locality, and that McInnes and he had been prospecting all the afternoon. Patently the answer was "thin," and I mentally concluded that if I were to leave the place unharmed I should have to be more than ever on guard against surprise and loss.

Glancing down to where I had left Johnny, I found that every movement at the workings could be distinctly seen from where I had come upon Burns, so that had we hidden our gold where we intended the conspirators could have obtained possession of it without the slightest difficulty. Their plan, I learned later on, was to hang about the creek until we got sufficient gold to be worth appropriating, and when they learnt that we were about to commence fresh workings, they decided that the time had arrived for "springing the plant." But the precaution taken for one of us to view the surroundings each evening before secreting the box had upset their calculations. McInnes felt that he was too exposed in his first-chosen point

of observation, and in his clumsy retreat to a more secure cover had trodden on and broken some rotten branches that revealed his presence.

On returning to Johnny I related my suspicions, and for its greater safety we decided to take the gold to the camp that very night, and also to purchase a tent for ourselves if possible at Spring Creek, where a small store had just been opened.

When leaving Melbourne, I took with me a small, strong carpet bag that I thought would not only answer for a pillow, but enable me also to keep a few articles of underclothing dry. In the centre of these I concealed the box of gold, and prepared for emergencies by drawing the charges from the pistols and reloading them afresh. McInnes was to leave early the following morning, and if further attempt was to be made to steal the gold, I felt that the critical time was near at hand. Johnny and I concealed a pistol thus loaded and primed inside our breast coverings, and agreed to use the weapons if any attempt were made to deprive us of our property. It was arranged also that we should take turn and turn about every two hours to keep watch. As we were accustomed to sleep next each other in the tent, there was no difficulty in silently signalling if it became necessary to act promptly.

We had just completed these arrangements

when the suspected pair returned to the tent. They were not slow to observe by our manner that we had lost confidence in them, and that we were prepared to defend our property. A whispered consultation took place between them over the fire after we had retired, but whatever its nature the night passed without any surprise.

Shortly after daylight, while I was having breakfast, McInnes was in the tent packing up his "swag." Somewhat interested in a story Burns was relating, I failed to notice that he was a long time engaged in making preparations for his journey, and when he reappeared he had his "swag" on his shoulders, ready for starting. Asked if he did not intend to have breakfast before he left, he said he would get as far as the cattle station first, and there procure some food. He was then pressed to have at least some tea; but that also he refused. We thought it strange that he should thus reject offers of refreshment before starting on so long a tramp, but seeing that we were within a few yards of the tent during the time he was packing up, I felt assured he could not take anything away except his personal effects. He gave us little time, however, to collect our thoughts, and bidding us a hasty "So long!" entered the bush that skirted the creek.

The man's abrupt departure without partaking of food suggested examination of our property;

and a brief survey revealed that he had cut open the side of the carpet bag and stolen the pistols, but the gold box was still there in the clothes in which I had wrapped it. Feeling its weight, and finding it to tally with the amount of gold we had obtained, we hastily thrust it into the bag again with a view to report the loss of our pistols to those outside and endeavour to recover them.

McInnes could not have been gone more than five minutes, and I felt that if prompt action were taken we had a fair chance of regaining possession of the weapons. The readily devised plan was to take to the bush in three separate directions, and after penetrating it for about a quarter of a mile, gradually to close in to each other, keeping within hail all the time, and thus "bag" him on our return towards the tent.

None of us sighted him on the outward trip, but when nearing home we discovered him lying on his back close to a fallen tree, with his "swag" removed from his shoulders, and, as usual, smoking an old cutty pipe. After upbraiding him for his dishonesty, we demanded the return of the pistols. He did not appear to be in the least disconcerted, and denied all knowledge of them. But on being told that he would not be allowed to proceed further until they were returned, he sulkily undid his bundle and handed them to me.

After seeing to the priming, and capping the

weapons afresh, we felt that we were masters of the situation, and Johnny essayed to examine his pockets and bundle to ascertain if he had any more of our belongings in his possession. The first attempt in that direction was furiously resented, and was met by a blow that felled the searcher to the ground. But a few words of seasonable advice, together with the persuasive effect of a cocked pistol held within a few feet of his head, prevented further opposition, and a thorough search of his effects was instituted. Nothing additional belonging to us was discovered; but as I had not opened the box containing the gold when the theft of the pistols was discovered, Johnny was sent back to the tent to ascertain if the gold was intact, and to "coo-ee" if it was. In a few minutes the signal was given, and after warning McInnes not to cross our path again, we made for the tent, accompanied by Burns, who had been a silent but interested spectator of the entire proceedings.

So long as the pistol was presented at McInnes, he wore a scared appearance; but when he felt that danger was past, for the first time since we met I learned he was not the tongue-tied creature we had taken him to be. He assailed us with a torrent of curses; but, having recovered our pistols, we felt that we could disregard his abuse. So with a feeling of relief that we were rid of at least one of our undesirable associates, we resumed work.



That day we obtained a couple of ounces, and in the evening, on the usual signal being given by Johnny that no one was about, I opened the box to add the day's earnings to our store, when, to my bewilderment and dismay, instead of lustrous, water-worn gold, I found a mixture of pistol bullets, shot, caps, and sand!

The adroit way in which McInnes had planned and executed the robbery proved him to be an old hand. He had correctly surmised that we should examine the carpet bag after he left, and that in our desire to recover the pistols—which would be first missed—we should be satisfied with proof of the security of the gold by the weight, and the sound when the box was shaken. He had evidently hidden the booty somewhere near the place where we discovered him when he heard our approaching footsteps through the bush. When I sent Johnny back to see that the gold was safe, I meant that he should open the box and have ocular evidence; but in his nervous haste, and his desire to be quit of the fellow as soon as possible, he simply did what I had done myself—took the box in his hand and calculated by weight and sound that the gold was there.

Johnny shared my astonishment when I showed him the contents of the box. For several minutes we could not speak of our loss. Each looked at the worthless stuff that had replaced what we had

toiled for late and early, and had already destined for certain uses, our feelings a medley of vexation, disappointment, amusement, and, preponderating over all, a fierce yearning to be again face to face with the cunning lout who had victimised us.

The gold was our first earnings, and its loss affected us more than it would have done if we had been longer in the colony. But Burns was the chief mourner over the event. He became furious when he heard our story, and invoked the most dreadful penalties on his late chum. At the time I was under the impression that it was out of sympathy with us that he displayed so much warm feeling in the matter. Later on, however, I learned that McInnes had outwitted not only us but also Burns; for they had agreed the evening before the robbery to make an equal division of the spoil.

Johnny and I conversed over our loss until near midnight. The more we talked, the more ruffled my feelings became, and before retiring I decided to start on the trail next morning. Although it would be a "stern chase," I relied on the thief's slothful habits to enable me to overtake him and recover our property before he left Ballan. I was young, impulsive, and smarting deeply from the wrong that had been done us; and I was under the impression that as there was no Govern-

ment protection in such an isolated place, serious penalty could not fall upon me for adopting a summary method of redress.

Accordingly, after a hasty breakfast, I took to the bush track at daybreak, and made first for the cattle station, assuming that I should there gain some information that would guide me in my search. When I reached it I learned that nothing had been seen or heard of McInnes. But as he had been promised a situation near Ballan, I decided to renew the chase in that direction.

About two miles further on I sighted the owner of the station (Mr. Cartwright), driving a mob of cattle towards the homestead. He had not seen the fugitive, and thought he could not have gone that way, or he would have been noticed either by himself or by his sons, as all three were searching the bush the whole of the previous day for strayed cows. On my relating what had occurred, he proffered sympathy and kindly advice that created an impression not to be forgotten. He strongly counselled me not to go a step further on McInnes's track. "I have been some fifteen years in the colony," he said, "and have purchased my experience in the same way as you, by taking into my confidence men who abused it. I consider, by his appearance, that Burns is even more dangerous than the fellow who has robbed you, and I warn you to get clear of him as soon as

possible. There is plenty of gold where that which you have lost came from, and in the course of a year or so you will not be much the worse for your loss. There's another way of looking at it. Even if you do overtake the scoundrel, he is not likely to give up the gold without a struggle, and as I notice you have a pair of pistols, you might, in a fit of temper, be tempted into a rash act that would cause you to be arraigned on a charge of murder. I can tell you that, although there's no police or military protection about these parts, the Queen's writ runs over Bullarook forest as effectively as in the United Kingdom. Take the advice of one who has a fair knowledge of the world in general, and of this part of it in particular. Go back to your claim and set to work, and I am sure you will have a lighter conscience a year hence than you would have if you came into contact with this McInnes. And there's one thing more I would like to impress upon you. In your future associations and dealings in this colony take every man you meet to be an unmitigated rogue until you have positive proof that he is an honest man. It is not pleasant advice to give you, but as the place is now overrun with the scum of humanity, I feel satisfied that it will be to your advantage to adopt it."

As I listened to Mr. Cartwright, I gradually felt my resentful feelings subsiding, and when he

finished I gratefully acknowledged his seasonable advice, and declared that I would implicitly act upon it.

As I now look back on that episode of my life I feel grateful that I was thus providentially diverted from the purpose I had in mind when I set out in pursuit of our despoiler; for had we met in that lonely forest in the spirit that then dominated me, the life of one or the other would, in all probability, have been forfeited.

On my return to the creek, Burns was naturally anxious to have full particulars; but the warning I had had regarding him was deeply engraved in my memory, and I gave him none but evasive answers. I felt that a game of cross-purposes was to be played between us, and that polite reserve and a watchful eye on his movements would be the wisest course to adopt while we were together.

During the next week Burns's time was principally occupied in denouncing his late chum's duplicity, and in invoking crimson, double-barrelled pains and penalties upon Scotsmen in general, and on those hailing from Glasgow in particular. He evidently felt that he especially had been badly used in the affair. Besides the loss of his share of the booty, which would have been over £100, to be outwitted by such a "—— chuckle-headed, porridge-eating, lime-juicing son of a

sea-cook " (as he fumingly designated McInnes) was a sore point. If he had been thus tricked by an "old hand" he would not have grieved so much over it. As he confessed later on, McInnes's apparent simplicity had, as in our case, completely deceived him. He considered that a reflection had been cast upon his discernment and "professional" skill, and he took the affair much more to heart than did the rightful owners of the property.

A few years later we had the comfort of learning that McInnes was doing five years' penal servitude in Pentridge Stockade for a robbery at a station where he had been employed, and where his phlegmatic manner and harmless appearance had, as with us, lulled suspicion regarding his true character.

I may conclude this chapter with a brief sketch of Johnny, my companion in misfortune, who, it will be remembered, had thrown in his lot with mine when I left the Wimmera party. He was a native of Bristol, a shoemaker by trade, small in stature, great in talking capacity, assertive in address, and unduly inflated with a sense of personal importance. I have often wished to be as sure of anything as my old mate was of everything. The last few years of his residence in England were spent in London, where he became sub-overseer in a leading boot and shoe establishment patronised by Royalty. In that capacity he occa-

sionally visited Buckingham Palace to take the measurements of the younger members of the royal household. He appeared to be especially proud of having performed that duty for the youthful Princess Royal, afterwards German Empress, and spoke in enthusiastic terms of her Royal Highness's amiability and condescension; and in our nightly conversations he seldom omitted reference to that experience of his.

Johnny was deeply imbued with the pre-eminence over other cities of the one where he was ushered into this transitory life. He never tired of expatiating on the charms of Bristol and its attractive surroundings. "There's no place like it, sir!" he would say, "and few can show points to a Bristol man!"

But before leaving the survey employ an incident befell him which knocked some of the nonsense out of him. A herd of half-wild cattle belonging to a neighbouring run happened to be grazing near our camp one evening, when the unhappy thought occurred to John that he would have some amusement at their expense. With that object he valiantly approached them with a burning brand from the camp fire, and landed it on the back of a huge, long-horned, brindled bullock, causing the hair to ignite. The result was not what John anticipated—a hurried stampede into the bush. The animal was not built on the

lines of Bristol bullocks. It was a wild, untutored beast, that feared nothing but the biting stock-whip, handled by an expert, well mounted, and rough-clad stockman. So instead of retreating, the beast turned aggressively upon its tormentor. He was not slow to see that mischief lurked in its vicious eyes, arched back, and horizontal tail, and he struck a bee-line at his best pace for a clump of stunted she-oak trees in the vicinity. But the bullock was the quicker of the two, and John was saved the trouble of climbing by being taken in the rear on the horns of the infuriated beast, and hurled with amazing velocity amongst the topmost branches of one of the trees, some ten feet from the ground. Owing to the dense foliage of the tree he alighted "softly," and sustained no bodily injury beyond surface bruises. But Burns's banter on the subject, especially his frequent reference to the "points" he (Johnny) discovered when elevated on the bullock's horns, and the familiar way in which he addressed him as "Snob," wounded his self-esteem heavily.

Johnny's rough adventure had, as I have hinted, a salutary effect upon him, and when it became apparent that he had been sufficiently humbled, the offensive sobriquet "Snob" was commuted to "Johnny," and by that name he will be known to the reader in future chapters.

An amusing feature of his character was his



habit of speaking loudly, as if desirous to place it as a set-off to his unimposing appearance; and in descriptions of adventures in which he had taken a part he was sublimely indifferent to rules of syntax, and invariably put himself first when grouping his characters. Thus, "Me and they," "Me and my wife," "Me and some friends," were phrases always upon his lips. John had been married only a few months when he left home, and, to judge by his laudations of his consort's perfections, was still under the spell of honeymoon glamour. As I sat on the ship's rail when about to pass out of the London Docks, I was deeply impressed with the parting scene between him and his young wife. A perfect storm of grief had seized upon her as she piteously besought him not to leave her; while he, with arm around her neck, fondly kissed her again and again, and soothingly whispered that he would rejoin her in less than twelve months with sufficient means to keep them for life. It was the most touching parting I had ever witnessed, and I had a vivid impression of it when I singled him out as a suitable mate on the occasion of my departure from Donald Cumrae and his bullock drays.

Though he had his foibles, Johnny was a strictly honest man, and I am glad to acknowledge the valuable services he rendered me on occasions when I needed assistance. Three years

later I met him at Happy Valley, and learned his career since we parted. He had been fortunate at the Ovens, and had taken a trip to England to bring out his wife. Alas for the fickleness of a woman's heart! She had become acquainted with a Lothario in the military business shortly after Johnny left her, and had vanished. Saunders could not discover any trace of the pair, and he returned to the diggings a sadder and wiser man. His former buoyancy, egotism, and self-conceit had been completely knocked out of him, and he freely acknowledged that the experience he had gained in Australia was more useful to him than that of the previous thirty years of his life. Still later I learned that he had acquired an independence by a lucky discovery at Fiery Creek. Ultimately he settled down in one of the suburbs of Melbourne, became a town councillor, and showed himself to be a model of respectability.

## CHAPTER VI.

HOW I MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MELVILLE THE  
BUSHRANGER.

THE Jim Crow Ranges and Bullarook Forest were in 1852 the principal haunts of bushrangers, ticket-of-leave men, and bolters from the prisons of the various colonies. Amongst these were an especially undesirable batch who had graduated at Port Macquarie, Port Arthur, and Norfolk Island (the Gehenna of the South Pacific). Owing to the dense growth of timber and scrub in the forest, and the numerous rocky defiles or cañons to be met with in the ranges surrounding the district, the capture of these outlaws became almost impossible without the assistance of black trackers, and in any case was beset with much danger to those who made the attempt. An additional attraction was the discovery of "payable" gold in nearly all the creeks, gullies, and flats of that region, so that if road agencies on the line of transit to the main goldfields proved unremunerative for a time, or if the police became extra vigilant, they fell back on this isolated quarter as a reserve, where they could at least glean sufficient recompense for

daily requirements, including an unlimited supply of liquor. Here they were free to indulge their brutal instincts without interference on the part of the few respectable people engaged in mining pursuits, whose lives would have been endangered by any attempt to preserve law and order without the aid of an efficient body of police. Not a single officer of the law was permanently stationed in the locality until population began to be attracted to it, some six months after my arrival there.

It was my misfortune, through fortuitous circumstances, to be brought into contact with some of the most notorious of the outlaws who infested the Jim Crow district. Several of them had completed long sentences in Tasmania and Norfolk Island, where some of them were the victims of fearful atrocities, while none of them came under humanising influences. The result was that they were precipitated on society at the time of the gold discoveries like so many wild beasts, and became a constant source of terror to peaceable and law-abiding people. Some of the vilest characters in the colony made Sailor Creek their headquarters, and, after recovering from the effects of periodical orgies, like freebooters of old they would issue from their fastnesses, make raids on the settled parts of the colony and the main diggings, and, after levying blackmail, would return with their ill-gotten spoils to engage in another big

carousal. With a single exception, the bandits were of the lowest order in the social scale—mere brutes in human shape, ever ready to commit any crime to gratify their depraved instincts, and utterly lost to every sentiment of pity, generosity, or remorse.

The exception referred to—the noted Captain Melville—is the subject of this chapter of my recollections. Before having a personal knowledge of him I had heard much of his character from Dan Burns. He was known to be in the ranges, near Bullarook Forest, at the time of the discovery of gold, having come to the place after committing highway robberies in the Western District, which attracted special notice from the fact that he made his levy upon those only who were possessed of an abundance of the world's good things.

No Australian "knight of the road" has been so much before the public as Melville. The events of his career have been told and re-told during the past fifty years, and have been invariably interlarded with sensational accounts of adventures and hair-breadth escapes for which there was not the slightest foundation.

Reading one of these fictions a short time since, it occurred to me that some authentic information should be furnished as to the man's true character. Police records as well as Colonial press reports have invariably represented him as the incarnation of

wickedness, and yet that is very far from the truth.

That he had grave faults, and that his mode of living deserved severe punishment, none can gainsay. But, on the other hand, up to the time of his capture he was known to be one who had never shed blood in his many audacious depredations, and who was animated by generous impulses towards those in want and distress. Owing to these extenuating traits in his character, there was a general feeling of pity at his untimely end. Since he certainly possessed virtues as well as vices, a lighter punishment might surely have been awarded him than incarceration for thirty-two years in a floating hell; and it is curious that so little leniency should have been extended to his memory by those who have written about him.

It was towards the end of 1852 that I first encountered Melville. Johnny and I took turn about to visit Cartwright's station to purchase our weekly supply of provisions, and some six weeks after my arrival at Sailor Creek that duty devolved upon me. On nearing the homestead, I noticed a shapely, well-cared-for horse, with complete riding equipments, fastened to a corner of the fence that surrounded the house. Presuming it to belong to a police officer or other Government official, I paid little attention to it, and, as usual, lifted the latch of the door to enter. I had only got across

the threshold when I found myself facing a revolver, and was ordered in a peremptory way to throw up my hands. The startling and unexpected manner in which the mandate was delivered must have caused me to present a scared appearance. Indeed, so disordered were my nerves for an instant that I did not sufficiently realise my position to comply with the demand. The reason for my hesitancy must have been apparent to the man behind the revolver. My facial aspect, and perhaps my then somewhat dilapidated "new chum" clothing, afforded him considerable amusement, and with a loud, hearty laugh he lowered the weapon and ordered me to take a seat that he pointed out. His easy, jocular manner, and the intelligent cast of his countenance, quickly restored my self-possession, and I soon took in the situation.

Cartwright and all his family were in the room, apparently under compulsion, and I was informed by them that I was in the company of Captain Melville, and the reason for my unceremonious reception was explained. He had been partaking of food, and, not hearing my approach until I was at the door, had, in case I was an "undesirable" visitor, received me in the way described.

During the time he was eating, conversation was carried on principally between Cartwright and myself. Melville said but little, and I had

ample opportunity to study him. He was seated close to the door, and opposite a small window where he could command a full view of his horse. He was armed with a light, double-barrelled gun and a pair of revolvers—the latter stuck in a red sash that he wore around his waist. His attire was simple, and, without firearms and his American sash, he would have been taken for a stock-rider by those who did not know him. He appeared to be about thirty-five years of age, was of medium height, with a supple, well-knit frame, and seemed at ease in all his movements. He possessed regular features, and had a pleasing expression when conversing on general subjects. Even in the way he partook of his food—with head uncovered—one could discern that he was a long way superior to most of the ruffians then doing road agency business.

After finishing his meal, he asked how long I had been in the country, where I was working, the number of people on the ground, our average earnings, and other questions. Informed of my present mission, he inquired how much money I had with me. I had none, and stated that our purchases were generally made by gold-dust. I had brought about an ounce with me to pay for our requirements, and handed him the wooden match-box containing it. After examining it he returned it, and in a good-humoured way requested



me to turn my pockets inside out, excusing his curiosity on the ground that his "profession" made him inquisitive. Having satisfied himself that I had nothing else of value upon me, he asked what was allowed me for the gold. On being informed that sixty-five shillings an ounce was understood to be the standard value, he informed Cartwright, with severity in his tone, that he was not doing the square thing; for the gold he had just seen was of the purest description, and worth seventy-seven and sixpence in Melbourne.

This at first surprised me. I had a high opinion of Cartwright, and was convinced that he had not knowingly done me injustice. Indeed, gold was then being won in such large quantities that I was satisfied sixty-five shillings an ounce was a fair market value. But even if the full rate was not given in such an isolated place, it was to some extent excusable. I mentioned this to Melville, but his outraged sense of rectitude was not appeased. In passing, I may mention that the information thus curiously obtained was useful to me, for afterwards I was allowed seventy-five shillings for every ounce I parted with.

I found the captain to be a capital conversationalist. No blasphemous expressions emanated from him, and but little slang that could seriously offend good taste; and at the end of half an hour

I felt as though I had known him for years and years.

In this confidential mood I hazarded the opinion that a man of his acquirements should feel ashamed to engage in the kind of life he had adopted, and was proceeding to proffer further advice when he turned savagely upon me, and peremptorily ordered me to mind my own affairs.

Perceiving that it would be useless and dangerous to expostulate further with him, I proceeded to transact my business with Cartwright. As I did so, a feeling of curiosity led me to glance several times at Melville. The ferocity that had overspread his features when I deprecated his wicked life had passed away as quickly as it had appeared, and, seating himself by the fire, he appeared to fall into a deep reverie. His attitude and manner were suggestive. The face was bowed, and the eyes had assumed a pensive expression, as if his thoughts were far away in the days when he had not broken with society. Although he had resented the liberty I had taken, he appeared to be taking to heart what I had said. A chord of memory had evidently been touched, and the better nature of the daring bandit chief was perhaps fighting to regain its lost ascendancy.

On finishing my business with Cartwright, I was about to take my departure, when the sounds of approaching footsteps were heard outside, which

brought Melville to his feet in a moment. His first impulse was to draw his revolver, and glance towards where his horse was tied. Finding him still secure, quick as lightning he faced round to the door, with his weapon held at arm's length. Then I saw the highwayman in his worst aspect, and could scarcely believe him to be the same being. There was no mistaking his untamed, determined nature, and if a trooper had entered the room at that moment his life would certainly have been sacrificed. I suspect that Melville was cursed with fierce passions which were not kept under control in childhood, and which, after his first fall from the paths of rectitude, grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength.

It was, however, only a toil-worn, hungry fellow-mortal who was presented to view when Cartwright opened the door. As in my case, when Melville realised that his freedom was not endangered by the new-comer, his ferocity subsided as suddenly as it had been aroused, and he pleasantly inquired the object of the visit.

The explanation was that the visitor had been to Ballarat, and had been unsuccessful there. Returning to Melbourne without means, he had heard of the "poor man's diggings" at Spring Creek, and had decided to try to reach them. Like my party, he had lost his way in the forest, and was suffering from hunger and thirst.

Asked by Melville if he had any means, the wayfarer replied that he had only a few shillings left of a large sum he had taken with him to Ballarat.

The man's story was strongly confirmed by his sickly and poverty-stricken appearance. I had been a silent observer and listener of the interview between the stranger and his interlocutor, and discerned strong traces of sympathy in Melville's features as he listened to the tale. Turning to Cartwright, he somewhat authoritatively ordered the man to be supplied with food. This was done, and while the famished wanderer was eating, the highwayman said: "Well, old man, I'm Melville the outlaw—you've doubtless heard of me. I'm not flush of loose cash just now, but I'll share what I have with you."

He then produced two £1 notes and a few shillings, and, after returning half the sum to his pocket, inquired how much I had after paying for supplies. On stating the amount, he remarked in a patronising sort of way: "You gave me some nice Christianlike advice a short time back, and I suppose you won't object to give half of what you have to this poor devil."

Even if I had been indisposed to comply, resistance would have been out of the question, so without demur I handed him the money.

"And you, boss," addressing Cartwright, "have

been doing a capital thing here in purchasing gold—a contribution won't hurt you."

In this way a sum of £3 10s. was subscribed, and in handing it to the stranger Melville expressed the hope that it would be useful to him.

This action on the part of the notorious highwayman, whom up to this time I did not understand so well as afterwards, fairly astonished me; and I feel convinced from what I then witnessed, as well as from subsequent information I gleaned regarding him, that he possessed in a marked degree the gift of sympathy and charity.

The recipient of Melville's aid was profuse in his thanks for the present, but the ranger stopped him short with the assurance that he had done nothing to deserve gratitude; for some day, he said, he might chance to meet him again possessed of wealth, and then he would expect the donation returned with a big interest. Then, after wrapping some food in a parcel, he bade us "So long!" and left the house.

I confess that I had come under Melville's spell. All fear of him had vanished, and I followed him from the building with the view of learning, if possible, something further of his history.

As he came near to where his horse was fastened, the fine instinct of the animal at once discerned that his master was approaching, and he

whinnied with pleasure—a certain indication that the strong affection so often noticed between man and beast when leading lonely lives together existed between these two. Melville loved his horse with Arab-like devotedness, and the affection was returned with interest. After giving him a drink, the outlaw kept fondling and whispering to him, as if he was the one trusty friend he could rely upon; and these endearments were reciprocated. No dumb animal could have evinced greater attachment to a master. It might be read in the beaming eye, and in the affectionate way in which he rubbed his velvety nose against the outlaw's face and shoulders. I remarked on the animal's intelligence, and his fitness. "Yes, Bob and I know each other," was the reply. "We've had some rough times together, and it would be a heavy wrench to part with him. There was a hot spurt after us some weeks ago, and I kept him at full pace for about fifteen miles. Then, finding he was blown and unable to go much further without a rest, we drew in among the timber, and after giving him a rub down and chatting with him he freshened up, and we had no trouble in keeping a good lead until we got to a cover where the smartest of the troopers would not care to venture. It was then I first learned the trick of talking to Bob in 'horse' language. I was just now making him understand that we

may have work before us, and he knows he will have to do his share of it. Don't you, Bob?" he added, caressingly patting the animal on the neck and shoulders.

At the mention of his name the animal looked his master full in the face, and by a loud whinny appeared to indicate that he comprehended what was said.

Then, fastening his gun to his back in the style of the mounted police, Melville vaulted lightly into the saddle, and, after examining his equipments, informed me that he would keep a sharp look-out for McInnes, whom I had described and whose villainous conduct I had made him acquainted with. With a light touch on the horse's flanks, and a friendly nod to me, he entered Bullarook Forest and in a few minutes was lost to sight.

While he was speaking to his horse, I had observed one peculiarity in Melville's features that I had not previously noticed. His ears were abnormally large, and grew close into the head. What this may indicate will be better understood by those who have given more time to the study of physiognomy than I have done. But every member of the criminal class whom it was my lot to come in contact with in the early fifties had large or deformed ears.

It was said, too, that Mr. McLachlan, the

well-known R.M. of Bendigo, invariably took into consideration, in his judicial decisions, the size and shape of the ears of those brought before him—the larger the “lugs” of a culprit, the heavier would he lay it on. For many years he had a responsible position in connection with the penal establishments in Tasmania, and being thus brought into daily contact with rascaldom, had almost necessarily become a physiognomist and reader of character. The knowledge thus acquired was highly useful to Victorian society when he was appointed administrator of justice on Bendigo—the most important of the goldfields. When there was any conflict of evidence, in cases where the accused possessed unnaturally large ears, furnished with thick, heavy lobes, “Bendigo Mac” generally gave society rather than the accused the benefit of his doubts, and the man a double dose of imprisonment. In this way some of the most dangerous characters in the colony were consigned to the hulks at Williamstown, and were kept there until an efficient police force was established to keep them under close surveillance on the goldfields.

I felt a sort of regret when I lost sight of Melville in the shades of the forest, and a longing possessed me to know more about him. At this time he appeared to be ubiquitous. The police were constantly scouring the country for him, and



frequently got on his tracks, when suddenly news would be received that he had committed a fresh robbery fifty miles in another direction. They were completely puzzled and amazed by the rapidity and audacity of his movements. The opportunity was afforded me a few years later to learn something further of his history, and as he was at once the most daring and the most generous of the Victorian bushrangers, a few particulars of his career may be interesting.

When a steady flow of free labour began to set in to Van Diemen's Land, and settlement became somewhat extended, a large number of the convicts who evinced signs of reformation were allotted to farmers or others in the country districts. These became responsible for their support, and to some extent for their safe keeping. It was found after a while, however, that the system did not work satisfactorily. The monotony of a country life became irksome to most of the men, and they either attempted to escape from the settlement, or joined the various bands of outlaws who at that period roamed at large over the island.

It then occurred to some official wiseacre that a more pliable material to supply the growing labour requirements of the placé might be procured by importing a few cargoes of boys who had come within the meshes of the law in the

mother country. No difficulty was experienced in furnishing trial shipments. The Home Government was only too pleased to get rid of the young rascals, and for the most trivial offences youths were sentenced to long terms in the colonies of Tasmania (then Van Diemen's Land) and Botany Bay.

The reader will have some idea of the way in which the British penal laws were administered half a century ago when it is stated that the crime for which the *soi-disant* Melville was sentenced to fifteen years' transportation was the theft of a pie. Nowadays for a similar petty offence a delinquent would be discharged with a caution.

Melville was a native of Paisley, Scotland, and his relatives were industrious and respectable people, but that was all that could be elicited from him regarding them. To his credit, be it said, he never disclosed his true name, and the secret died with him. In Tasmania he was known as McCallum, and he assumed the name of "Melville" after escaping from there in 1852 and finding his way to Melbourne.

With some hundred and fifty youths of nearly the same age, taken from British prisons and reformatories, he arrived in Tasmania about 1838. Herding in such society, there was little chance afforded to improve his character, and it is not

to be wondered at that after a time he became irreclaimable.

A few years after his arrival at Hobart he was persuaded by two old hands to abscond from a road gang and take to the bush. All three were arrested in arms a few weeks later, brought to trial, and sentenced to death. His companions were executed, but owing to his youth, Melville was let off with a life sentence, and sent to Port Arthur. Having spent seven years there, he served lengthy assignment terms with settlers near Launceston (Tasmania), and from thence he escaped as a stowaway, and arrived, as stated, at Melbourne in 1852.

After leaving Jim Crow and Bullarook, he committed several sensational robberies on the Ballarat road and then made his way to Geelong, to be present at the marriage of one of his former associates. The police, who had been continually in search of him for months, being apprised of his visit, surrounded the building where he was enjoying himself, and succeeded in effecting his capture.

When he was brought to trial irrefutable evidence was produced of numerous highway robberies committed by him, and the only claim he could make to a mitigated sentence was that he never robbed anyone who could not afford the loss. It was the most unfortunate plea he could have

offered for his misdeeds. It was felt that no wealthy man was safe on the roads while Melville was at large, and, instead of serving him, the "class distinction" he observed in his pillaging excursions was the means of gaining for him a much harsher sentence than he might otherwise have received.

A consensus of opinion prevailed at the time that the sentence was unduly severe. It was thought that prejudice even had been introduced into the trial, and when the long smouldering discontent with the administration of justice broke out into open hostilities at Ballarat a couple of years later, the sentence passed upon Melville was adduced as a reason for reorganising the department of justice.

That a man of his character would long submit to the discipline exercised over prisoners in the hulks was not to be expected, and I was prepared to learn that some day he would attempt to escape. This he did when being conveyed from Williamstown to his floating prison. A launch, having on board Melville and some thirty other convicts of the shore gang, was being towed to the hulks by a small boat containing a warder, the ship keeper, and two oarsmen, when a number of the convicts seized the tow rope, and nine of them, including Melville and Burgess (the latter the leader of the notorious Maungatapu murderers), took possession

of the boat. The officials and one of the boatmen were thrown overboard, and the owner of the boat, refusing to leave, was instantly brained by one of the prisoners with a stone-breaking hammer. Several volleys were fired upon them from the hulk, and one of the prisoners was shot dead, while Burgess was severely wounded in the shoulder. In all three lives were lost in the encounter.

After taking possession of the boat Melville and his companions made down Hobson's Bay with the object of seizing a schooner lying off Gellibrand Point, in which they hoped to escape from Port Phillip. Meantime the sentinel on the hulk, who had been an eye-witness of what had transpired, signalled for assistance from the shore, and the smart police launch, always ready for emergencies, soon overhauled the bolters. They submitted without resistance, were brought to the hulk, and there heavily ironed. Shortly afterwards they were tried for murder, and Melville, the supposed leader of the attack, was sentenced to death.

Doubtless he was in a position liberally to fee able counsel to defend him. Some of the fruit of the heavy exactions he had made upon wealthy people when at large were probably hidden in places in Bullarook that could easily be discovered by description. Be that as it may, his counsel successfully raised technical points in his favour, and the conviction was quashed. But before the news

could be conveyed to the outlaw he became his own executioner by choking himself with a pocket-handkerchief.

In the course of a long career I have met with many persons who enjoyed the confidence and esteem of their fellows, and to whom clung an odour of respectability and sanctimoniousness, who could not boast a particle of the better side of Melville's nature. Dishonest he was, and fierce and desperate to boot, but this, at any rate, may be said of him, that the ways of hypocrites, liars, robbers of widows and orphans, and perverters of virtue were not his ways.

## CHAPTER VII.

## DAN BURNS DECIDES TO MAKE THINGS LIVELY.

IN striking contrast to Melville were the loathsome creatures whose unwholesome society fate thrust upon us. After the departure of McInnes with our first earnings, Johnny and I prospected various likely-looking places at some distance from camp, and discovered gold everywhere in what would nowadays be considered highly remunerative quantities. Only one of these, however, came up to expectations, and we decided to settle down regularly to work it. The place was situated about a mile from our camp, and as the tent belonged to Burns, we arranged to allot him a portion of the claim in consideration of his shifting the habitation to the workings. We judged the ground to be equally profitable for about forty yards square, and Burns was given his choice of a portion. He declined, however, to select any particular part himself, preferring, he said, that I should mark out his share, and giving what seemed a fair reason—that as I was the discoverer, I had the best right to apportion it. Thus urged, I pegged off for him

about sixty feet square, and for the first time for a month he set in to work with a will.

By a strange freak of fortune, I had selected for him the best piece of ground that was opened during the five months I was on the creek, while the part reserved for ourselves became exhausted after a few weeks' work. That, however, did not concern us much, as there was abundance of auriferous wealth to be had in every direction for the seeking. The stripping was only a few feet, and with a tin dish alone Burns washed out some twenty ounces the first week. In a few hours one day he filled a match-box from a "pocket" with nuggets varying from half a dwt. to half an ounce.

Thus furnished with a large amount of easily acquired wealth, with only a small portion of his claim worked out, but unable longer to resist his intense craving for strong drink, he decided to take a "spell."

Liquor in large quantities was then flowing into Spring Creek and Tipperary Flat—where the Irishmen were located—but as Burns made it a point, for reasons previously stated, to keep clear of places where there was a chance of being recognised, he elected to go back to Ballan, where he had held his orgies during the time we were at the survey camp. There, while his money lasted, he knew he was safe from arrest, as few respectable people stayed longer at the one shanty in the place than was absolutely



necessary to obtain hasty refreshments. There also he was more likely to meet the class of men he delighted to associate with—outlaws who made the neighbouring Bullarook Forest a refuge during the day, and emerged from it at nightfall to fraternise together and plan robberies.

Of the twenty-three miles he had to tramp to indulge his craving for liquor Burns thought very little. He possessed an iron constitution, and was used to bush travel. The track also had become fairly defined, and no fear was entertained that anyone need again be lost in journeying between Cartwright's and Ballan.

After measuring off his claim he placed marks upon it to enable him to detect if it had been encroached upon during his absence, and with a light, jaunty step, inspired by the possession of some eighty pounds' worth of gold, he disappeared one morning, with the fervent hope on our part that Providence would ordain that we had seen the last of him.

For some days prior to his leaving I noticed that he frequently endeavoured to shape into a curl in the centre of his forehead a lock of his naturally straight hair. Inquiring his object in making such tonsorial alteration, I received an evasive reply. Later on, however, I learned from one of his associates similarly adorned, who was in a half-drunken and confidential mood, that it was the distinguish-

ing mark of the Van Diemen convict brotherhood, and that their token or password was "Diamond cut Diamond," or, for the sake of brevity, "D. cut D."

Over a week passed without any sign of Burns's return, and we had begun to hope that we had seen the last of him, and were actually congratulating ourselves one night on being relieved of his presence, when the sound of approaching footsteps broke on the surrounding stillness, and to our extreme annoyance the miscreant, in a half-drunken state, staggered towards us, threw himself down in front of our fire, and in an incoherent way demanded food.

Having satisfied his hunger he became communicative, and related particulars of his jollification and the choice companions he had met with. He then inquired if anyone had been working his claim, and, being assured on the subject, he informed us that he had agreed to take on three mates to assist in working it. Two of them would be at the creek when they had finished "a little job" they had in hand.

This latter information was imparted in a way which suggested that the job in question was not a creditable one.

The third partner, he said, was lying "soaked" at Ballan when he left, and would, he thought, arrive next evening. He himself had parted with

the last of his money two days before, and before he left that morning had received from the landlord of the shanty two bottles of gin on trust, the last of which he had finished just before reaching the creek.

While giving us these particulars he was smoking an old black clay pipe, and after a few minutes' rumination he remarked—"This is a lonely sort of place now, but I can tell you 'twill be —— lively before long, or my name isn't Dan!"

That was the gist of his first conversation after arrival, and needless to say it was copiously interlarded with his customary blasphemy and low colonial slang.

What we had just heard had a disheartening effect upon us. Besotted and besmirched as he appeared after his heavy debauch and long journey, we could have been content to remain in the place for a time if we had had only himself to deal with. But with three others, perhaps equally depraved, we felt that our position would be intolerable, and after he had taken himself off for the night we decided to sacrifice our prospects and leave for some other field.

The resolutions I had made to part with Burns had always been frustrated by some inscrutable trick of fate, and this present decision met with no better success.

On the following morning there came unex-

pected visitors to our camp. In his cups at Ballan, Burns had been descanting on the glowing prospects at Sailor Creek. His description of the place soon got wind in the township, and the two men who now appeared had tracked him when he started the previous morning. They had stayed at Cartwright's during the night, and reached the creek while we were having breakfast. Both bore the appearance of hard-working, honest men, and after conversing with them for some time—during which I noticed that Burns regarded them with his usual sinister side-look, as if displeased at their presence—I encouraged them to remain, feeling that the company of a few trusty people in so lonely and dangerous a place was highly desirable. One of the twain was a stalwart seafaring man. He had been a Sydney whaler in bygone years, had left his ship when she touched at the Fijis, and had been inured to every description of hardship and danger during a long residence among the savages of the South Seas; but withal he had the genial, frank manner of the typical British sailor. Such a man we felt would be a host in himself if we came into collision with Burns and his party. Thus reinforced, we decided to stay on.

The other new arrival was a carpenter by trade, a native of Taunton, Somersetshire, and had been a resident of Sydney for some years before the gold era. Of him more anon.

Having by constant searchings gained a knowledge of several "payable" parts of the creek, we took these two men into our confidence, and laid them on to ground that would give good returns for their labour. Being satisfied with the result of their first day's work, they erected their tent and made preparations to stay. They had with them a small light vehicle, resembling a costermonger's cart, containing a complete miner's outfit, and I noticed with satisfaction that they were in possession of an excellent double-barrelled gun. Now, therefore, we were fully a match for Burns and his new friends, if we were not taken at a disadvantage. Other shelter and accommodation had, however, to be obtained, and the following day we procured from Spring Creek the necessary calico for a "gunyah." This we erected close to the newcomers, and it was our only shelter during the remainder of our stay on the creek.

As we shifted our belongings from Burns's tent we saw that he was closely watching our movements. The last thing I took possession of was our chamois leather bag containing what gold we had earned since the McInnes robbery. It had been buried near the front of the tent, and when I rooted it up from the ground, Burns, with the instinct of a born thief, and dominated as he was by inordinate cupidity, greedily snatched at it and endeavoured to wrest it from me. A rough struggle

ensued between us for a few minutes, but luckily Johnny was within hail, and in response to a signal, he ran to my assistance.

In a nervous sort of way Burns stated that he was only having a lark, and that he never meant to take possession of the bag. By this time, however, we knew our man. We quite understood that to one of his thievish propensities it was a source of deep chagrin to be thus frustrated a second time in his efforts to purloin our property—and to find that it had actually been hidden within the precincts of his own tent, and that he had walked over it several times daily for a month!

He, too, knew that he was understood, and the strained relations that had subsisted between us for some time became intensified into antipathy on both sides. A weight, however, had been taken off my mind by the accession of the new comers, and as all of us were working rich ground, with nearly half a mile intervening between us and Burns's tent, the time passed more cheerily than any I had experienced since my arrival in the colony.

Jack Curtis's nightly recitals of his adventures and hair-breadth escapes in the South Sea Islands, and in New Zealand during the Hone Heke war, were entertaining. Even in those distant parts the accounts of the fabulous gold discoveries in Australia had been freely circulated, and all who could leave for the goldfields had done so. Curtis

had caught the fever badly, as well as other white residents of Fiji, and although from his robust physical proportions and fighting capacity he had become a prime favourite of Thakombau—the then cannibal king of these islands—and was permitted by him many indulgences, including an unlimited number of wives to work for him, Jack could not resist the temptation offered of “making a rise” on the Australian diggings. He wanted, he said, only two hundred pounds. With that he would go back to the islands, purchase land, and make his wives keep him for the rest of his life.

A further attraction for him at the Fijis was a half-promise from old Thakombau that he (Curtis) should become his successor as king of the islands.

It did not take long to satisfy Jack's modest ambition. In less than two months he acquired gold valued at more than two hundred pounds, and after darkness set in one day he surprised us by announcing that he intended to leave that night. With so many desperadoes infesting the locality, he thought it safer to travel at night than during the day. By sleeping in secluded places in the bush during daylight he hoped to reach Melbourne in two days. He had not divulged even to his mate his intention until he was ready to start, fearing that his departure might become known to Burns and his confederates—two of whom had arrived on the creek, as expected, shortly after we removed to

our new quarters. Jack wisely concluded that if they became aware he was leaving with a quantity of gold the information would soon be conveyed to their friends in Bullarook, and he would in all probability be robbed, if not murdered.

Curtis was working "payable" ground when he thus hastily decided, but having realised the amount he wanted, and longing for the easy life he had enjoyed in his Fijian elysium, no persuasion or inducement could alter his resolution to clear out. Accordingly, after partaking of supper, he made up a light "swag," and left on as lonely and dreary a journey as can well be imagined—a journey such as few except the hardiest and most courageous would have cared to venture upon at that time. I never heard of him afterwards, but it is to be hoped that

The sweet little cherub that sits up aloft  
Kept a watch o'er the life of poor Jack.

The mere fact that a man should venture at night-time on such a journey through a densely timbered forest infested by bands of cut-throats, will afford some idea of the risks and anxieties of those who won wealth on the outlying goldfields at that period, and who had personally to convey it to distant places of safety.

Curtis's mate, Tom Kintock by name, had a wife and family in Sydney, and these responsibilities, together with the fact of his having the pick of



an unlimited area of auriferous ground, induced him to remain with us. Our position had been materially weakened by Curtis's departure, but as we still had the gun, the proximity of the outlaws to our camp did not occasion us much anxiety.

On several occasions we had seen Burns and his mates at their workings, and from rising ground had noticed as they squatted around their fire at night that they had procured a fresh supply of liquor. This they appeared to use freely, but up to the time of Curtis's departure they exhibited no signs of intoxication, and had not troubled us with their presence. A few nights later, however, the three worthies put in an appearance when we were about to turn in, and made a show of friendliness by offering us drink from a square gin bottle.

We had anticipated a visit from them for some time, and had agreed on a policy of reserve, and on no account to accept of drink if they offered it, in case it should be "hocussed." When we declined their hospitality our reason was quickly divined, and in order to convince us that the drink was genuine Burns poured out a quantity of it in a pannikin, and each of the three drank a portion. Being thus assured that there was no intention to stupefy us, and desirous to live at peace with them if possible, we each partook of a small quantity, and conversed with them for some time. Their visit was evidently paid with the intention of restoring

confidence, and for some weeks after this they called regularly and exchanged ideas on various subjects. They never omitted an opportunity to inquire as to the returns our ground yielded, and candidly informed us of their own weekly earnings since setting in to work. But being still satisfied that they had sinister intentions towards us, we were guarded in our replies.

Their now frequent visits enabled us to form a fair estimate of the character of the two rascals who, as Burns had told us, had a "job in hand" when he left Ballan. Although they were always circumspect in language and demeanour, we were conscious that they had an amount of low cunning and duplicity in their natures that more than compensated for want of physical strength to do us harm. They were addressed by Burns as "Bat" and "Jerry."

Bat was a short, wiry, hatchet-faced scoundrel, with an egg-shaped head. By his own account he was a native of Birmingham, and, like Burns, had the short, jerky steps that denoted long service in chain gangs. He was what our American cousins would designate a "sneak thief"—one who would commit any petty larceny, even to robbing a blind man of his last copper, but who would not run into danger to accomplish his purpose. He would be useful as a spy or tout for the more daring members of the thieving fraternity, and was doubt-

less generally engaged by them in such capacities. There was not a redeeming element in his composition. He was the essence of meanness, cowardice, cruelty, and deceit, and it did not need a physiognomist to discern that he would sell his friends either for the sake of greed, to save his own skin, or to gratify malice. In short, from his fox-like craftiness and his ability to secrete his pigmy person in places where more robust frames would have been conspicuous, his movements should have been more closely watched than those of his companions.

The man called Jerry was cast in a totally different mould from either of his friends, and the sight of him called forth mingled feelings of pity and abhorrence. He was hunch-backed, and, like the other two, wore the twisted curl in the centre of his brow. He had a singularly ape-like cast of countenance. The forehead was low and broad, and from it the outlines of the face suddenly tapered in, and terminated in a sharp, peak-like chin. With the exception of thin, reddish eyebrows the face was hairless. The nose was flat, and like the head triangular in shape, while the eyes were small, sunken, and hoggish in expression. These defects, together with immensely long arms, made him a strikingly repulsive object to look upon.

Yet with the physical blemishes enumerated, Jerry was not wanting in mental gifts. He was a native of Dublin, was fairly posted up in book lore,

and was conversant with the history of his native country for centuries past. Unlike his companions, he never used profane language, except when far gone in drink. He kept a memorandum-book, and I noticed that he frequently made jottings in it relative to subjects that were discussed nightly over the camp fire. Jerry was not obtrusive in conversation, and seldom took part in controversial questions until his opinion was sought. After several visits from him we gleaned that when the offence was discovered that made him amenable to the laws of his country he succeeded in escaping to France, and was in Paris during the stirring times of '48 and '51, when Louis Philippe was sent about his business and Louis Napoleon made his *coup d'état*. The scenes in the French capital at that period seemed to be deeply graven upon his mind, and it was only in his allusions to them that he displayed either emotion or fluency. He returned to Ireland after peace had been restored, and was arrested and transported to Van Diemen's Land. On arriving at Hobart, after a short service in the hard labour gang, he was assigned to a country settler, where his decent education gained for him respite from physical toil, and he became teacher or tutor to his employer's family. He had only served half his time when, through good conduct and interest at headquarters, he procured his ticket-of-leave, and gravitated to Victoria

on the breaking out of the goldfields. Jerry's anticipations of easily acquiring wealth in his new sphere of action were not realised. His deformity prevented him from obtaining honourable employment, and the hard and rough work of mining life was unsuited to his tastes. When other means of procuring a living failed he joined those in Melbourne who subsisted by preying on society. By them his tact and sagacity soon came to be recognised, and he was selected for the position of "planner" or "putter up" of burglaries and highway robberies. In this capacity he was located in the neighbourhood of Bullarook when Burns made his acquaintance at Ballan, and offered him a mateship in his claim on Sailor Creek.

The foregoing, and more, of Jerry's career I learned when over our camp fire his tongue became loose through heavy potations of rum. From his own note-book, which I accidentally became possessed of one day, I found almost every other leaf written upon in a different style of caligraphy, and by his aptitude in that accomplishment I opined that Jerry had a *penchant* for forgery, and that this was the cause of his leaving his native land, first for France and afterwards for Tasmania.

Whether I am right or wrong, Jerry considered himself ill-used by being sentenced to fourteen years' transportation, and was accustomed to express his denunciation of British rule in general

and of the administration of its penal laws in particular. Jerry's fine-drawn distinctions between Crown prisoners in Tasmania were highly amusing. When speaking of some he referred to them by the opprobrious term "lags," but invariably classed himself as an "exile," the implication being that he was expatriated for some venial offence that he need not be ashamed of, and that he deserved sympathy rather than disapprobation. He had committed to memory quite a host of Scriptural quotations—doubtless learned in prison as a means of gaining lenient treatment. These he was in the habit of introducing into his conversation over the camp fire at night; his object evidently being to make his less experienced listeners believe that he was the possessor of a store of untapped wisdom and uncorrupted virtue. In short, Jerry was an arrant hypocrite and a skilled diplomatist in managing the affairs of thieving confederacies, and both Burns and Bat deferred to him on all occasions when problems affecting their mutual interests were under review. His was the master-mind of the trio, and consequently we kept him under stricter observation than the coarser members of his party.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## BLACK HARRY AND HIS DOG TURN UP.

IN appearance the most formidable of Burns's band was the man whom he said he had left "soaked" at Ballan, and whose company he expected the day after his arrival at the creek. Over a month elapsed, however, without any sign of him, and his friends frequently expressed wonder at "Black Harry's" long delay in joining them.

Often did they speak admiringly of his loyalty to the "fraternity," his convivial qualities, and his unlimited capacity for absorbing strong drink.

One night we were listening to a description by Jerry of a street scene in Paris during the revolution of '48, when cover was broken in a piece of scrub close by, and a tall, gaunt form, accompanied by a huge, fierce-looking dog, stood before us, and, after a heavy fit of coughing, saluted the gang with the password, "D cut D." He was introduced to us by Burns as his long-expected mate, and while the new comer regaled himself with food he explained his reason for not joining his comrades earlier. He had dropped across some old Norfolk Island pals who were in funds. With these he had

been enjoying himself at one of the locations of the "craft" in Bullarook, and, having lain out during a wet night, had contracted a heavy cold that prevented him for weeks from travelling any distance. His late companions had departed several days before, and left him in the bush almost without food. "In fact," he concluded, "I am more fitted for a hospital than this outlandish place, and if poor old Captain" (alluding to his dog) "had not been starving I would not be here now."

That he was ill was obvious. His frequent attacks of hoarse coughing indicated that disease had permanently settled upon his lungs.

After a while Black Harry glanced hastily at Johnny and at Kintock, and then his sunken but lustrous eyes became riveted on me in a long and intensely searching gaze.

Even a skilled physiognomist could not have traced what was passing through such cunning minds as those of Burns and his mates, Bat and Jerry ; but to an ordinary observer of facial expression Black Harry's feelings were easily discernible. I have little doubt that he was conscious of the pity that had seized upon me for the early doom that his pinched appearance and distressful breathing portended.

Perhaps some redeeming trait in his nature that had lain dormant through a long career of crime and recklessness had awakened in response to what



he had seldom or never experienced—the sympathy of a fellow mortal.

When he withdrew his gaze from me, a melancholy smile played about his mouth, and a softer expression overspread his rugged features, and although no words were spoken, the impression was instinctively conveyed to me that neither then nor afterwards would harm befall me if he could prevent it. There had passed between us that strange communion of mind with mind which renders words superfluous.

Black Harry was about thirty-six years of age, and a native of the North of England. He was over six feet in height, and straight as an arrow. His coal-black shaggy hair, redundant beard, and swarthy complexion gave him a semi-savage appearance, and had gained for him his nickname. He was born and reared in an atmosphere of crime and degradation, and a career of drunkenness, debauchery, and exposure had reduced him to a complete wreck. During the whole time he was near us he never made the slightest pretension to honesty, and denounced in scathing terms those of his companions who did so. Yet he had some rude conception of a Supreme Ruler and of a future state of existence.

“I’m sure,” he said on one occasion when the subject was discussed, “that an all-merciful God will deal lightly with me. I was conceived and

born in sin, and was taught nothing but villainy from my infancy, and I'll not be held responsible for my misdeeds in this life."

Harry's was evidently a highly impressionable nature, and he would have made an excellent subject for religious enthusiasts to operate upon. Like Melville, he was a remarkable mixture of good and bad, though, unfortunately, the bad predominated.

After some slight attention which I paid him in the early stages of his illness, the amicable understanding established at our first meeting developed into confidential relations, and one night after the others had retired to rest he told me his history.

The solemn stillness that surrounded us ; his fierce and repellent aspect, with his black, tangled mass of hair, tawny-coloured skin, and cadaverous expression ; the great dog that lay curled up alongside him ; the garish reflection of our fire on the tall, white, spectral-looking gum trees around, were strikingly suggestive of primeval times, and made as awe-inspiring a scene as can well be imagined.

Black Harry, to recapitulate his story, never saw or heard of his father. His mother was a confirmed drunkard, and when only a few years old shared with him the liquor she obtained. He soon acquired a taste for it, and before attaining the age of sixteen he became a slave to alcohol. The only

education he received was how to commit petty larcenies. Harry was smart at the business, and was able to support himself and his mother by thieving for many years. But twice he was captured, and on each occasion was imprisoned. Thus brought into daily contact with criminals of the lowest type, he learned more villainy than during the whole of his previous life. On being released he went in for higher game, and his career in England terminated when he was nineteen years of age. Detected in an attempt to steal a gold watch from a jeweller's shop, he was sentenced to twenty-one years' transportation to Botany Bay. There were about two hundred and fifty convicts on board the ship he sailed in, and when near Rio Janeiro some of them succeeded in setting fire to her. The weather being fine, and two other vessels being in sight, they knew that little personal risk would be incurred by the destruction of their temporary prison. The object was to get on shore for a spell—perhaps to escape altogether. When the fire was discovered the prisoners were brought on deck, and directions were given to the soldiers to shoot down any who showed symptoms of insubordination. The hatches were then battened down, but the fire spread, and signals of distress were hoisted. One of the vessels in sight observed them, and bore up to render assistance. She proved to be a British sloop of war, and by the united efforts of the crews

of both vessels the fire was extinguished. The means for keeping the prisoners in security had, however, been consumed, and it was decided to take the transport to Rio. Before that could be accomplished, the foremast—near which the fire had originated—went overboard; but with the assistance of the man-of-war they succeeded in reaching Rio harbour.

To effect repairs all the prisoners had to be landed, and were placed under a strong guard. Notwithstanding the vigilant watch kept over them, Harry and five others succeeded in escaping one dark night, and hid themselves in the out-houses of a liquor shop resorted to by sea-faring men. The night following their arrival there a free fight took place at the house between British and foreign seamen, and one of the former was murdered. The crime soon became known in the city, and before any could escape a file of soldiers surrounded the buildings and arrested all the inmates. On appearing before a magistrate next day the runaway convicts were recognised, conveyed back to prison, heavily ironed, and a strict watch was kept over their movements.

Over two months expired before the necessary repairs to the ship were effected, and when she was ready for sea the prisoners were again placed aboard of her. In due time she reached Sydney, where for several years Harry had a diversified

career. He was frequently punished for breaches of prison discipline, and still exhibiting no sign of reformation, was sent as a hopeless case to Norfolk Island. He was in that place during the worst period of its history, and came in for a full share of the fearful punishments refractory convicts were subjected to under the despotic government that then prevailed there. He remained at the island for three or four years, and on his return to Sydney became implicated in a robbery of Government stores, was tried and convicted, and with seven others concerned in the crime received sentence of death. Through the intercession of a Roman Catholic priest (a co-religionist), and on the ground that he was only a tool in the hands of others, he was reprieved with the hangman's noose about his neck. A few minutes later the other seven were launched into eternity.

That terrible experience sobered Harry for some time, and shortly before the discovery of gold he was granted his ticket-of-leave, and engaged in stock-driving overland between Sydney and Melbourne. In that capacity he had several narrow escapes in encounters with the aborigines, and once received a dangerous spear wound that rendered him helpless for several months.

When gold was discovered he joined some of his former associates, abandoned himself to the baser instincts of his nature, and took to bushranging.

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He had been concerned in most of the principal robberies that had taken place in Sydney and Victoria, and was a member of Jerry's gang at the time Burns fell in with him at Ballan.

"And now look at me!" pathetically wailed this battered semblance of humanity, after relating his experiences, "and tell me if my life was worth living, or why such a miserable wretch was brought into existence? I have been a drunkard and a thief since I was a child, and have gone through as much as would have killed a dozen men.

"Look what they did to me at that cursed Norfolk Island for what they call breach of regulations," he went on, and dragging off his shirt and turning his back to the firelight, exposed to view great furrows of discoloured flesh, where the terrible instrument of torture had literally cut into his bones.

"They talk about the cruelties of the Spanish Inquisition!" he remarked bitterly, as he re-clothed himself. "I can tell you that no savage torture or barbarity ever equalled the hellish usage that I have seen some suffer in that place in the name of British justice!"

I expressed the horror I felt at the revolting spectacle of his mangled frame. "Aye, Squire," he went on, addressing me in his usual fashion, "the outside world knows little of the doings of Norfolk Island in my time. I have seen as many

as fifty\* at one time tried for their lives there, and more than once I have seen from six to a dozen hanged of a morning. Aye, and I have seen men there, who never mentioned the name of God but in blasphemy, kneel when sentence of death was passed on them, and return thanks to Him that they were about to be delivered from the tortures of their overseers—of those who were appointed by the British Government to reform them. Did it reform us, or tame us, or break our spirit? No! It made us the incarnate fiends that we are and will be till our graves are closed over us. The day they cut and carved me into the shape you have just seen, they cut every good feeling out of me, and made me little better than a wild beast.”

The man spoke with passionate emphasis, his eyes glaring like fire under their black lashes. At the end of his story a heavy fit of coughing seized him, and for several minutes he was unable to make further remark. Then in softened tones he added mournfully :—“I never knew what friendship was, or received a kindness from any living creature except my dog—poor old Captain. I saved his life when he was bad with distemper, and when his owner was about to drown him. I managed to

\* When Judge Burton held a court at the convict settlement of Norfolk Island in 1834, he tried one hundred and thirty capital charges, said to be the record number tried at one sitting of a court in Great Britain or her colonies.

cure him, and he has been the one grateful creature I have met in my lifetime, and the one companion that I could trust."

Harry was coarser in mind and person than Melville, but after hearing his recital I could not help thinking that, degraded and repulsive as he then appeared, with the trail of the serpent over him, there were in him germs that might have developed into good qualities had he enjoyed the advantages of a moral training and elevating companionship in early life, and if his better impulses had not been repressed by ill-usage and evil associations.

From what I have said before of the gang that we were now daily compelled to hold intercourse with, the reader will understand the unenviable position we were in. Even to leave for other fields would have been attended with danger, as we were satisfied that a close watch was kept on all our movements, and equally conscious were we that our neighbours—Black Harry excepted—were only waiting until we had acquired sufficient wealth to make it worth their while to wrest it from us. Anxious were the days, and almost sleepless the nights, when we fully realised the perils that encompassed us. We were accumulating the wealth we had come so far to seek, but with the anxiety we suffered lest we should be despoiled of it by these marauders it seemed scarcely worth possessing.



Our chief hope lay in the outlaw who had unfolded to me the secrets of his miserable life, for in his repentant state of mind (induced by the knowledge of approaching dissolution) he had assured me that if he could prevent it, no injury should be done us.

A day or two after Black Harry had given me this assurance his companions decided to shift their camp close to ours. This movement they accounted for on the ground that they would be nearer their claim, and that one fire would suffice for all. Thus we were brought into closer contact than ever with the men we wished above all things to be separated from.

Three of the gang set in to work the ground that I had marked out for Burns, while Black Harry, who was not fit for hard physical toil, attended to their cooking. Their claim yielded splendid returns, and at the end of a fortnight they were in possession of some sixty ounces of gold.

After dividing the wealth thus easily obtained they engaged in a debauch that baffles description. Day and night were rendered hideous by their unnatural revels. Four kegs of spirits were procured from Spring Creek, and each ruffian had one to himself. As they squatted round the camp fire, drinking the fiery spirit from pannikins, like water, they freely related blood-curdling stories of crime in which they had participated, and indulged in blasphemous and odious slang and imprecations

until they became senseless, and lay prone on the earth, more bestial than gorged swine.

Of all the drunkards who came under my notice in these days, I never found any to have so insatiable a desire for alcoholic liquor as Black Harry. He would sit by the fire all night with a keg of rum in his lap, or with his head resting upon it, and drink the potent spirit from the taphole until nearly suffocated. Then he would fondle and speak to the vessel as though it were a child, while his intelligent dog—the superior animal of the two—would now and again raise his massive head, and look in an apparently wistful and pitiful way into the face of the debased being whose faithful servant he was.

I had somehow gained Captain's confidence, and was the only one he would allow near his owner during these drunken debauches. Venturing on the liberty thus permitted, I essayed to perform a friendly act one night that well-nigh cost some of us our lives.

In a half delirious state Harry had nearly finished his share of the liquor when he was seized with a heavy fit of coughing which I thought would result in the bursting of a blood-vessel. By way of doing him a kindness, Johnny and Kintock and I agreed to deprive him of the drink while he slept by turning the keg over. This I did, and got back to our resting place unobserved. In a short time he awoke, and as usual endeavoured to drink from the

keg by holding the taphole over his mouth. It was amusing for a while to notice his futile endeavours. After several ludicrous attempts he began solemnly and earnestly to expostulate with the keg—affording a pitiful and striking illustration of drunken imbecility. His remonstrances and blandishments were alike unavailing, his worst passions became aroused, and his savage demeanour and brutish yells of anger were revolting to look upon and listen to. His mates had all come outside their tent, half drunk as they were, on hearing his furious outbursts of unbridled rage. It was fortunate that they had done so, for Harry concluded that they had stolen his liquor, and made for them, wildly brandishing a miner's spade, and with the ferocious instinct of a wild beast strongly outlined on his every feature. There was an immediate stampede, and the trio contented themselves with watching their incensed mate's movements for the space of two hours from the top of a neighbouring hill. We, also, the real culprits, deemed it advisable to retire until his frenzy had abated.

There was no occasion, however, for serious alarm. Harry took possession of Jerry's liquor, and after a heavy levy on it became pacified, and commenced to drawl out the refrain of a bacchanalian song for his own amusement and the edification of those who were sitting bedewed and shivering with cold on the hillside.

When he had again fallen asleep Jerry sought to regain his property, but a fierce growl from Captain, and the display of a formidable set of teeth, as he lay with his two fore paws over the prostrate inebriate, significantly warned him off.

These revolting scenes continued for nearly a week, when the gang left, as they said, to finish their spree at Spring Creek, where some of their friends were located. They returned in about a fortnight completely cleared out, while their orgy appeared to have told heavily upon them, especially upon Black Harry, and they remained in their tent to recruit for several days after their return.

With the exception of Burns none of the crew appeared to partake of solid food during their revels, and in his case the nourishment consisted solely of raw beef. This gave him an advantage over his comrades; but the use of such a blood-heating diet increased his natural ferocity, and rendered him all the more dangerous to those against whom he cherished feelings of resentment. The expression of his bloodshot eyes was not to be mistaken. It was impossible to misunderstand the vicious instincts that were so plainly reflected in those brutal orbs.

## CHAPTER IX.

## AN ANXIOUS VIGIL.

AFTER they had squandered their wealth, the luck that had hitherto befriended our neighbours appeared to forsake them, their ground yielding no better returns than sufficed for food and a moderate supply of strong drink. For weeks they worked at it with ill-success, and ultimately abandoned it altogether. Too lazy, or too wanting in intelligence, systematically to prospect for the hidden treasures that lay in abundance in their vicinity, for some time they led an aimless sort of existence, except that they kept a close espionage over our doings. As the weeks wore on without their evincing any desire either to leave or to set in to work, it became obvious to us that at no distant date their criminal designs against us would ripen into action. This was all the more apparent from the low, earnest conversations carried on in their tent after their light was extinguished.

About this time, when we were all seated around the fire one night, Burns related a story that is worth recording, if only to enable my readers to

form a fair estimate of the characters of these land pirates. The would-be moralist of the gang—the hunchback—was querulously complaining of the ill luck they had recently had, but concluded by confidently asserting that Providence would yet be kind to himself and his friends before they left Sailor Creek. “Although an unfortunate exile,” he said, “I have had in my time many marks of favour from Providence.”

“So have I, Jerry,” responded Burns. “God is very good to us poor persecuted exiles.” And then he related an incident that had befallen him the year before.

He got a rise on Bendigo, it seems, when the first discoveries of gold were made there, and had spent it all in a debauch at Porcupine Inn. Dead broke, he was making his way to Melbourne when, near the Columbine at dusk, he discovered a man lying drunk by the side of the road. No one was in sight at the time, and he sat down alongside him in a promiscuous way, he said. His better nature was aroused by the man’s helplessness, and in a spirit of generosity he resolved to watch over him till he regained consciousness. Loss of time was not a material object with him, so he lit his pipe and smoked till darkness set in. Then it occurred to him that the man might have money about him. If so, he thought it his plain duty to relieve him of it in case he should injure himself by further in-

dulgence in liquor, and in that beneficent mood he proceeded to search the inebriate. He was pained and surprised to discover some twenty pounds in gold, notes, and silver, in his pockets. Further examination revealed the fact that the man wore a waist-belt, and that some softish substance like sugar was enclosed in it. With his sheath-knife he opened it, and in one of its pouches discovered a chamois leather bag containing over three pounds' weight of gold.

"And you stuck to it!" interjected little Bat, admiringly.

"And I'll be bound didn't leave him the price of a nobbler!" echoed Black Harry.

Burns, however, explained that he had a conscience, although some might not think so. A mental conflict had ensued as to whether he should leave the inebriate a portion of his wealth; but a sense of duty compelled him to decide that the man's interests would be best served by easing him of the whole lot. "The fellow was a low sot," he remarked, "and didn't know how to take care of himself, and if he had killed himself by drink I might have been accused of aiding in his death by not raking in the whole pool."

"And what did you do after that?" inquired Black Harry.

"I was just going to tell you," said Burns. "Luck and Providence helped me. Thinking that

there might still be something about him that would prove harmful, I was turning him over to make another search when he opened his eyes and appeared to be getting his senses back. Well, as I'm a modest sort of cove and didn't want the thanks I knew he would give me for looking after him, I just took to the road, tramped all night, and got to Bush Inn at daybreak. Yes," he added, reflectively, "I'm sure Providence put that man in my way. I saved his life, and at the same time got funds that I wanted badly. We both, therefore, had reason to be grateful."

With a hasty, covert glance at our party that did not escape the notice of at least two of his listeners, he concluded his story by remarking that although things didn't look very bright for him just then, he was sure, as his friend Jerry said, that Providence would throw something in his way before he left the creek.

The cupidity of Jerry and Bat appeared to be fully aroused by their mate's narrative. Their eyes were riveted on him, and at its conclusion the former solemnly asseverated that his friend Dan had played a square game throughout the whole business. "What I have heard," he added oracularly, "reminds me of the story of the poor bloke who was left half dead by thieves on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The Priests and Levites passed him unheeding, but a



Good Samaritan like Dan came along and saved his life."

Then, evidently on good terms with himself because of his apt parallel, he levied a heavy toll on the pannikin of rum by his side, and gave an inward chuckle that shook his whole frame and brought out in strong relief the huge protuberance on his shoulders, lending, in the fitful glare of the fire and the sombre surroundings, a hideously elfish aspect to his appearance. When Jerry laughed the hump on his shoulders appeared to be the principal organ of his mirth.

Burns had made a mistake. Unconsciously he had betrayed his intentions towards us. We fully understood the meaning of his reference to Providence. Before retiring that night Kintock remarked that "there was a lot more devilry where that came from," and there and then entered into a compact with us to observe the strictest scrutiny over the gang in general and over Dan Burns in particular.

Here, perhaps, I may pause to give a sketch of Tom Kintock. Although he had always been on apparently good terms with the Burns party, and had not, like me, incurred the hostility of any of its members, he thoroughly disliked their company. Tom had been more fortunate than any of us in the hunt for gold, and at this time was the possessor of some twenty-seven pounds' weight of the

precious metal. His interest, therefore, was closely identified with ours in defeating designs to molest us or to deprive us of our property.

Kintock had come out as a free emigrant to Adelaide in 1847, and later on removed to Sydney. He was a capital specimen of an English artisan. Although not so imposing in physique as his lately departed comrade, in most respects he was the abler man of the two. He was never "off gold" during the four months he was on the creek. After Curtis left he worked as a "hatter," and appeared to have an intuition for hitting upon "payable" ground. He worked for a few months on the Turon River when gold was first discovered in New South Wales, and the experience gained there was highly useful to him afterwards. Tom was brief and pointed in speech, self-possessed in action, honest in his dealings, fertile in resource, and possessed wonderful staying powers in trying emergencies. During our acquaintanceship I never once heard him make use of a profane expression. That he had a full share of acquisitiveness, or desire to possess wealth, was true; but this trait in his character rather recommended him to us, situated as we were. If he was not a man of Quixotic generosity, we felt sure that he would vigorously resist any attempt to deprive him of his property. And it was through the qualities I have indicated that he afterwards became one of the wealthiest residents in an important city in New South Wales.

Burns's party were camped close to the creek, and owing to a spell of dry weather, the only water to be had for cooking or drinking purposes had to be fetched from the rear of their tent. Kintock's domicile was situated somewhat closer to theirs than was ours, and now he formed the habit of stealthily reaching the water hole in a roundabout way at night, under pretence of securing a supply for next day's use, but in reality to endeavour to glean the purport of the subdued discussions that were carried on nightly. So quiet were his movements that even the dog Captain, who always slept alongside his master, never betrayed the slightest inkling of his proximity.

For some time little was elicited by these nocturnal visits. Tales of bygone crimes and of old associates were the principal themes of their discourse. Occasional allusions were made to our characteristics, but nothing definite could be ascertained as to their designs towards us. Still our energetic mate persevered in the unenviable task he had taken upon himself. The possession of some thirteen hundred pounds' worth of gold had brought with it heavy responsibilities, and he never slept until he was satisfied that no surprise visits might be expected during the night.

About eleven o'clock one night, some three weeks after he began his vigils, a slight noise outside our shelter brought me to my feet. My ner-

vous system had become affected through anxiety and watching, and I was on the *qui vive* at the slightest stir about our abode. To the inquiry, "Who's there?" the response came, "Hist!—it's me—Tom," in barely audible tones.

"Well, boys," he said, in a low, earnest voice, as soon as we had admitted him, "I've just heard a lot of bad and good news. The Burns gang are to bail us up to-morrow morning just before daylight, and the good news is that we know it. It gives us both bowers and the ace to work with, and it'll be a clean euchre for Dan and his mates. By the way, I also learned that to-morrow will be Christmas Day. Black Harry was over at Cartwright's for their week's grog, and they told him there about it. A fellow soon loses the run of the good old English holidays and holy days gold hunting in these outlandish places. It'll be a serious Christmas Day for some about here or I'm mistaken. They want a Christmas-box from us. Well, chaps, if we three are game they'll get it—in lead. But wait till I get Bessie, and while I'm givin' her a bit of a dressin' up I'll tell you all about it."

On his return to our tent, and while overhauling the gun, Kintock related in a collected way, and with a determined aspect, a plot that had been hatched by the conspirators for our despoilment and destruction the following morning. Both Jerry and Bat had revolvers, which they had hitherto

succeeded in concealing from us, while Burns was to do his share of the butchery with an axe. Black Harry had declined to take any part in the attack, truthfully remarking that his "reckoning" was heavy enough already. He was, however, sufficiently loyal to his associates not to interfere with their proposed robbery, but knowing that Burns had a special grudge against me, he stipulated that no murder was to be done, and threatened to "peach" if any harm befell me beyond the loss of my gold. The outrage was to be perpetrated just before daylight. Jerry and Bat were to slit open the back of his (Tom's) tent, and if he gave up his gold quietly no further injury was to be done him; but if he declined to surrender it and showed fight they were to shoot him. Burns was to attack our quarter, and had remarked that he knew how to settle things there. If it was to be a case of blood-letting they were to bury the bodies of their victims in a prospecting paddock that Johnny and I had sunk shortly after our arrival on the creek, then divide the booty, burn the tents and such of the mining outfit as was combustible, and rejoin their friends in Bullarook Forest.

The story thus related by Kintock did not occasion me much surprise. Constant intercourse with danger since I first met Burns had to some extent seasoned me and prepared me to meet it. I had, however, to consider that our party was insuffi-

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ciently provided with effective weapons; and it became a question with me whether it would not be wiser to take to the ranges with my gold rather than risk my life in an unequal affray. The advice I had received from Cartwright when in pursuit of McInnes also weighed with me, and I expressed doubts as to the prudence of remaining in the place any longer.

Kintock was working rich ground at the time, and it was doubtless this circumstance that moved him to the eloquence with which he endeavoured to dissuade me from showing what he called the "white feather." "No British judge and jury," he said, "would convict us for defending our lives and property by shooting these ruffians—in fact they would give us credit if we destroyed them root and branch."

To the observation that they had twelve shots to our four, he replied, "Depend upon me to bring down two at the outset, and after that it will be strange if we three can't give Dan Burns his quietus. Black Harry needn't be counted in the matter. Besides, we've right on our side. That counts for a lot."

Kintock seemed bent on trying conclusions with our antagonists, and endeavoured to lend force to his counsel for aggressive measures by good-naturally insinuating that if we had from the first shown a bold front to Burns and his friends we

should still have been in possession of the gold that McInnes had robbed us of.

This was the most effectual argument he could have used. Time had not obliterated the keen annoyance I felt the morning I had been so artfully outwitted by that apparently simple Scottish sailor, and the mention of it decided me to agree to Tom's proposal.

Although I thus gave in my adhesion to Tom's warlike plan, I may as well disclaim possession of courage in the common acceptation of the word. Could I have done so honourably, I should have preferred to procure a substitute to do my share of the fighting, or even have left Tom to do it all himself.

Valour is an interesting subject to read about, and one that has always had a special fascination for me; but Nature has so constituted me that I have ever inclined to deal with my fellows by moral suasion rather than by physical force, and I prefer to consider consequences, feel the weight of responsibilities, and cogitate over methods to escape danger rather than rush into it. Occasions occur, however, when duties foreign to our natures are thrust upon us and cannot be well avoided. So, after mentally reviewing the situation, I concluded that the only honourable course open to me was manfully to face the danger; and as it was to Kintock's assiduity and disregard of peril that we

were indebted for the discovery of the murderous plot, I willingly conceded to him the leadership of our little band.

It was a bright starlit night, and on the assailants being first sighted a signal "coo-ee" was to be given by the discoverer. Tom was to give Jerry and Bat a double charge of buckshot (obtained for kangaroo and wallaby hunts) each. Burns would have considerable difficulty in getting into our abode, as it was surrounded by gum branches that were used as "break-winds"—the only accessible opening being in the front, where he could be easily dealt with to advantage.

That was the plan of campaign proposed in whispers by Kintock, who then asked: "Are you game, boys? Remember, it is a case of either shooting or being shot."

As Kintock never exhibited nervousness or perturbation in his actions, he infused a considerable amount of his own enthusiasm into me. As to Johnny, although he was silent, his acceptance of the plan was taken for granted, and Tom requested him to see to the reloading of the pistols. But here an unforeseen difficulty arose. Johnny would not fight, nor even watch.

"I am not a fighting man," he said, "and I promised to be back to my wife in twelve months at most, and I don't want to run any unnecessary risks."

We had divided our gold a few days previously,  
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and buried it where we lay at night, and he now elected to take his share and make for the ranges. After his departure I remarked to Tom that Burns's party had too much the advantage over us in numbers and arms.

"Never mind," he replied; "we're better off without Jacky—it wants pluck to deal with these rascals, and he'd do more harm than good if there's to be shooting. Come to my tent; it'll be the first attacked. If we give them a warm reception, there'll be no more trouble."

Kintock possessed true British grit. The more difficulties he had to contend with the better he seemed to be pleased. His temper was now fairly aroused, and I became to a great extent infected with his combativeness.

Needless to say, the night was a pretty anxious one for us both. After a long intimacy with danger, I can safely affirm that nothing is so trying to endurance as waiting through a long dark night to repel an attack. Warily the hours dragged along, and only once a few whispered words passed between us. Too much time was afforded us for reflection. Had we had a dog to warn us of the approach of the robbers we could have defied them. About midnight dark clouds overspread the face of the sky, and completely obliterated the bright starlight which we had depended upon to give us timely sight of our foes.

Although he did not exhibit the slightest tre-

pidation and appeared collected in all his movements, my iron-nerved fellow-sentinel must have frequently allowed his thoughts to wander anxiously during that night of peril to his family, of whom he had often spoken in affectionate terms. •

But to impulsive and sensitive natures such as mine an ordeal such as this is a much more serious thing, and, as I watched, the leading events of my lifetime crowded into my memory, and visions of kindred, friends, and the old home beyond the seas flitted before me. There was presented to mind the last happy Christmas Eve, spent under the paternal roof with relatives and friends. I saw the yule-log burning in the open fireplace, the dancers whirling under the familiar holly-branch, festooned with wreaths of mistletoe, and heard the laugh, the jest, the hearty chorus to some favourite old-time song; and I noted the keen enjoyment exhibited in the features of all the actors except one—she who had tended and watched over me in infancy, childhood, and early boyhood, and from whom I was shortly to part, in all likelihood for ever. Then came the notes of the waits as they ushered in the “happy morn.” And how mockingly now appeared the first words of their quaint old welcome :

God save ye merry people, let nothing you dismay;  
For Christ our Saviour He was born upon a Christmas  
Day !

As these visions passed through my heated brain, I felt strongly inclined to break away from my position and take to the hills as Johnny had done; but in a moment my thoughts were diverted to another channel by the click of the gunlock, as at a slight rustling my statue-like companion raised the hammer, dropping it again when satisfied that it was only caused by an opossum or a bandicoot. Then came the reflection that Kintock had a wife and family depending upon him for support, and yet was prepared even to risk his life, while I had no domestic tie specially to bind me to existence; and I felt that it would be rank cowardice in such circumstances to desert him. So I decided to "face the music" at all hazards. But the oppressive stillness and uncertainty of our position began to tell heavily on my nervous system, and I could not help whispering: "Miserable work this, Tom!"

His reply, as usual, was brief and pointed. When he wanted to avoid distasteful subjects, he would quote a proverb and lapse into silence. So now, with a strong, friendly grip of the hand, he whispered: "No pancakes without egg-breaking!" and resumed his gaze into the intense darkness through the slit he had made in the back of his tent.

I calculated that it must be within half an hour of daylight, and that the attack could not

now be long delayed, when a distant rumbling noise, apparently from the direction of Cartwright's, broke the deep stillness. In a few minutes it was sufficiently near to cause us to suspect the approach of a band of horsemen. A halt was apparently made on the ridge of the range just above our camp, and we concluded that a contingent of marauders had come from Bullarook Forest to assist our neighbours to carry out their murderous scheme. Indeed, so fully was I assured that such was the case that I suggested to Kintock the futility of offering any resistance.

Tom's quick, stertorous breathing indicated that he also realised the magnitude of our danger, but before he could reply the troop came down the slope of the range with a rush, and appeared completely to surround us.

Impressive stillness reigned in our midst for the next two or three minutes—the most anxious I have ever spent in my life. The darkness was still so impenetrable that we could distinguish nothing at a distance of more than a few feet. It would be folly to deny that we were both scared. But what was that? An almost imperceptible bellowing noise broke upon our ears, and in an instant we were relieved of a tremendous load of anxiety.

Going outside, we found the tent completely hemmed in by wild cattle. By shouting and

hurling amongst them brands taken from the burning ashes of our previous night's fire, we succeeded in dispersing them, and, just as frightened as we had been by their approach, they stampeded up the flat in full flight.

I asked Kintock to discharge a barrel of the gun after them, so as to deter them from again coming near us. "No," he replied determinedly, and sufficiently loudly to be heard by the outlaws, who were now outside, "No. I intend to keep the contents of these two barrels for more dangerous cattle than I have been lately expecting!"

That was the most effective shot he could have fired. The significance of the remark was thoroughly understood, and daylight set in without any attempt being made to molest us.

A few days afterwards we learned the cause of the invasion that had so alarmed us. Cartwright had fallen in with a mob of wild cattle in the ranges, and had succeeded in cutting off a number from the main body, intending to keep them for station purposes. These, having broken loose from the temporary stockade in which they had been confined, had careered in our direction, and, startled by a cry from Bristol Johnny, who had selected his hiding-place close to where they made their first halt, had rushed down the slope, and right into the heart of our camp.

The memory of that night has always been

singularly vivid, and especially the wild rush of the cattle into our midst when we were momentarily expecting to be attacked by the outlaws, who were doing sentinel duty at the same time as ourselves, and were quite as disconcerted by the interruption. The happy frustration of their murderous plot I at the time attributed to a happy accident; but when viewed in conjunction with later events by riper intelligence, it appeared to be invested with a deeper significance. Of this I shall speak later on.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE LAST OF BLACK HARRY.

WHEN Bristol John put in an appearance at our fire in the morning, he had a singularly woe-begone aspect, and appeared somewhat ashamed of having deserted us the previous night. Conscious of the danger of either leaving by himself or remaining with us, he had latterly given way to despondency, and now, suffering from sleeplessness and exposure, he was a spectacle for pity rather than reproach.

Fully impressed with the importance of avoiding dissensions amongst ourselves, and thus exposing our weakness to the enemy, we decided to make no allusion to his faint-heartedness. Almost simultaneously Black Harry, accompanied by his faithful Captain, tottered towards us, panting, coughing, and scarcely able to keep his feet. He had his 'possum rug with him, and informed us he was about to leave for Melbourne. He had had queer symptoms during the night, and "didn't want to die in *their* company," jerking his thumb in the direction of his recent com-

panions. We endeavoured to dissuade him, without avail, from undertaking so arduous a journey in his debilitated state.

"I know," he said, "that I have but a short time to live, and I want to make a confession to a priest, and try to get absolution for the heavy sins that lie on my conscience."

From his occasional angry looks at his late abode, Harry appeared annoyed at something that had recently happened there. When we inquired the cause, he told us in indignant tones that his mates knew he had not a shilling in his possession, and although two of them still had money left, they had declined to give him the smallest assistance. "But I'll be even with them," he remarked; "for the police 'll know all about their doings the first station I come to. I told them I'd split on them."

We remembered the stand he had taken in our behalf the night before, and gladly furnished him with sufficient means for his journey.

After thanking us, he beckoned me to follow him, and, on our entering the piece of scrub whence he emerged the first night I saw him, he solemnly warned me to be on my guard night and day against Dan Burns. "He means to kill you if he can," he remarked; "but if you do escape him, don't go through Bullarook. They have your description there." Then warmly pressing



my hand, he feelingly ejaculated, "God bless you!" and went back to the fire.

Black Harry's words sank deep into my mind, and now I was always armed, both night and day.

While Black Harry was partaking of a pannikin of tea, we made up a parcel of food for his journey, and strapped it and his 'possum rug on Captain. The dog had been used to perform carrying services for his master, and as he was now on familiar terms with us, and apparently trusted us, we had no difficulty in equipping him for the journey.

So weak and exhausted was Captain's master that he rested several times before reaching the brow of the hill overlooking our camp. There, waving us a friendly adieu, he passed into the timber, closely attended by his dumb companion.

About two hours later Burns and Bat left their tent, and, without a word to any of us, took to the bush in the same direction. As they did not return until late that night, I began to suspect that Bat (their scout) had either seen Harry with me in the scrub or had overheard our last conversation; that they had followed on his trail with evil intentions, and that the confession he desired for the ease of his conscience and the threat he had uttered against them would never be carried into effect.

The whole of that night a light was kept burn-

ing in the bandits' tent, and from their gesticulations—reflected through its transparent sides—as well as from subsequent declarations when under the influence of drink, we entertained little doubt that for Black Harry the end of his journey had come before he reached Ballan. Any uncertainty there might have been was completely removed when we discovered his old silver watch in Bat's possession. Afterwards the crime was confessed, as we shall see presently. But I shall have more to say about Black Harry later on.

## CHAPTER XI.

## HIDING TREASURE.

AFTER the experience I have related, the question of leaving the place again occupied my mind, but Kintock resolved to stay at all hazards until his claim was exhausted of the rich yields he was getting daily from it; and as our safety and protection depended upon our keeping together for a time, I threw in my lot with him. For our greater security, however, Tom's tent was shifted alongside ours, and an arrangement was made that regular night watches should be kept so long as we remained at the creek.

We arranged that in the future our earnings were to be divided daily, and that each should become responsible for his own share. With that object in view, each of us was to fix upon a hiding-place for his gold. Accordingly, towards dusk of the day on which Kintock's tent was shifted, I sauntered up the flat to make my choice. About ten chains from the tent, where the creek had become narrowed by the encroachments of the banks, I noticed a large slab-shaped stone lying on the

opposite side, and overhanging it a small wattle tree. The boulder was almost round and flat, and would weigh about a hundredweight. Passing on without appearing to be looking at anything, I decided that this was just the spot for me. After going about half a mile further, I returned to the tent to allow Johnny to go upon a similar errand. He took the same direction that I had taken, and reappeared in about half an hour. Then Kintock's turn came, his search being in a thickly timbered gully in our vicinity.

After the evening meal, and the coast being still clear (Jerry was either sleeping off the effects of a debauch or had been planning some fresh villainy indoors all day, while Burns and Bat had again disappeared in the direction in which Harry had gone), I slipped off my boots, and quietly plodded up the creek. Although it was completely dark, I had no difficulty in finding the place I had fixed upon, and raising the boulder deposited the bag under it. On my return Johnny went out in the same stealthy manner. He was absent longer than we had expected, and we were about to make search for him when he put in an appearance with my bag of gold in his possession! His story was that he had had some difficulty in finding the place he had pitched upon, not having accurately surveyed the landmarks. When he discovered it, he intended to scoop out a hole in the soft earth under-

neath it, and there bury his hoard. With that object he lifted the stone on its edge, and the first thing his hand came in contact with was my property! When it is stated that thousands of large boulders lay about there, it will probably appear to the reader a singular coincidence that we should both have selected the same stone to cover our deposits. However this may be, John's honourable conduct in restoring to me intact my property raised him higher in my estimation than he had ever been before.

Poor Johnny! Honesty seldom gets its fitting reward in this life, as my narrative will show.

No communication now passed between us and the Burns gang. They were accustomed to leave early in the morning and not return till late at night, and, as they did not take any miners' tools with them, it was evident that they were not engaged in honest work. Later on we learned that their time was solely spent in keeping watch and ward over us from the hills on both sides of the creek—as McInnes had done—to endeavour to obtain a clue to the place where our gold was secreted.

We had temporarily hidden it in separate places near our camp on the night Johnny discovered mine under the boulder. Unfortunately for himself, Johnny's intense longing to have his earnings well out of the reach of our dishonest neigh-

hours led, for the second time, to his complete despoilment. So deep was his anxiety for its safety that his rest became broken. In his dreams he would frequently speak of his wife, and of places in Bristol with which he had been familiar. Then he would revert to Burns, Black Harry, and McInnes, and when a climax was reached in his impressions he would sit bolt upright and remain so for hours at a stretch, his mind always on the rack through fear of impending danger.

One night about this time he appeared more than usually restless—even feverish—in his sleep. Burns, Jerry, and McInnes were the principal subjects of his thoughts; and after piteously imploring them not to rob him of his hard-earned property, he started abruptly from his sleeping place and ran towards the entrance of the gunyah with a cocked pistol. On our recalling him to his senses, he said he had dreamt he saw Burns and McInnes taking his gold from where he had hidden it. When we had reassured him he appeared to go to sleep again. Shortly after daylight, however, I awoke to find his berth vacant, and divined at once that he had gone to place his treasure in some more remote spot.

Breakfast was ready before he returned. He was coming from the direction of our workings, and a weight appeared to have been removed from his mind. His natural buoyancy of spirits re-

turned, and he told us gleefully that he had removed his gold to a safer place. "It is now as secure," he remarked, "as if deposited in the Bank of England."

A few days later it was my turn to prepare the midday meal. I had left my partner at our workings and had finished my repast when he came up in a woefully dejected mood. His "plant," he said, had been "sprung," and now he was a poorer man than the day he arrived in the colony! He had hidden it in a piece of scrub near the claim, had not been near it since, and now, after a most careful search, it was not to be found.

I went with him to the *cache*, and he pointed to the root of a sapling as the place where he had deposited the gold. Freshly turned-up earth in several places indicated that careful search had been made for it. "There is the mark," he stated, "that I placed over it," pointing to a round, water-worn piece of quartz, "and I am certain Burns or some of his gang stole it."

It was a cruel stroke of fortune, and it is not surprising that we never saw him smile or look pleasant during the remainder of our sojourn on the creek. He had toiled incessantly for nearly five months, had become possessed of sufficient means to start for himself in the business he had been trained to, and now by a single act of imprudence—the result of over-anxiety—he had been

deprived of everything, even of hope itself, for as the rainy season was expected to set in shortly, we had decided to leave as soon as Kintock's ground was worked out.

No wonder that after this misfortune poor Johnny became misanthropic and unsociable, and lost all heart in his work.

Simultaneously with the disappearance of his gold, little Bat vanished, and we surmised at once that he was the delinquent. Any doubt we might have had was dispelled by a prospector who came our way to spy out the land, and who inquired if any of us had lost gold. We told him of Johnny's loss, and he went on to relate that about a week previously he was in a shanty at Spring Creek where there was a lot of gambling and drinking going on, and one little "cove," an old hand, was "blowing" about the discovery of a rich pocket he had dropped on at Sailor Creek without having to do any pick or shovel work for it.

The prospector also told us that by a strange coincidence Bat had got up about the same time as Johnny on the night of the latter's dream, with the view of prospecting the ground Kintock was working, as he believed this to be a rich patch. The first thing he saw was Johnny delving with a knife into a bank of clay a little above our camp. He knew in a moment what this meant, and placed himself in a position near a gum tree where he



could view Johnny's movements unobserved. When the bag of gold was extracted from its hiding-place and conveyed by its owner up the creek, he was easily able to keep Johnny in view by dodging through the bush that skirted the flat; and when the latter made for the scrub near the workings Bat mounted a stunted peppermint tree, and, ensconced among the leaves and branches, commanded a complete view of his victim's actions. So it came about that, before my mate had breakfasted that morning, and probably at the moment when he was congratulating himself on his gold being as safe as though it were in the Bank of England, his whole five months' earnings, nearly £500, had passed away from him for ever; and without even consulting Burns or Jerry, or taking his belongings with him, the vile little scoundrel made away over the ranges, and was never again seen at Sailor Creek.

With these ruffians the maxim, "Honour among thieves," had no meaning. This was the second robbery perpetrated by them since coming to the creek, and in each case one of them appropriated the whole "cake" to himself, to the extreme disgust of the others, especially of their head-centre, Dan Burns, whose earnest invocations of withering pains and penalties upon his treacherous partner were audible for several days. His oaths and many-jointed maledictions at being thus

outwitted a second time were of a fearful and wonderful nature. When he had exhausted the more ordinary curses, he followed them up with torrent after torrent of far-fetched and newly-coined anathemas upon the head of his absconding mate.

Jerry viewed the matter in a more philosophical spirit. Probably he had had many similar experiences, and had become seasoned to the general perfidiousness of the class he mingled with. The only remark we heard from him was a response to the earnest desire of Burns that a "hump" might be stuck on the shoulders of the runaway as big as Mount Macedon (a well-known landmark on the highway to the principal goldfields). Jerry regarded this as an affront to himself, and advised Burns to change the subject; but evidently fearing to further exasperate his incensed companion, he enigmatically added, after a short pause, "It beats Bannaher\* entirely!" It was a safe interpolation—and so like Jerry; for no one could understand whether he meant Bat's deception, the loss of his personal share of the robbery, or Burns's variegated blasphemy and general wickedness.

\* A Hibernian gentleman of the olden times who has been authoritatively reported to have outwitted the Prince of Darkness.

## CHAPTER XII.

## DAN BURNS TAKES ACTION.

THE number of our unsavoury neighbours now being reduced by one-half, the feeling of disquietude we had so long experienced became materially lessened ; and although still impressed with the necessity of closely scanning their movements, we became injudiciously heedless of their power for harm. While we were in that frame of mind Burns approached our fire one morning about a week later to use it for cooking purposes. Realising that this was a fresh attempt on his part to renew familiarity with us, I was unable to control the loathing I felt for him, and plainly gave him to understand that he was not to come near us again, nor address me on any subject while I remained on the creek, and that all of us preferred his absence to his company.

No reply was vouchsafed, but an expression of ferocious vindictiveness overspread his features such as I wish never again to see on human face, and the conviction was forced upon me that I had blundered in thus openly breaking with him.

One evening shortly after this, Kintock, who

had been at work later than usual, came into camp with the news that he had seen, from an eminence, a mob of kangaroos grazing on a flat about half a mile from his claim. From the exhilarating accounts I had heard of kangaroo *battues*, I had frequently longed to participate in the amusement—as much for the sake of the sport as for a change of *menu*, which had hitherto consisted of the modest fare of beef, mutton, and damper.

A full moon would appear about ten o'clock, and I endeavoured to persuade my friends to accompany me, and share in the expected sport. But all efforts in that direction were unavailing. Tom felt tired after his day's work, and owing to his recent loss Johnny had no heart for amusement of any sort; so borrowing from the former his "Bessy," I loaded it with buckshot, and sauntered off in the direction in which the animals had been seen.

Darkness had set in before I started, but as I was thoroughly familiar with the surroundings of the place, I had no difficulty in finding my way.

In traversing a bridle-path that led to it, I had to pass close to a prospecting paddock which we had sunk some months previously. It was about six feet square, ten feet deep, and was situated near the spur of a hill projecting well in towards the creek from the main line of ranges.

Owing to recent rains it was at this time full of water to within a couple of feet of the surface; but by keeping well up the ascent no difficulty was experienced in avoiding it.

When near to where the kangaroos had been observed there was not sufficient light to discern any object further than fifty yards or so, and as the slightest noise would have caused a stampede of the animals to the thickly-timbered gullies near at hand, I sat down and smoked until moonlight should enable me to shoot with some degree of accuracy.

When the moon rose, the opportunity I had waited for was afforded me: about twenty of the animals were distinguishable at the farther end of the flat, some two hundred yards distant. One of them—a huge “old man”—was somewhat nearer than his companions, and appeared to be acting as their scout. By stealthily gliding from tree to tree I was enabled to get within shooting range of them, but just then their guardian evidently scented danger, and while he was erect on his haunches taking a nervous view of the surroundings, I let drive at him with both barrels. The reverberation of the piece had scarcely died away when the whole pack was in full retreat, going as only kangaroos can—fifteen or twenty feet at a bound. I followed a short distance in the hope that the scout had been wounded and

was unfit for flight; but the light was too feeble for satisfactory search, and, feeling that it would be imprudent to venture alone into a scrub-covered gully where they had taken shelter, I wended my way homewards.

I had arrived within about a hundred yards of the hill spur near the paddock when a shadow emerged from behind a tree, and the one man whom I had cause to fear and avoid in life stood before me. By the glint of the moon that now began to show above the tree tops on the adjacent hills I observed a fiendishly triumphant expression on his features, and the conviction was forced upon me that the crisis of the hateful relations that had existed between us was at hand.

Somewhat annoyed at my unskilful shooting, it had not occurred to me to reload the gun, and I felt myself completely at the mercy of the ruffian, who, I suspected, was armed with a loaded revolver.

My first instinct was to make a run for life; but reflecting that I could not save myself that way—Burns being a much smarter pedestrian—and remembering that lately I had assumed a defiant attitude towards him, I decided to face the ordeal, and endeavour to get out of my difficulty the best way I could with the aid of the empty gun. He appeared to be under the influence of drink, though not drunk.

His first inquiry was whether I brought anything down with the two shots I had fired. The question was asked sarcastically, and I judged from his manner that he suspected the gun was empty, and that I was unprepared for defence. Seeing that there was nothing to do but to put a bold face on it, I frankly told him that I suspected his designs, and warned him that my two friends were aware of the threats he had uttered against me, and that if harm befell me he was the one man who would be suspected and punished for it. He ironically assured me that he had no weapons about him, and meant no mischief; but his tone and demeanour so clearly indicated his intentions that, without further comment, I moved some distance from him. Thus we paced towards camp, the senses of each of us on the stretch. Burns held the uppermost position on the slope of the hill, but kept gradually moving closer towards me, while, to preserve a safe distance between us, I correspondingly moved downwards until we came to the prospecting paddock. I had not so far averted my eyes from him for a moment, but now the fresh danger to which I was exposed flashed upon me, and I glanced hurriedly round to see how best to avoid it. The action was fatal to any movement I could make either backwards or forwards. With a tigerish bound and a savage oath, the whole weight and force of Burns's body was

flung upon me, and I was hurled irresistibly into the water.

When consideration is given to all the circumstances—the lonely surroundings, the distance that separated me from friendly aid, the antipathy that had existed between us from the beginning of our acquaintance, my knowledge of many of his crimes, the threats he had uttered, his design to rob and murder us, and the malignant way in which he had regarded me a few mornings previously—the reader will realise the peril I was in. I was as completely at the mercy of my enemy as if I had been securely bound and he had been standing over me with knife or dagger poised for the stroke.

But my time had not come. With all his cleverness and subtle scheming, man is, after all, only to a very limited extent a free agent to work good or evil. When sinking the paddock I had found it necessary to cut several roots that shot out from an adjacent tree, some of which roots had penetrated the soil to a considerable depth. One of them was situated just above the surface of the water, and through soakage a portion of the earth had fallen away from it. On coming to the surface I instinctively gripped it as my one chance. Although in such dire straits, my senses were fully awake, and, looking up, I could discern Burns moving around the edge of the shaft, and appar-



ently searching for a boulder sufficiently large to end his fiendish work. Dazed and weak as I was, I mentally besought forgiveness for my sins of omission and commission, and resigned myself to my fate.

I had not finished my supplications when a strange thing occurred. A deafening, crashing, and rending noise broke on the stillness of the night, and was rapidly followed by another, and another, and another, each one nearer and louder, the last being within about a chain of the shaft. Glancing upwards, I again beheld my would-be murderer. But what a change! The moon now shone full upon him, and—either from superstition or fear—instead of his recent hellishly vindictive aspect he showed abject terror and bewilderment. His hands hung listlessly by his side, and his features wore a scared, blanched, and utterly dismayed expression. Noting this sudden change, it flashed upon me that if any chance of safety remained to me this was the time to make the effort. I reminded him that his record of crime was terribly heavy, and that to perpetrate the deed he contemplated would place him beyond redemption. Then, feeling my strength becoming exhausted, to awaken his apparently paralysed faculties and as a last resource I cried with all the force I was capable of, "Help! help!"

The succour thus invoked came immediately.

The man who had only a few moments before intended murder prostrated himself over the edge of the pit, and, stretching out his hand, with an almost superhuman effort, extricated me from my frightful position.

The whole of the incident, from the time I was flung into the shaft until I was restored to the surface, occupied only a few minutes, but my nervous system had been terribly shattered, and for a short time I was almost bereft of consciousness. On regaining my senses I found that I had been divested of my outer clothing, and that Burns was making every effort to restore animation. In a nervous, eager way he assisted me to camp, and was apparently as solicitous for my welfare as if no previous ill-feeling had existed between us. No words were spoken until we came near camp. There he requested me not to mention what had occurred, and said he would confess all next day.

Here let me give some explanation concerning the occurrence that had saved my life. The side of the range above the paddock was composed of slate rock, covered by a foot or two of loose black soil or clay. Slight as was the sustenance for nourishing vegetation, the whole of the ascent was covered with immense stringy bark and gum trees, measuring from one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet in height. Naturally,

the roots had not sufficient hold to ensure stability or lengthened age, and it was almost a nightly occurrence, through atmospheric pressure, for one or more of the trees to give way, bringing down others with them as they toppled over. Strange though it may appear, it was on calm and on frosty nights that most of these wrecks took place. On such occasions might be heard far and near among the hills the booming sounds of fractured trunks and limbs of huge forest monarchs, as they gave way under the heavy weight of their dense top foliage, and brought with them on their downward course, by sheer weight of outspreading arms and trunks, other giants that had withstood the force of storms for perhaps a century.

To those unacquainted with bush life in hilly country it may appear an enigma that forest denudation should occur in the way described. But the explanation is simple. An immense tree on the ridge above the paddock where I was immersed had given way to atmospheric pressure, and brought with it a number of its fellows, making a complete avenue from the summit to the foot of the hill, and suddenly disclosing to view the white orb of a full moon rising in all its radiance and beauty.

The wonder is not, therefore, that the fall should have taken place as that it should have occurred at so critical a juncture. But things

happen in this life that are not easily capable of human explanation; and, fatalistic though the theory may appear, this incident, like other experiences, strengthened my impression that the tenure of each man's days in this sublunary sphere is fixed from the beginning, and that neither himself nor others can prolong or shorten it. And I would add that he is best prepared for the vicissitudes and perils of life who cultivates a healthy conscience, and keeps prominently before him the words of the Psalmist, "Though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

To be in the jaws of death is, however, not such a terrible ordeal as might be supposed from the description I have given. Nature is kind when the last moment of this life appears certain. To suddenly meet the grim ferryman is a much less trying experience than to await him for weeks and months on a bed of suffering. In my case death seemed unavoidable, and I became reconciled to my fate. But when the appalling noises of the crashing and riven trees interrupted my spiritual communings, some indefinable inspiration seized upon me that forces were working which might aid in my rescue. Then a great longing for a further lease of life and earthly enjoyment possessed me; and my affrighted appeal for help was uttered. I have had many narrow escapes

from death, but none which has left such an indelible impress upon my memory as this, except when I was nearly drowned in my boyhood, after a boat accident. This latter experience leads me to believe that death by drowning is the easiest and most painless way of passing out of existence—first darkness, then airy phantasms, pleasant dreams, and finally sleep and rest. And it was this fate I was reserving for myself when I saw upraised the missile which Burns was seeking in order to finish his hellish work.

On returning to camp my soiled and water-soaked garments and enervated condition at once attracted the notice of my friends, and I was asked what had happened, but kept my promise to Burns. As for him, he did not appear on the following day, and towards evening I visited him to learn the reasons for his murderous attack upon me. On entering his tent—for the first time for nearly three months—I noticed that he had been endeavouring to drown conscience in strong drink, and yet he was fairly rational in his conversation. His old aggressive manner had to some extent forsaken him, and he assured me that I had nothing to fear from him again. Turning a bucket bottom upwards as a seat, he briefly outlined the causes that had led to his antipathy. It originated from a feeling that I regarded him from the first with suspicion. His dislike grew

stronger when I frustrated his attempt to steal the surveyor's horse, and as a result of the ill-success which attended his frequent efforts to discover where I had secreted my gold, and culminated in an intense desire for revenge when his recent overtures to restore familiarity between us had been rudely repelled. "But now," he remarked, "rest satisfied that I have no ill-feeling towards you."

When I inquired the cause of so sudden a change in his demeanour, he replied: "Well, I was knocked all of a heap last night when them trees began to tumble down, and I saw Har——"

Although he thus abruptly concluded, I knew in a moment whom he meant; and as it was evident that conscience was sorely pricking him, I felt that no better opportunity would be afforded me of gleaning tidings of the unfortunate man who had befriended me.

"Yes, you thought you saw Harry," I said. "What of him?"

"He was beckoning to me, and——"

Again he abruptly halted, and with a dismayed look and a shudder of his whole frame his eyes became averted from mine; but "Murderer!" was as plainly depicted on his every feature as if read from an open page.

Seeing that in his disordered and conscience-stricken state of mind I was not likely to get

further information regarding Harry's fate, I withdrew without comment.

After leaving Burns's tent I examined the scene of my adventure, and was astounded at the immense weight of timber that had fallen. I also noticed an erect charred stump just above where the first huge tree gave way. It had one bare limb standing out horizontally from near the top, and might well have been mistaken by Burns for a human figure. As to its having beckoned, this could be accounted for by the shadows of the swaying trees in the vicinity playing upon it in the bright moonlight; and yet I am not disposed to say that Burns did not see a human phantasm. It certainly required something more than the noise of the falling and rending trees to so thoroughly scare one who up to this time seemed to fear neither God nor man.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## AN INTERLUDE.

AFTER the incident related in the last chapter, although still working rich ground, I could not reconcile myself to stay longer on Sailor Creek. The pressure had been too high. My health was beginning to fail; so I decided, even if unaccompanied by Kintock, to leave for Melbourne.

The Spring Creek diggings had by this time become widely known. Some five hundred fresh arrivals had turned up there, and as gold was being got freely, a commissioner and party of police had been located there. Better still, news reached us that a branch escort would take gold to Melbourne, *viâ* Castlemaine, and that the first would start about a week later.

But disappointment still dogged me. Heavy rains set in, and continued for three days, and at the end of that time the creek was running bank high. I had deposited my gold at the bottom of a hollow in its bed some time previously, and placed a heavy boulder over it. There was then only about two feet of placid water, but now my treasure lay at a depth of ten or twelve feet below



the surface of a stream running like a mill sluice, and sweeping every loose obstacle before it. I confided my misgivings as to its safety to Kintock—the one man I could rely upon in such an emergency. Cool and self-reliant as ever, he counselled patience till the rain abated and the creek fell. The gold had been deposited near a sharp bend in the stream, and he suggested the cutting of a race through a portion of the flat, and turning the main body of the flood water in a different direction. Long and weary days were passed in that arduous task, Kintock, whose claim had become inundated, and who, in consequence, had also decided to leave, assisting as vigorously as if the sunken treasure had been his own. Success at length crowned our efforts, and at the end of eight days I was gladdened by the sight of my hard-earned property. But the escort had left, and we were compelled to wait a fortnight for another. A few days later we succeeded in getting away from the place unobserved, and lodged our respective earnings in the custody of the Government official at Spring Creek. A heavy weight of anxiety being thus removed, with a freedom from care I had not experienced for months, I passed the time pleasantly and prepared for departure. Refreshing sleep, and with it my wonted bodily vigour, again returned, and I felt for the first time that wealth acquired under recent

conditions was not worth the wear and tear of body and mind it had cost. My experiences during the last few months had nearly broken up my constitution, and I learned for the first time that wealth is only a very small factor in human happiness.

Before the flood set in, the last of Burns's companions had left. Jerry concluded that the game he and his partners had been playing at Sailor Creek was lost, and as a last resource he retreated to Bullarook—doubtless with the object of gaining the assistance of his friends to intercept us in the forest. But Black Harry's warning not to pass in that direction was kept in mind, and one fine morning in the middle of March, after depositing our working tools in a prospecting shaft, and covering them with soil, we started on our downward journey. The route we took was by Parker's (the Black Protector) station, and thence by a track that led to Carlsruhe on the great highway between Bendigo and Melbourne.

As we—Kintock, John, and I—gained the summit of the range overlooking the creek, I paused to take a parting glance at a place that had been so eventful to us all. We had not seen Burns for several days, nor was he made aware that we were about to depart. But he had not been far off; for there he stood on a bare-topped hill near his tent, watching us until we reached the edge of the thick

bush, and doubtless perplexed at the unexpected direction we were taking.

We had with us the little handcart which Tom had brought with him to the creek. On it were piled a tent, blankets, and what light belongings we thought it worth while to take with us. An impromptu harness had been manufactured out of pieces of rope and sheep-skin, and each took hour about to draw it over mountain, hill, and dale, the eighty odd miles between Jim Crow and Melbourne.

What cared we on that downward journey for bushrangers, or for the jokes passed by wayfarers about our "private escort," as harnessed to our little "costermonger" we traversed the main trunk road to Melbourne? We had nothing to lose but our gold receipts, and these had been rolled up into the smallest possible compass, and deposited in an auger hole made in the axle of the cart, and plugged in so neatly by Kintock that the keenest road agent would never have suspected the "plant."

On the fifth morning after our departure I found myself again in Melbourne—then crowded with thousands of new arrivals. What a delightful change from our recent irksome situation! No cares or anxieties; amusements everywhere; in the enjoyment of rugged health; and with a substantial credit at our bank! What more could

one desire? And what a delicious sense of pleasure and freedom I felt in my brand-new orthodox digger's outfit—for which no tailor measurements had either been asked or taken! And how enjoyable it was to share in the then common vanity of successful diggers—a bright red silk sash round the waist, a Panama hat, a heavy nugget ring branded with pick and shovel, and a Colt revolver in position for immediate service!

One of my principal haunts of observation and amusement during that holiday season was Liar-diat's Beach (now Sandridge). Thence I would take pleasant trips across the bay, or on board the ships that were coming in almost hourly from all parts of the world with their human freight, to share in the golden harvest and assist in building up Greater Britain in the South Pacific. And there on the old jetty I have many a time watched and conversed with the founder of the most extensive business in Australasia—then eking out a precarious existence by fishing. Little could one foresee at that time that he would become one of the wealthiest men in the Southern hemisphere, or that branches of the business he was to establish would be seen forty years later in almost every town in Australia and New Zealand. Verily, the whirligig of time brought in strange changes to many denizens of Victoria in the early fifties.

The delivery of English mail correspondence from the old wooden shed that did duty for a post-office was a red-letter day at that period in Melbourne. Many a time did I post myself at a point of vantage where I could command a bird's-eye view of the immense concourse of people that assembled long before the hour appointed for letter deliveries, expecting to receive news from friends in far-off lands.

I have now distinctly in mind the scene presented on one particular occasion. Two heavy mails had arrived by sailing ships within a few hours of each other the previous day, and nearly a thousand persons, belonging to almost every nation under the sun, were assembled, and anxiously awaited intelligence that would bring joy and comfort to some, and plunge others into the lowest depths of despondency and discouragement.

The first to receive a missive is a coarse, sensual-looking man. With a hasty glance at the superscription, he thrusts the letter into his pocket, and unconcernedly jostles his way out of the throng. To the next inquirer is handed a letter with a deep mourning border. A long, searching look is given at the written address. The hand convulsively smites the forehead, and deep distress is written on the countenance. He knows before he opens it that some loved one in his old

distant home has passed away. Again he hurriedly glances at the significant border and writing, and all but breaks down, and the onlookers respectfully and sympathetically make way for him to pass out and ponder over his grief in privacy. Next, a letter is passed to a man in digger's garb. He retreats to the corner of an adjoining street and eagerly peruses it, without noticing the thousands of people about him. None can misinterpret his feelings as he reads. The message affords him intense satisfaction, and with a light heart and fresh vigour he will soon be on his return journey to the diggings, or *en route* for England; for it is only a betrothed man or one who has unexpectedly become heir to a fortune who could read a letter with such rapture. A shabby-genteel looking young man, with delicately cut features and figure, denoting that he has been unused to hard work in his time, has the next turn. There is no letter for him; and with a scowling look and a wicked snap of his jaws he retreats to the rear of the assemblage. His clothing and air proclaim him to be a "remittance man"—perhaps the black sheep of a wealthy or aristocratic British family. He is cleaned out, and will be compelled to polish diggers' boots or loaf about hotels until the arrival of the next ship with mails—probably months later; for there was no inter-ocean steam service at that period.

Now a young woman—apparently a domestic servant—manages to get near the opening. “Yes, there is a letter for you,” she is told. She glances at the handwriting, and, oblivious of the banter of those in her vicinity, and with flushed and happy features, thrusts the precious missive inside the bosom of her dress as something to be prized and preserved above silver or gold.

As Melbourne was at this time growing at an enormous pace, it was an exceptionally attractive field for the investment of capital. So I decided to eschew gold-mining and embark in some more settled pursuit. The opportunity to do so was afforded shortly after my arrival.

Meeting an old schoolmate—a recent arrival—possessed of some means, we agreed to start in the provision trade—a trade in which we were the least likely to incur risk or loss, the demand for the necessaries of life being far in excess of supplies. Farm and dairy produce and fruit were in special request, and brought fabulous prices on the gold-fields, and in these we decided to deal on a considerable scale.

The arrangement was that my partner was to proceed to New South Wales and ship thence the “lines” of goods most in request, while I was to take delivery, and forward them to the principal mining centres. Every detail in connection with the enterprise was carefully considered, and, as

far as we could see, the utmost care was taken to avoid risk or loss.

In due time the schooner *Sydney Lass*, with the class of goods referred to, reached the bay, and I engaged lighters to convey them to Cole's wharf at Melbourne. Two of these barges—appropriately named *Grampus* and *Porpoise*—were soon laden to their utmost capacity with the most valuable part of the cargo, and were moored alongside the schooner, awaiting the services of a tug to take them up the Yarra, when, as ill-luck would have it, a southerly gale suddenly sprang up, causing an unusually heavy swell in the bay, and resulting in damage to the vessel, through the plunging of the lighters and the heavy strain on their mooring ropes. As the gale and swell increased, and there was no sign of the tug coming to our assistance, the skipper, fearful for the safety of his craft, and regardless of entreaty and protest, cut the barges adrift, and in a few minutes I had the mortification of witnessing the submergence of both beneath the troubled waters of Hobson's Bay—and with them what represented nearly all the wealth I had garnered at so heavy a cost on Jim Crow.

The loss of my capital, however, affected me less than a single night's worry for its safety while I was in the vicinity of the Burns gang; and except for neglecting to insure the goods to



Melbourne, instead of only to Hobson's Bay, I experienced no deep or lasting regret at the loss. Indeed, in those days it was almost impossible to dwell on mischances for any length of time. All was bustle and confidence in the future, new gold discoveries being reported almost daily. So after consideration I concluded that commercial pursuits had their risks as well as other callings, and finally decided to await the arrival of my partner, square accounts, and then betake myself again to the diggings.

Thus at the outset of what promised to be a lucrative career my life was deflected, by a single stroke of ill-luck, from the prosaic pursuits of a provision merchant to the more adventurous occupation of which I had already had my share.

I will here narrate a strange and decidedly disagreeable experience which I once had on the occasion of another visit to Melbourne. Having done my business in the capital, I was on my way back to the goldfields, and made Bacchus Marsh the first stage of my journey. There was then a rough accommodation house in the place, bearing the attractive sign of "The Digger's Retreat." Having eaten, I was conducted to a lean-to at the rear composed of rough palings. There were two double beds in it, and one of them was pointed out as my resting place. Immediately on enter-

ing I noticed a sickly odour, and on inquiring the cause, was informed that it was owing to the door not having been opened for some time. There was one small window in the shed, but it could not be unfastened.

Fortunately I was a smoker, and I industriously fumigated the room, but, notwithstanding my fatigue, try as I would, sleep would not come. I managed to kill time till about midnight, and was anxiously longing for the dawn, when the sound of approaching footsteps led me to turn my face to the partition and feign to be asleep. The door opened and three persons entered. I gathered from their voices that two were females and one a male. There was silence for a few minutes, when, evidently in response to a mute inquiry, the young woman who had conducted me to the room said, loudly enough to be audible: "Oh, it's all right. He's only a new chum. He came from Melbourne to-day, and is fast asleep. There's your bed—good night!" and then she retired. The couple who had accompanied her were evidently advanced in years—and to some extent in inebriety. I surmised that much from their cracked voices and maudlin conversation. I gathered from their remarks that they had come that day from Ballarat in a cart, had made money by grog-selling, and were bound to Melbourne to purchase a fresh stock of liquor.

The woman was addressed by her companion by the suggestive appellation "Spider"—the man's name I did not learn.

They had been sitting on the side of their bed for some time, smoking and conversing, when the man lowered his voice to a whisper, and wondered if "he" was worth "shaking" (*i. e.* robbing).

"Oh, it's not worth while," replied Spider, in an equally low tone; "we must start early to get to town to-morrow, and if there's any bother here to-night we might lose more than we'd gain."

"If he's only a new chum," remarked the man, "he knows a thing or two; he's got his clothes tucked under the pillow."

"He won't have much anyhow," his companion replied; "he's going up. *You* turn in."

Although they spoke in whispers, I plainly overheard the entire conversation. Shortly afterwards the pair turned in, and the man, in a sociable sort of way, remarked:

"Well, Spider, it's a grand country this. Who'd ha' thought when we were on t'other side that things would ha' turned out as they have?"

These conciliatory remarks were abruptly brought to a conclusion by "Spider" peremptorily bidding him to shut up and go to sleep.

In a deprecatory way the man reminded her that "she needn't be so —— spiteful." And a little later, as if calling to mind some special injury

received at her hands, he said, "I was a —— fool to tie myself to such a cursed ugly old ——!"

He had scarcely uttered these words when a violent scuffle began, in the course of which the lighted candle was knocked off the chair alongside their bed, and the place was left in total darkness. The contest was evidently short, sharp, and decisive. Judging by the choking sounds that proceeded from the man, Spider had a firm grip of his throat, and she savagely affirmed that she "would do for him if he gave her any more of his —— jaw."

With the man it had been a case of the proverbial worm turning when trodden upon, but there was not the slightest use in his turning. Not another word did he venture to utter after the mauling he had received at her hands, and half an hour later I was pleased to hear from their snoring that both had become oblivious to worldly affairs.

Needless to say that I had not the slightest desire for sleep, and at dawn of day I arose, dressed, and went outside to inhale the fresh air.

After a sluice under a pump in the yard I felt somewhat refreshed, and proceeded to the front part of the house for a stimulant, intending to take to the road without breakfast. In response to a knock at the door a dissipated-looking young fellow opened it. He appeared sulky at being

disturbed so early, but on learning that I had a long journey before me, and being invited to drink with me, he became more sociable. I inquired who my room-mates were at the back of the house. He did not know them, but thought they were not of "much account," and asked if I saw the old woman. Replying in the negative, he laughed, and said I ought to have a peep at them before I started.

The liquor appeared to make him communicative, and he added: "See any ghosts last night?"

"Do you mean the two old ghosts that slept in the same room with me?"

"No—a tall fellow, with reddish whiskers and hair, and a scar over his eye."

I asked him to explain, and he went on: "You won't make a fuss if I do—you won't tell the boss?"

Promising to observe secrecy, I elicited from him that a few days previously a corpse had occupied the bed I had just risen from. It was that of a man who had made money on the goldfields. On his way to Melbourne he stopped at Bacchus Marsh and commenced to drink heavily, *delirium tremens* being the result. In this state he wandered into the bush, and after a few days' search his body was discovered in the scrub and was brought to the shanty and placed on my recent sleeping berth. The lean-to was known as the

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“dead-house,” and had been frequently used for inquests!

From the conversation I had overheard the previous night, it occurred to me that it might be well to be able to identify my room-mates, and I quietly returned to the lean-to. They were both still asleep, and in the broad daylight they were a most unsavoury-looking pair of mortals. Every feature displayed vice of the most malignant type. The man was some sixty-five years of age, and had a heavy, sottish appearance, with coarse, grizzly hair covering almost the whole of his face. Ill-looking, however, as he was, the woman was many degrees worse. She might have been of any age between sixty and a hundred years. Her skin was the colour of varnished oak, and her long, tangled, grey hair lay spread over the pillow. Her mouth was parted, and two yellow tusks, each nearly an inch long, were exposed to view. One of her skinny hands lay outside the bed-clothes, the fingers resembling the talons of some huge bird of prey. The two protruding fangs, however, claimed most attention. They gave her a hideously wolfish expression. There was not a redeeming trait in the countenance of either. Depravity and crime were written in every lineament, and as I wended my way onwards I felt pleased that other business engagements had prevented Spider from “bothering” about me.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE HORSE THAT WAS SHOD WITH GOLD.

THE stream of population, at the time when my thoughts were once more turned towards gold-digging, was moving in the direction of the Ovens, where it was reported that gold was being unearthed in large quantities. An interesting feature of this rush was the intense excitement that ensued upon the rumour that gold was so abundant that even the miners' horses were shod with it! Nothing that occurred during that eventful period stimulated emigration to Australia so much as this sensational announcement. Even at the present day the great majority of the Australian colonists believe that the thing really happened. Yet the statement was a pure fabrication. It originated at the election of a member to represent the district in Parliament. A resident storekeeper named Dan Cameron had the unanimous support of the diggers, and was triumphantly placed at the head of the poll. There happened at that time to be a travelling circus at the Ovens, one of the attractions of which was a horse trained to lie on his back in the ring and flourish his heels

in the air. To the audience it appeared that he wore shoes of gold; but in reality the shoes were of gilded iron, and so constructed that they could be taken off each night after the performance. Brown, the owner of the circus, saw a chance of making an honest penny out of the Cameron election, so, consulting with some members of the election committee, he offered for a consideration the use of the "gold-shod horse" for the procession to the poll. The offer was accepted, and every means was taken to advertise a display which just suited the extravagant humour of the miners. The news ran like wildfire that Cameron was to ride to the polling place on a horse with golden shoes, and people poured into the streets in thousands to witness the spectacle. "Shoes of gold at the Ovens!" announced the newspapers in large letters. "Shoes of gold!" echoed business men in Melbourne as they hurriedly despatched large consignments of goods to meet the requirements of the new rush. "Gold-shod horses!" murmured crowds of toil-worn men who eagerly tramped along the high road to the Ovens, each with a "swag" weighing from 60 lb. to 80 lb. swung over his shoulder. "Gold-shod horses!" exclaimed thousands of people in far-off lands, who broke up comfortable homes and faced the tedium of a four months' voyage to Melbourne, there to be disillusioned, and



to long for the chance of lynching the authors of the fable.

Fortunately I became acquainted with a fellow-lodger who had had experience of the Ovens, and assured by him that it was a storekeeper's and shanty keeper's rush, and that the rich Bendigo field had been only skimmed over and would yield more profitable returns than the Ovens, I decided to move towards Bendigo, and arranged with George Francis Train, the well-known Yankee cyclone orator, to convey our belongings to the scene of operations.

Train had then in his hands the principal carrying trade to the diggings, and that, combined with the agency of the "White Star" packet ships and the storage of emigrants' luggage—much of which was never claimed—brought him a rapid fortune. Train was a notable man at Melbourne in those days. Poor fellow! In fancy I have him again before me—now indulging in flowers of rhetoric with friends or visitors, and anon issuing instructions in florid pyrotechnics. Even when superintending the simple work of loading a bullock, his grandiloquent remarks, ponderous style, and assumption of superiority over ordinary folk were amazing and amusing, and he became in consequence the observed of all observers. After amassing a huge fortune he returned to the United States, and, inflated with the success that had

attended him in Australia, became a candidate for the Presidency. He started with the announcement that if elected he would reform the world. The great republic declined to take him at his own valuation, and after losing the wealth he had acquired at Melbourne, he sank into obscurity. With all his shortcomings, however, he was a man of many good parts. To those in want or distress he was profuse in his liberality, and many a man with whom things had gone ill had abundant cause to remember him with gratitude.

## CHAPTER XV.

## EN ROUTE FOR BENDIGO.

My first trip to the famous Bendigo goldfields, with a new mate, Torrence by name, was sufficiently memorable. The vast number of people coming and going—new chums and old chums—dressed in every variety of costume, and most of them carrying firearms; the heavily-laden drays, and the struggles of the horses and bullocks to extricate them from swampy ground or tenacious clay; the savage yells and grotesque oaths of the drivers; the eager, anxious looks and quick, elastic movements of those bound northwards, as if fearful of being too late to share in the riches that were being so freely unearthed; the numerous parties with handcarts and wheelbarrows containing almost all their worldly gear; swagsmen bending under the weight of seventy or eighty pounds over their shoulders; the occasional bursts of laughter from fortunate, light-hearted diggers bound for Melbourne with escort receipts for heavy parcels of gold which awaited them at the old treasury in Collins Street

—these are some of the details that still live in my memory.

Towards evening of the first day out, while admiring the superb horsemanship displayed by a stock-driver in avoiding the repeated charges of some half-wild store cattle which he was driving to Melbourne, my attention was attracted by angry exclamations from our carter. With deep-mouthed vociferations and curses he addressed his team :

“Gee, Feargus ! So, good horse ! Now, Nosey ! You —— lazy brute ! The old game—not pulling an ounce !”

After thus brutally anathematising Nosey, he belaboured him about the head with his heavy whip handle, although the beast was clearly doing more than his share towards dragging the vehicle out of a deep rut.

Nosey was an iron grey, with a facial profile resembling a Roman nose, while the leader, called Feargus, was a large-boned, rough-coated chestnut that appeared to have been only recently broken into harness.

Venturing to remonstrate with him, I was coarsely reminded that the team belonged to Joe Ogston, and was bidden to attend to my own business.

I refrained from further comment ; but the fiendish expression of the man made a very un-

favourable impression upon my mind, and mentally "ear-marked" him as a person to be kept under observation.

After a severe muscular strain on the part of both horses, assisted by some half-dozen wayfarers, we succeeded in getting the dray on to good ground, and while the still trembling animals were recovering breath, the fierce expression on Ogston's features suddenly relaxed, and in a few minutes he relapsed into the silent, commonplace mortal he had seemed to be. His want of self-control, however, suggested that in his gusts of passion he might be a dangerous person to deal with. As he appeared to be an old hand, I surmised that he was a man with a history, and resolved, if possible, to know something of it before we parted. The marked taciturnity he displayed during the evening meal, and later on when smoking near the fire, gave edge to my curiosity, but at first I could elicit nothing from him. But on the morning of our third day out heavy rains set in, and by the time we reached our camping ground in the yard of the old Bush Inn (near the entrance to the Black Forest, and in close proximity to some twenty other drays) we were soaked to the skin. Stimulants were freely partaken of, and especially by Ogston, and under the influence of the strong drink his reticence vanished, and he became the most garrulous of the party.

While in this communicative mood he disclosed that he was keenly interested in politics. "Political representation without universal suffrage is a — farce!" he remarked, and so earnestly did he harp on the subject that I guessed I had discovered the key to his character.

By judicious questions, I gleaned that he had taken a prominent part in the Chartist agitation that disturbed the Old Country from 1838 to 1842. He was a member of the Birmingham Convention, and one of the leaders of the popular outbreak at Newport in 1839, when some dozen persons were shot dead and large numbers fatally wounded. Being arrested and brought to trial for the part he had taken in that sad affair, Ogston received a sentence of ten years' transportation. He appeared proud of the position he had held as a Chartist leader, and confidently assured us that no reforms had ever been achieved without blood-letting; "for you see," he remarked, "almost all the clauses of the programme we fought and suffered for have become fixed laws in Britain and most of her dependencies. We have to thank Old Nosey Wellington," he continued, "for the failure of the Chartist movement. He was the leading man in Bobby Peel's Government, and his remedy for social and political reforms was a volley of musketry, a bayonet charge, and the transportation of the survivors to distant lands."

On his using the word "Nosey" I conjectured that he had thus christened his shaft horse through its resemblance to the Iron Duke, and asked him if this was so.

"Yes," he replied; "I saw the brute in a sale yard at Melbourne, and he reminded me so of Nosey Wellington that I bought him for the love I bear the old butcher. The horse Feargus I call after Feargus O'Connor, who was the mainstay of the Chartist party."

Heavy peals of distant thunder and vivid lightning now denoted that a storm was breaking, and rising abruptly, Ogston intimated that he intended to camp about a mile from the inn, giving as a reason that there was a patch of good grass there, where the horses would have a plentiful night's feed. "And if you chaps would take friendly advice," he concluded, "you'd roost for the night in that hay-loft" (pointing to a building some fifty yards distant), "for we're goin' to have a real old-fashioned buster before many hours!"

Without further speech he removed the feed bags from his horses' heads, and, taking from the dray a small tent and a tomahawk, he and they were soon lost to sight amid the dense bush.

Shortly afterwards a terrific storm broke upon us. For fully two hours deafening peals of thunder rolled about amid the dark masses of clouds overhead, forked lightning played around our encamp-

ment, and rain descended in torrents. As, however, the night was still young, Torrence and I remained under the shelter of the tilt that covered the dray, smoking, and exchanging the experiences we had had since our arrival in the colony.

About eleven o'clock there was a lull, and after tipping the ostler for a shake-down in the hay-loft, we turned in for the night.

Next day we inquired how Ogston had passed the night. "You must have had an unpleasant time during that downpour of rain last night, Joe," someone said, "with no covering worth speaking of?"

"Yes," he rejoined with an ironical grin, "in most respects it wasn't over nice, but it was safer and pleasanter by a long chalk than fooling around that dray with forked lightning jumping about it."

"But you were in the same danger where you were camped," I replied.

"No, I wasn't," he answered, "for I hadn't five kegs of powder near me—and worse luck, one of them had got burst by the jolting of the dray when we were trying to get it out of that crab-hole near Deep Creek, and the blamed stuff is scattered amongst my freight in every direction!"

A feeling of consternation seized upon us on hearing these words. Five kegs of powder!—and the contents of one of them scattered all over the dray! And we had actually lit several matches and



smoked sundry pipes of tobacco while we were seated on those kegs during the storm. For some minutes we were speechless, and an icy chill seemed to run down my back as I realised the danger we had passed through. My feelings appeared to be fully shared in by my mate Jim, as in broken syllables he inquired—

“Do you re—ally m—ean there’s a lot of p—p—owder in that dray, and—and a keg b—burst?”

“Aye, mate,” replied Ogston unconcernedly, “it’s part of my freight for Bendigo.”

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Jim, as if communing with himself, and unheeding of Ogston and his confession, “five kegs of powder, and one of them burst! Enough to blow the Bush Inn and all the drays in the yard to Jericho! And to think that I was carelessly lighting matches and smoking over that death-trap!”

Then, as if endeavouring to fathom the full depth of Ogston’s villainous character, Jim’s eyes became fixed upon him with mute astonishment at first, and then in blazing anger.

“Wasn’t it your duty to tell us that you had dangerous cargo of that sort aboard before you left us last night?” I asked.

“Well, a man would think so,” he frankly acknowledged, “but I was too—frightened about my own skin when that storm was rolling up to think

of yours. Besides, I got ten years for minding other people's business, you know ; and for the rest of my life I intend to mind Number One. Yes, sir-ree—that's Joe Ogston's religion ! Two kegs of brandy were stolen from my dray one night a few months ago near the Campaspe while I slept, and if anyone attempts that little game, this trip at least, he may be blown to blazes for aught Joe Ogston cares. You must think me a verdant sort of coon to expect me to tell people what my cargo consists of."

Then, after a slight pause, he added by way of extenuation, "You forget I told you to sleep in the hayloft."

Torrence now made use of language that it would be better to leave unrecorded, except one sentence, which I heartily endorsed. "If all Chartists were such murdering scoundrels as you," he shouted, "they should have been hanged instead of transported."

These utterances did not appear to disconcert Ogston, though he furtively eyed Jim's stalwart proportions, as if taking his measure. Apparently he decided that it would be well to adhere to his rule of minding Number One. Then, unconsciously illustrating in a simple way his favourite doctrine, he unceremoniously appropriated to his own use three-fourths of the uncorked bottle of ale I had purchased for five shillings at the last accom-

modation house, and which was to have been equally divided between the three of us.

I need not add that there was no further social intercourse between us and Joseph Ogston, ex-Chartist, during the remainder of our journey.

Nothing so plainly attested the heavy traffic over the direct routes to Bendigo and Forest Creek in the winters of '52 and '53 as the number of skeletons of horses and bullocks that had succumbed to the undue strain imposed upon them, through bad weather, overloading, and dearth of sustenance. Especially was this noticeable in the Black Forest, which, after heavy rains, resembled a quagmire or peat bog more than a thoroughfare. Detours had been taken by teamsters in every direction to discover, if possible, solid ground; but go where one would, the same ghastly objects were presented to view—broken and upturned drays and carts, and the skeletons of the animals that had drawn them lying in the positions where they had dropped down, through exhaustion, to rise no more. But for the myriads of crows that made it a rendezvous, and held high carnival, the Black Forest would have been a plague-ridden region. In most cases the hides had been stripped from the carcasses by the teamsters, and when the coast became clear the winged scavengers would alight from the trees and feast until only bare, unsightly frames of bone remained. It was a bad time for

bullocks. The miners had no more useful servitors than the enduring animals that toiled incessantly from early morn till night in conveying to them, over mountains and through sterile plains and swamps, their daily requirements of food. But at this time all sentiment appeared to be completely blotted out, the mad thirst for gold apparently overruling every finer feeling of human nature.

The immense amount of animal life thus sacrificed before the construction of roads induced a sharp business man to start a bone-mill on Bendigo. It became more profitable than gold-mining, and regular supplies of bone-dust have been sent thence to almost every part of Australasia.

Nor were the bones of beasts of burden the only remnants of mortality to be seen within the bounds of the Black Forest.

There also, deeper perhaps than the ploughshare can reach, lie the remains of many unfortunate gold-miners, who, having amassed an independence at the diggings, entered it lightheartedly, but never reached its southern limit alive. Like Bullarook, it was a favourite resort of the robbers and cut-throats who infested the colony, and the numerous inquiries in the "Missing Friends" columns of popular London papers for persons "last heard of on Bendigo or Forest Creek" were significant of the hideous crimes that were perpetrated in that gruesome piece of bush country.

But at last, a week after starting, our arduous journey ended, and we found ourselves in the vicinity of the Porcupine Inn, some twelve miles from the southern workings of Bendigo. The so-called "inn" was a rough accommodation house, composed of Tasmanian palings. It had been a favourite resort of shearers and general station hands before the gold era; but at the time I write of it was one of the richest claims in the colony; for it was the only house licensed to sell liquor within a radius of twenty miles of Bendigo, where nearly sixty thousand gold-diggers were congregated.

After partaking of the evening meal at camp, we visit the shanty to glean information from some of the crowd of miners assembled there. High jinks are going on at the Porcupine. Quoits for £20 stakes, and other games, are being indulged in outside, while the rooms, and even the out-houses, are crammed with people from Bendigo, or wayfarers going up or coming down. Nearly all the miners appear, from their bronzed complexions and free and easy style, to have been seasoned to colonial life. They have worked out wonderfully rich claims, and are enjoying life in their own way. The future has no concern for them. They are living for the hour and the day, and implicitly believe that the good times that have opened up for them will last their lifetime—perhaps for ever.

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Gambling is going on for high stakes at each roughly improvised table. Mingling with the players are a number of beetle-browed, square-jawed, large-eared, weather-stained men, who are smoking black pipes, and watching the games in an apparently nonchalant way. I have recently been in close relationship with men of the same stamp at Jim Crow, and know them at a glance. They are taking stock of the men who are most freely "flashing" their nuggets, bags of gold, and bank notes. Each of the human jackals has already in view some one or more of these Bendigo diggers to plunder when stillness reigns throughout the building during the small hours, and the senses of the victims are overpowered by the fumes of strong drink. Only a short time will elapse ere some of these hilarious miners will be seen slowly moving towards Bendigo, sadder but wiser men; others will probably not again see the dawn of day.

If so minded, the landlord of that shanty could have told strange stories of scenes that had come under his observation. But he was a man of few words. His interests were best served by minding his own business, and it was no surprise to us to learn later on that he netted forty thousand pounds a year for the first two years after the discovery of gold on Bendigo.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## WHAT I SAW ON BENDIGO.

LET me describe Bendigo as I knew it in its prime. The task is not difficult. The pulse throbs quicker, the pen moves more swiftly, and I am again in the hey-day of early manhood as memory brings vividly before me the scenes of those halcyon days! Yes, Bendigo is a place worth writing of. When I first knew it, in that memorable winter of '53, gold to the value of half a million sterling was won from it weekly; and since the day Harry Frenchman bottomed his first prospecting shaft there, and proclaimed to the world the discovery of the veritable "Tom Tiddler's" ground, over eighty millions' worth of treasure has been extracted from its soil—and all that from an area no larger than an ordinary sheep run.

I will begin with some incidents that came under my notice in the course of a day's outing soon after my arrival.

It is midwinter, yet the day is uncomfortably close, and a heavy cloud bank in the north portends an approaching thunderstorm. Our claim in Kangaroo Gully is nearly worked out, and "Spell ho!" for a day or two has been agreed upon, as

much for relaxation from toil as to search out another suitable spot to set into. Flour is now £25 a bag, and if the long-expected supplies do not reach the field for another week it will be up to £50. But a horseman has just arrived, and reports that hundreds of teams are on the road, and that a large number are actually within a few miles of the outer southerly workings. It is early in the day, and we stroll in that direction, for we have heard much of the doings of the teamsters during their protracted trip, and are desirous to see how they will shape coming up the big hill that leads into Bendigo.

Before we get within a quarter of a mile of it the resonant crack of bullock whips, like volleys of musketry, breaks on the ear. We take a stand on the brow of the hill, and discern, as far as the eye can reach, teams of horses and bullocks. The drivers are mostly rough, unkempt men, and oh! what fierce and far-fetched oaths are uttered as they goad the jaded and half-starved beasts up the ascent. One team has at length topped it, and with a hoarse "Whoa-a!—come hither, Poley!—Wi, Magpie!" the man guides his bullocks to one side of the track to make room for others, and halts to give the panting and hollow-sided beasts a few minutes' rest. In answer to questions about the roads, he says snappishly that there are no roads. Black Forest has been no better than a



swamp for the past two months, and he has lost two bullocks out of the team he left Melbourne with some six weeks before. He apostrophises Governor Latrobe and his executive for not maintaining a decent thoroughfare, and emphatically wishes he had the job of hanging the whole batch. Then a self-satisfied look overspreads his features, and he informs us in a semi-confidential way that many of his brother "punchers" are worse off than himself. Some have lost nearly all their teams, others have been over three months on the journey, and few have got so far without some accident.

His freight, he tells us, is £150 a ton, but he would sooner turn to and "crack diamonds" (break stones) than bring another load that winter for less than £200 a ton. He has come in half-loaded, and almost all the others are in like case. It was only the light, swag-loaded teams that managed to get along without delay. To the question if there was much flour or general provisions aboard, he replies that nearly all the "heavy stuff" has been left under cover at various points along the line of transit, but in an encouraging way he assures us that "there is a good swag of grog in most of the drays"—the inference being that the thousands on Bendigo could dispense with food for a time, but to be deprived of liquor would be an unendurable calamity.

Viewing his grimy face, neck, and hands, I hazard the question: "Have you brought up any soap?" With a look of unutterable contempt, and in bullock-drivers' vernacular, he ejaculates: "Soap be d——d!" and fiercely exhorts his team to move ahead.

Nearly all the drivers exhibited signs of having solaced themselves by raids on the liquor casks. It was to some extent excusable. The life was a terribly laborious one, and the liquor that was broached was generally replaced by pure water. Thus diluted, the spirits became more innocuous to those who freely used them—at a cost of thirty shillings a bottle.

After watching for some time the bemired drays and fagged and enfeebled beasts of burden, as they slowly crawled up the steep ascent, and their rugged drivers as they urged on with their cruel whips and grotesque imprecations some unfortunate "Damper" or "Doughboy" that was thought to be malingering or lazy, we went back to the workings with the conviction that carrying to the diggings in the winter of '53, for both man and beast, was the most unenviable occupation that could be engaged in—even at £200 per ton.

But see! Crowds are rushing towards Long Gully—cradles and tubs are forsaken, and the cry has been raised: "A ring! a ring!" We hasten on with the others, and find in an open space,

surrounded by a wall of diggers, two men stripped to the buff and engaged in a stand-up fight. Inquiring the cause of the dispute, we learn that the belligerents own adjoining claims, and a dispute having arisen about a boundary peg, one called the other a liar, and the result was a challenge and a "set-to."

I once heard George Francis Train give a carter the lie by characterising him as a "stupendous perverter of veracity." The man appeared puzzled, scratched his head, and tried for some time to understand the accusation, but at last he gave it up in despair, grinned all over his face, and designated G. F. T. a "blamed fool." Had the latter used the highly objectionable little three-lettered word he would have had a different answer. So in this instance the ring has been formed, and the disputants are at it "hammer and tongs." Not much harm is done, however. One gets a black eye and the other a swollen mouth. Then a stalwart digger, who could have crushed either of the combatants with a blow of his brawny fist, steps between them, pats them on the shoulder, tells them they are both good men, and suggests that honour should now be satisfied, and that the misunderstanding might be settled to the satisfaction of all concerned by appointing two of the onlookers to measure the boundaries of the claims. Neither is loth to adopt

the proposal, and in a few minutes they shake hands and return to work as if no unpleasantness had arisen between them.

These incidents are constantly taking place on Bendigo. The ground is rich ; fortunes are being made hourly ; and an encroachment of even a few inches in driving leads to angry words. Then the lie is given, and the cry taken up far and near : "A ring ! a ring !" The lie is seldom given with impunity. It is well that it should be so. If the transgressor gets the worst of the combat—as is generally the case—he learns to keep a bridle on his tongue in the future. If he is a bully, and too powerful to be chastised by the man he has insulted, there are men there to see that he does not do much harm. The great majority of the miners are of the right stamp, and dislike a bounce or a blackguard. Such gentry are shunned and made to feel uncomfortable, and in time they come to put some restraint upon their tongues.

As we pass on towards Eaglehawk, we see hundreds of men racing over a neighbouring rise, with picks and shovels over their shoulders. A fresh discovery has been made, and the cry is heard in every quarter : "Rush ho !" Soon thousands are running in mad haste to take up claims. We arrive at what is known as a "blind gully," and finding the likely ground pegged off in every direction, content ourselves with marking out a

claim ahead of the others, and then make for where a crowd of men are stationary in the centre of the gully. We find they have gathered around the shaft where gold has been struck. The man at the windlass is requested to pan out a few shovelfuls of the earth to ascertain the value of the new discovery before work is started by the recent arrivals. The prospect is only a few pennyweights to the pan, and one of the bystanders cynically remarks that it is only a "tin-pot" gully. In that way it was christened, and although a large quantity of treasure was extracted from the place later on, it was never known by any other name than Tin-pot Gully.

In a somewhat similar way all the numerous rich gullies on Bendigo were named—either from an incident that occurred at the outset of a rush, or from something connected with the surroundings. Thus California Gully was named after the Californians who had discovered it; Peg-leg from its having been opened by a wooden-legged man; Robinson Crusoe from the fact that the prospector wore a hairy cap; Eaglehawk, because of nests of that bird being seen in trees on the margin of the gully.

After a brief inspection of the workings in Peg-leg, Sailor, Eaglehawk, and other busy scenes of mining life, we made a bee-line in the direction of Ironbark, where we learned that a marvellously

rich claim had been bottomed that very morning by a couple of rich chums. It was their first attempt at gold-seeking, and they had been considered by the knowing ones to be "off the lead." But the uncertainty of gold-mining was here amply demonstrated. They sank over a "pocket" at the foot of the reef or bank that skirted the gully, and dropped upon a veritable "jeweller's shop."

When we reach the place we find a crowd of miners gathered around the claim eagerly scanning the contents of each bucket of fabulously rich soil as it is drawn to the surface by one of the lucky owners, who with flushed face and shaking hands empties it into sacks for safety's sake. Meantime a messenger has been despatched to the police quarters. Two constables soon appear, and the precious freight is conveyed to the camp to be washed out at leisure under official supervision and protection.

The owners of that despised claim extracted a fortune from it in less than a week, and probably they were on their way back to the Mother Country within a month of their arrival. That was a common occurrence on Bendigo in those days. Men amassed as much wealth in one day as would make them independent for life, if they were wise enough to know how to make good use of it.

As we proceed towards Golden Point, we see another rush in the distance. Men are coming

towards us helter-skelter, and behind them are a body of dark, olive-complexioned men, with tattooed features, and armed with picks, shovels, and other impromptu weapons, in hot pursuit of the men in front. We learn that they are New Zealand aborigines, and that some of them having discovered a rich gully, attempts had been made by a gang of bullies to measure off their claims to the limited area allowed by the regulations, and even to "jump" some of them. These fierce, untutored Maoris had no conception of the legal aspect of the question; possession with them was nine points of the law; so when the rowdy Pakehas attempted to peg them off, they resorted to hostilities, and their savage instincts being roused by the sight of blood, they chased the "pugs" off the field with what offensive weapons could be laid hold of. The general impression at that time was that all Maoris were cannibals, and although the discomfited ones—professional pugilists—would not have hesitated to attack people of other nationalities, they had a decided aversion to being "scoffed," as they called it. However that may be, the New Zealanders were allowed undisputed possession of the ground. The sympathies of the more orderly miners were with them, and general satisfaction was expressed that their antagonists had been properly handled.

Passing over towards Commissioner's Flat—in

later days known as Pall Mall—we find the redoubtable Captain Brown haranguing a knot of diggers on their grievances, and advocating physical force as the only remedy for misgovernment on the goldfields. But for that the time has not arrived. The men listen attentively to his utterances, but exhibits no outward manifestations beyond an occasional hearty “Hear, hear!” as the captain eloquently unfolds his plan of campaign. Most of them are working rich claims, and for the present they prefer to remain quiescent. So when a few days later the skipper was arrested, and forwarded under escort to Melbourne to take his trial for using seditious language, few were present to give him an encouraging send-off. His lusty oratory, however, was not forgotten by many who heard it. It materially assisted a year later in bringing about the sanguinary conflict at the Eureka Stockade, and in ending for ever abuse of power on the Victorian goldfields.

Next we come to the rude building that does duty as a courthouse, where a number of suspicious-looking persons are assembled. Something interesting is going on there. A constable informs us that “Mac” (McLachlan) “is fixin’ up criminal business, and makin’ things hot for the prisoners.” We have heard a good deal about “Bendigo Mac’s” leaning towards “Jedburgh justice” in dealing with the Bendigo criminal element. As I have



said in an earlier chapter, he had been a magistrate in Tasmania, and knew by sight nearly all the Crown prisoners there, as well as the ticket-of-leave men who had found their way to Victoria. He never forgot a face he had once seen, and was, in consequence, held in dread by "t'other siders." When one of these was charged before him for a misdemeanour, he invariably inflicted the full penalty prescribed by law—even if his guilt were not proved "beyond a reasonable doubt." On that account Bendigo had less of the criminal element than any other goldfield.

Entering the court, we find that the prisoner is suspected of being an accomplice of a man who has just been sent for trial. He gives his name as Phil Butler. The magistrate adjusts his spectacles so as to take an accurate survey of Phil, and, apparently satisfied with the scrutiny, inquires when he changed his name from Johnson, or number eighty-three at Port Macquarie? No reply is vouchsafed, and Phil sees at once that the game is up. After some hesitation, he confesses that he wished to "turn over a new leaf" in Victoria, and thought it better to alter his name. The reply of the Bench is characteristic. "It is very laudable on your part, Johnson, to turn over a new leaf. The sentence of the court is that you be imprisoned for three months in Melbourne gaol, and be kept at hard labour during that time."

Phil is taken aback, wears an appearance of injured innocence, and complains that he did not have a fair trial. But the Bench is equal to the occasion, and replies in its blandest tones that the "Court will dispense with legal technicalities and concern itself especially with justice," and orders him to be removed. The prisoner flings a wicked, defiant scowl at the magistrate as he leaves. McLachlan has observed it, and orders him to be again placed in the dock. He knows that he is dealing with an incorrigible ruffian, and soothingly informs him that additional consideration has been given to his desire "to turn over a new leaf." In order to afford him a more favourable opportunity of carrying out his praiseworthy intention, his sentence will be increased to four months.

The next case is a civil one. The owner of a restaurant for the accommodation of diggers has been summoned by his attractive female assistant for £12—wages and expenses incurred in travelling to Bendigo. She had only recently arrived in the colony, and had been engaged at Melbourne at 30s. a week and her "keep." She found on arrival that there was no private sleeping accommodation in the place, and had to occupy the same room as the owner and his wife. In stating her case, she volubly informs the Bench that she didn't like it—hasn't been used to that sort of thing; was told she would be made comfortable, and have a

nice room all to herself. Things have been grossly misrepresented, and she wishes to return to Melbourne; but defendant refuses to pay her unless she gives him a month's notice.

The magistrate has been listening attentively to her plaint, and the judicial spectacles are again placed in position. When the girl's statement has been concluded, slowly and deliberately he asks the defendant if it is really true that innocent young women have no place to sleep in but the room occupied by himself and his wife.

The man acknowledges that his accommodation is somewhat limited, but excuses himself on the ground that he has had no time to erect another compartment. He will, however, have everything "ship-shape" shortly.

On hearing this, a look of majestic indignation overspreads the magistrate's features, and in tones of suppressed wrath he ejaculates: "And this thing to have occurred in the nineteenth century, and in a British community! Verdict for the plaintiff for the full amount!"

The young person thus befriended has evidently had some experience in life, and considers the time opportune for properly bleeding her late employer. She whimperingly remarks that she declined a good situation through the glowing accounts given her of Bendigo, and then demurely inquires if something for "damages" cannot be

added to the compensation awarded for breach of agreement.

The request has the effect of concentrating upon the fair applicant a searching scrutiny from the magistrate. At first she is regarded with wonder, then with sympathetic gravity, and finally an unmistakable look of admiration is discernible in his features. The litigant's musical voice, comely appearance, lithesome figure, and tidy apparel have done their work. "Damages!" he exclaims, as if astounded at so moderate a request. "Most decidedly! £10 damages!—and" (to the police attendant, with a withering glance at defendant), "Sergeant O'Grady, you will make a careful examination at once of all restaurants, and report if any are without proper sleeping accommodation for young female assistants."

It was no surprise to me to learn later on that the sagacious young woman received an offer of marriage, when leaving the court, from a rival restaurant keeper, who had been listening to the case, and, further, that the pair were yoked a week later, and drew to their shanty most of the customers of her late employer.

I should add to these recollections of McLachlan that he was indebted to O'Grady, the assistant magistrate, for much information regarding many old offenders brought before him. Like his chief, O'Grady had had considerable experience in Van

Diemen's Land, and, besides possessing an excellent memory for faces and events, had kept a written record of the names and offences of the more prominent convicts. From the severity of their sentences McLachlan and his coadjutor were both hated and feared by the dregs of the Bendigo population. McLachlan knew it, and knew also that he went in danger, but that did not deter him from unflinchingly doing his duty. For some eighteen years he was a terror to evil-doers and the praise of those who did well, and on his retirement from office over £1,000 was collected and presented to him.

Leaving the court, we hear the "town crier" ringing his bell. "Oh yes—oh yes!—oh yes! This is to give notice to all and sundry that Lolar Montes, the late queen of Bavary, will appear in a bran' new startlin' tragedy to-night at the theatre—to be follered by a side-splittin' comedy. No reserved seats. Commences at eight punctally. Roll up!—roll up!—roll up! God save the Queen!"

Even at this early stage the luxuries and embellishments that quickly follow on rich gold discoveries are noticeable in several places. Canvas and calico are being superseded by more substantial structures of sheet iron and weatherboards, indicative of faith in the permanent prosperity of the field. Bendigo boasts of a theatre, and no

less a personage than an erstwhile favourite of Royalty is to be the principal performer this evening. Before leaving the Mother Country I had read and heard much of the notorious Lola Montes—actress, adventuress, and mistress of the weak-minded Louis—and I decide to be among the audience. In a few minutes the primitive edifice is so crowded that barely standing room can be obtained. A written placard is posted on the door, giving the titles of the pieces and the names of the performers. The admission fee is five shillings a head, and the packed houses every night demonstrate that the enterprise of the owner or lessee is justified.

There is no mistaking the leading “star” when she makes her appearance. She has evidently inherited the best points of her aristocratic Irish father and her handsome Creole mother. One has only to look at her magnificent dark, flashing eyes, her willowy form, the traces of former beauty, and her lithe, active movements to see that one is in the presence of a very remarkable woman, and it is not hard to believe that she should have been able to bewitch a king and cost him his throne. After her expatriation from Munich she gravitated to California, and again went on the boards. She soon tired of 'Frisco, and now we have her on Bendigo.

The burst of applause that greeted Lola's ap-

pearance has subsided, and scarcely a sound is heard but the voice of the speaker as she takes up her part. The diggers are intently watching her. Most of them are conversant with her parentage and antecedents. Although announced as sensational by the bellman and the written notice, the piece is tame and unedifying to most of those present. The subordinate members of the company are amusingly deficient in their parts—the voice of the prompter being distinctly audible in every part of the building, and provoking at times uproarious mirth. Lola's delivery is somewhat imperfect, and not clearly understood by many of her patrons. But they are in a good-natured mood. She is a stranger and a foreigner, and they exhibit an amount of forbearance for shortcomings that is often found wanting in more select theatrical assemblages.

But an unexpected interruption now occurs. The drama is about half through, and a loud peal of thunder indicates that the storm which has been threatening all day is about to break over Bendigo. A little later a terrific crash is heard, as if thousands of cannon were discharged simultaneously, and a blinding flash of forked lightning passes through the roof of the building and wrecks a part of the stage scenery. Lola Montes has been within a few feet of it, but is the only one present who looks unscared. Without the slightest tremor

in her voice, she announces that "there is to be a little thunder and lightning in the latter part of the play, but if this sort of thing goes on" (pointing to the wrecked scenery) "we shall not want any sham affair—only a little brandy and——"

She pauses abruptly, either from want of language or ashamed to complete the sentence, and leaves us to guess the unfinished portion by saying, with a coquettish shake of her shapely head and a musical laugh, "You know!"

If doubtful as to what she was about to suggest, most of us knew, at least, that we had before us an astute and fascinating woman—one possessed of iron nerves as well as of unbridled ambition. But her frivolities, and the wonderful self-control she displays on so trying an occasion, are regarded with admiration by many of the diggers, and we hear such expressions as—"Isn't she a stunner!" "Bravo, Lola!" and from a pock-marked, rugged-faced man, with red hair and an aggressive cocked nose, in the front seats, "Oh, but you're a darlint, Loly! 'Tis a pity yez aren't some dacent man's wife!"—implying that he (the speaker) would be a fitting consort for the late "Queen." He is a lucky digger, and considers himself quite good enough to mate with a scion of Royalty. His face is all aglow with suppressed admiration and indulgence in rum. His apparent commiseration of Lola's forlorn celibacy evokes



peals of laughter in which the "ex-Queen" herself heartily joins.

Although rain is still descending heavily, the receding thunder denotes that the storm is nearly spent, and the play is resumed. But the recent common danger has broken the reserve that has hitherto existed between "her Majesty" and the audience, and she is now familiarly addressed by the diggers as "Lola." She is requested to "stash" tragedy and give them comedy. She essays to carry out the entire programme, but they won't have it. They want something to send them away happy.

Making a virtue of necessity, the management cut short the melodrama. The comedy turns out to be just as weak, but it affords Lola a better opportunity to display her shapely limbs in a fandango dance.

We have some four miles to travel to our tent, but the night is still young, and the air deliciously clear and bracing after the recent storm. We retrace our steps leisurely; for there is something animating and interesting to be seen in every gully. Rich leads have been found in all, and their margins are thickly lined with tents. Music, song, and laughter are heard in every direction. The German camps are strong in music, but they lapse into silence when stirring martial strains are commenced on the bagpipes by enthusiastic Scot-

tish Highlanders, who are numerous on Bendigo, every gully, indeed, having its piper and pipes.

In Golden Gully we find a party of four full-blooded negroes entertaining a group of miners. One of them is singing a dirge bearing on slave life in the Southern States, and is accompanying himself on a banjo. There is an amount of pathos in his voice and demeanour that excites the sympathy of the listeners. Probably he is an escaped slave himself, or has in mind some loved relative or friend in bondage as he plaintively chants :

O poor Lucy Neal ! O dear Lucy Neal !  
If I had you by my side how happy I would feel !

But the mercurial temperament of the negro race becomes manifest when one of his mates takes up the running—

Come, gals, let us sing,—  
Don't you hear the banjo ring, ring, ring ?

and as banjo, bones, and tambourine assist in the amusement, the clouds that hung over the lamentable position of Lucy Neal are dispelled ; the springs of hilarity are loosened ; the quartette yell, and laugh, and romp with an *abandon* that can be only badly imitated by other races.

The scene, song, and music have an exhilarating effect upon the bystanders, and in a pleasant mood we pass on to the hill that leads to our tent in Kangaroo Gully. Here something

fresh arrests our attention. A party of four Britishers or Americans are seated around a camp fire, and one of them is singing the latest popular ballad, "Ben Bolt of the Salt Sea Wave." The singer has a rich, powerful bass voice, into which he throws much feeling. We hear the song for the first time, and are fascinated by the pathetic sentiments—

There's a change in the things that we loved, Ben Bolt ;  
There's a change from the old to the new.

Fifty years have gone since I saw the singer and heard his song, and both have ever since held a strong place in memory. And to-night in fancy he is again before me, and I hear his rich, deep-toned, far-reaching voice reverberating throughout the gullies of old Bendigo, and once more telling—

Of all the crowd that assembled then  
There's only you, mate, and I.

A little later the only sound heard is the barking of a dog, as some solitary digger, returning from a mild carouse with a friend, steers too close to a strange tent.

At 11.30 the vast masses of humanity on Bendigo are enjoying the rest that is begotten of health and hard physical toil, and over the great tent-studded field reigns a silence as profound as when

the solitary shepherd recently pastured his sheep on these gullies and flats that contained under a few feet of soil untold wealth.

Such, with slight variations, was life on Bendigo in '52-'53.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## DAN BURNS STRIKES AGAIN.

HAVING after about five months become possessed of a liberal share of the riches of Bendigo, I was suddenly seized with an uncontrollable longing for enjoyment of scenes more in harmony with my tastes. The constant rushing and pushing, measuring off of ground, quarrels and fights over encroachments on claims, and the generally uproarious life led by a majority of the population, became distasteful, and my thoughts reverted to the place that appeared so inviting when I first sighted it, and where I had made my initial discovery of the precious metal. As a locality to reside in, Jim Crow had advantages over any part of Victoria that I had seen. Bendigo was rich in gold, but it had no other attraction. There was no pleasant scenery to relieve the eye; water was scarce; the hills were barren, and covered with heavy deposits of ironstone and quartz; while the intense heat and the clouds of dust raised by northerly "bursters" during the summer season were hard to bear. How different was Sailor Creek, with its cold, refreshing, crystal streams in almost every gully; its moderate heat in sum-

mer, its bracing, health-giving atmosphere in winter! Game of every description abounded there; and attractive scenery and quiet, sequestered spots were to be met with in all directions, where one could commune with Nature.

Then there came a craving to make further investigation of places where I had met with encouraging prospects of gold and rubies, and to explore a locality where I had unearthed stone weapons and other relics of bygone ages. Many curios were discovered there and elsewhere in Australia by the gold miners, and thrown aside as valueless, that would be regarded as priceless by antiquaries.

It might be supposed that Jim Crow would be the last place on earth I should care to revisit after my experiences in it, and with the likelihood that I should be brought into further contact with the ruffians who had caused me to leave it. Yet the impulse to be again there became irresistible, and although doing well on Bendigo, and having an unlimited area of rich ground to operate upon that I had just discovered, I was back in Melbourne in '53 with the object of returning to the scenes that had so suddenly taken a strong hold upon my fancy.

We were heartily welcomed by our old friend Cartwright, and learned from him that nearly all the bushrangers had recently cleared out from

the district for the Ovens, McIvor, and other new fields, but that Dan Burns was still on the creek. No one could tell how he was living, as he was never seen at work. Only one party had "set into" the ground we had abandoned the preceding winter, and they had already taken some sixteen pounds' weight of gold from it.

After erecting our tent, my first business was to recover the mining tools which we had buried some six months before. On arriving at the abandoned shaft where we had deposited them, we found that someone had been prospecting there, and that the plant had been "sprung." The two men who were working in our old ground could give no intelligence as to who had extracted them, but they thought the "old hand" living in a gully about half a mile further up could enlighten us on the subject. They said they had seen little of him, as he seemed to be leading a kind of hermit's life, but they believed he had been drinking heavily.

Making my way to Burns's tent, I found him, although more dissipated-looking than ever, subdued in manner, and apparently pleased to see me. I inquired if he knew anything of our tools, and he replied that he did not; but before he had time to say more my eyes lighted on an axe that I at once recognised as part of my property. When I pointed to it, and remarked that it was

an old friend, he saw that it was useless to deny knowledge of the tools, and confessed that he had been observing us from the hills when we secreted them, and had appropriated the lot as perquisites—goldfields' flotsam and jetsam—and he offered to return them for the sum of fifteen pounds. As we felt that it would be useless to urge our rights of ownership, and wished to set into work in peace, the bargain was concluded, and we left him.

Three months of quiet, uninterrupted, and fairly recompensed work followed. During that time we did not again get sight of Burns, although his tent was still in the place where I had interviewed him. But passing an abandoned shaft one morning, and hearing sounds, I was surprised to discover the miserable outcast at the bottom flourishing a sheath knife, and incoherently threatening some imaginary foe. From his bloodshot eyes and vacant expression it was plain that strong drink had at last completed its work. He appeared to have degenerated into a hopeless maniac, and in a pitiful, whining way he implored that I would not let "them" know where he had hidden himself. By "them" he meant Black Harry and the dog Captain, who had been chasing him about the creek the whole of the previous night. Harry, it seems, had sworn "to take him to the lowest depths of hell."



Seeing how the case stood, and desirous not to incur his resentment while in so dangerous a mood, I endeavoured to appease him with the assurance that I would make an effort to discover "them" and put them off his track, and then left to consult with my mate.

That evening, after we had decided to inform the Spring Creek police of his condition, a prospector who had been trying some new ground in the vicinity of Burns's tent called upon us with the intelligence that there was something seriously wrong with him. He had heard him cursing, groaning, and struggling, and begged me to go with him to see what was amiss. An uncanny sight was presented to view on our opening the door of the tent. Burns was lying on his back with his throat cut from ear to ear. The knife I had seen in his possession in the morning lay close to his outstretched hand, and his tent was more like a slaughter pen than a human habitation. Although his body must have been drained of nearly all its vital fluid, he was still alive, and a gleam of consciousness seemed to overspread his features when I entered the tent. I saw that the main artery had not been severed, and that with skilful treatment his life might be preserved. But where could one look for skill in such a place? Even if a doctor could be found willing to come, fifty miles had to be tra-

versed, and by that time the man would be beyond all hope of recovery. In such an emergency we had to depend on resources within reach. Fortunately, we had with us appliances for repairing our tent and clothes, and without much difficulty we managed to stitch up the ghastly wound. It was a disagreeable duty for a novice, but it had to be performed to save Burns's life; and it was satisfactory to find that we thus succeeded in preventing further loss of blood. He spoke but once during the time we were operating upon him. When I chanced to give him some pain in my somewhat clumsy operations, he looked me straight in the face and gurgled out: "You are having your revenge!"

After completing our unpleasant task, we placed him in as comfortable a position as his quarters would permit, and I decided to remain near him until morning, intending, when relieved by the man who had assisted in the operation, to proceed to Spring Creek and report the case to the Government officials.

For about an hour Burns remained passive, but at the end of that time madness again seized upon him, and again he importuned me not to let Black Harry come near him. "I have just seen him," he moaned, "looking through the tent door, and he has sworn that he'd take me to hell."

Noting his terrified aspect when he uttered these words, it occurred to me that by practising on his fears I might learn what I had often desired to know—whether he and Bat had really murdered Harry.

So dependent was Burns upon me for help that he became pliable as a child, and by persuading him that I would prevent the spectres from further molesting him if he made a full confession of all that transpired the morning he and Bat followed Harry into Bullarook Forest, I obtained the desired information.

Fearing that Harry, in his then repentant mood, would not only divulge former hideous crimes that the pair had committed, but would also frustrate the murderous designs they entertained towards me and my mates, the miscreants tracked his footsteps with the object of effectually silencing him.

They came upon their victim about seven miles beyond Cartwright's station. Harry had lit a fire in a piece of open bush some few chains from the track, and the smoke enabled them to come upon their quarry. He had partaken of some tea, and was asleep when they discovered him. The dog, having lived for months in their tent with his master, gave no notice of their approach, and both were shot through the head and died without a struggle. The bodies were first dragged

some distance into the bush and concealed in the hollow trunk of a gum tree, and were buried the following day.

While I was absorbed in thought over this atrocious crime, Burns endeavoured to tear away the bandage we had fastened round his throat. He was so weak, however, that I had little difficulty in restraining him. But he raved incessantly for fully an hour of horrible crimes he had perpetrated in the past.

About midnight he again dropped off into an uneasy slumber, and I went outside to inhale fresh air. Overcome by the day's fatigue and the quietude that reigned around, and in the belief that the wretched castaway would rest some time, also that in his prostrated condition he could not travel any distance, I lay down at the foot of a tree close to the edge of the terrace that bordered the creek.

It may seem to the reader a piece of reckless hardihood that I should have remained any length of time alone in the company of so dangerous a character, even prostrated as he was by his self-inflicted injuries. But men held their lives in their hands in those days, and were always armed. So feeling fairly secure where I lay, a sense of drowsiness stole upon me, and in a few minutes I was asleep.

But the incidents of the day, and the mur-

derer's recent confession, were of too startling a nature to permit of refreshing rest. It was a fitful, uneasy, dreamful obliviousness I had passed into. First there appeared to my perturbed senses home, relatives, and friends beyond the seas, and especially distinct a departed loved one, on whom my thoughts frequently centred when I was alone. Then I saw Burns and his companion in sin in a sequestered spot standing by a new-made grave, and the ghastly remains of Black Harry and his faithful dog lying near, awaiting interment. As I gazed, horror-stricken, at the yellow, emaciated features of the bandit, sounds appeared to be borne to me of threats of vengeance from Burns; and then there was presented to my astonished vision, with irresistible distinctness, the figure of the friend on whom my thoughts had just been dwelling. So vividly did she appear, with outstretched arm and hand, as if warning me of danger, that I convulsively raised myself to a sitting position, and endeavoured to collect my scattered senses.

For a few seconds I experienced the bewilderment that follows from a sudden awakening out of sleep. Then my eyes rested on the wretched maniac whom I had been befriending, and who was now standing within a few paces of me, armed with the knife he had attempted his life with, his eyes blazing like two live coals.

Constant familiarity with danger since first I became acquainted with Burns, and the habit thus acquired of thinking fast and acting promptly, now proved highly serviceable.

To attempt to rise was out of the question, for, being close to me, he would have been upon me before I could assume a posture of defence, and would probably have inflicted fatal injuries. So it flashed upon me that my only safety lay in rolling bodily down the six or eight feet of descent that lay between the position I rested upon and the bed of the creek. This I did, and from the opposite bank I saw the madman striking frantically at the ground I had just vacated. Then, apparently exhausted with his efforts, he sank down to the ground, raving and uttering threats of vengeance.

From the savage rage he displayed at my having escaped, it was clear that he again intended murder, and, releasing my revolver, for a moment the impulse obtruded that it was a duty and a mercy to end his career of crime and misery. But the voice of conscience appeared to whisper, "Hold! The All-seeing has him in charge, and will requite in His own good time." Then came the reflection that he should not, in his insane state, be held accountable for his acts. But still more potent to assuage anger was the thought of my better angel—presented so vividly to sight and mind in my dream—and the code of Scriptural

texts she had handed me years before as my guide through life, one of them being, "Vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord." So anger and resentment were disarmed, and leaving the maniac in the hands of God I went to my tent.

The warning that came to me so clearly when my enemy was about to make his third attempt on my life has never been explained to my satisfaction as merely resulting from the startling events of the previous day. May it not be possible that intense concentration of the mind on loved friends or relatives who have passed into Spirit Land can—like earnest, heartfelt prayer to the Throne of God—bring succour in time of need to those with whom they were in sympathy here? Even now verging as I am towards the sunset of life, and free from preconceived theories, I incline to the belief that for some hidden purpose a superhuman force then interposed in my behalf, and I feel with Schiller that "the immortal soul does not share the exhaustion of matter. During the sleep of the body she unfolds her radiant wings and flies forth, God knows whither. What she then does none can tell ; but inspiration now and then betrays the secret of her nocturnal visit."

Accompanied by my mate and by the man who had assisted in doctoring Burns, I returned next morning in order that the madman might be so effectually secured as to prevent him from further injuring himself or others. The first thing we

saw was his sheath knife, buried to the hilt in the spot where I had slept. There was no sign of his presence in or near his encampment, and although diligent search was made in the surrounding bush, not the slightest clue to his whereabouts rewarded our efforts, and there was nothing to do but to report his disappearance to the Government officials at Spring Creek.

Three days were spent by troopers in scouring the country, and, under the impression that in his demented condition he had wandered to some nook in the almost inaccessible forest and there perished, further search was abandoned.

On the ninth day after Burns disappeared, a stockman called at our tent on his way to the Government camp, and informed us that he had discovered the body of a man in a hollow log near Bullarook creek, distant some five miles. He had been searching for a stray horse, and in passing down the margin of the creek noticed a blucher boot lying on the bank half filled with water. It being a lonely place, seldom visited except on missions similar to his own, curiosity led him to alight from his horse and examine the boot. Glancing around, he saw the fellow to it protruding from a hollow tree trunk; and further examination revealed that the body of a man was inside the trunk. No response coming to several signals, he concluded that it was lifeless, and, sharing the



common dislike to handle a corpse before it came under the notice of constituted authority, he left to report the discovery to the police at Spring Creek.

From the man's story and the description of the boot I entertained no doubt that it was the body of Burns he had dropped across, and as it was then late I persuaded him to remain with us that night, an indefinable feeling of curiosity having taken possession of me to see the last of one who had been a source of anxiety and danger to me almost from my first arrival in the colony.

Next morning we reached the camp, and two constables were despatched with a light cart to bring the remains to Spring Creek for interment. In company with these and the stockman I arrived at the secluded spot whither in his frenzied condition Burns had wandered.

It would be difficult to conjure up anything more revolting than the sight that met our gaze when he—not *it*—was drawn out of the charred receptacle which he had chosen as a hiding-place, and in which, it would appear, he had sought to escape from the spectre of the murdered Black Harry. Wonderful to record, he was still alive. Nearly a fortnight had elapsed since he had tasted solid food, having lived solely upon water during that time, and made use of his boot as a drinking vessel. His covering consisted only of an old

shirt, trousers, and a sock on the right foot. Through bush conflagrations the inner portion of the log had become coated with charcoal, and his skin and clothing were completely blackened by constant contact with it; both eyes were glued together by sandy blight, while the ghastly and partially closed wound and smears of clotted blood about his throat and breast made a sickening spectacle. In addition, the exposed portions of his body bore evidence of having been bitten by centipedes or other venomous insects.

Thus situated, the wretched creature must, one would think, have suffered the tortures of hell itself during the ten days he had lain in his poison-infected prison; yet the only return he made to those who were now ready to succour him was to assail them with horrible curses and blasphemies.

As he lay on the ground before us, crime-tainted, robbed of human semblance, and muttering hideous imprecations, he could only be likened to one of the lost souls depicted in Dante's "Inferno"; and, abnormally wicked though his life had been, horrible as he was to look upon, and bereft of hope, one could not withhold from him feelings of pity.

After pouring a little weak brandy and water down his throat, we lifted him into the cart and conveyed him to Spring Creek. Thence he was

at once forwarded on to Castlemaine, where medical assistance could be procured, temporary hospital accommodation having just recently been erected there. But he did not reach Castlemaine alive. On the return of the constables I learned that he expired when about two-thirds of the journey had been accomplished, and that with his last breath he defied God and invoked curses upon imaginary enemies.

Thus passed away one of the vilest scoundrels Australia has ever seen. Often there were redeeming qualities to be found among the ruffians who infested the goldfields in the early fifties; but for a combination of vices, few, if any, could equal Dan Burns. If a full record of his atrocious career could be furnished it would disclose as much unadulterated devilry as could probably be found in any member of the human race.

Looking back now upon my experience with Burns and others of his class, I feel that the widespread crime that then prevailed in Australia would have been most effectually repressed by a suspension of the law, and by allowing the miners, as in California, to cure the evil by the aid of vigilance committees and Judge Lynch. Had this course been adopted, hundreds of thousands of pounds would have been saved to the country, and security to life and property would have become established many years sooner.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

PETER LALOR AND THE FIGHT AT THE EUREKA  
STOCKADE.

FOLLOWING closely on my experiences of the criminal element in Australia came an eventful episode that may here be fittingly incorporated in my memoirs. Coming from one who was an eye-witness of most of the incidents leading up to the fight at Eureka Stockade, and of the final collapse of the movement to establish an Australian Republic, this record may be useful to some future historian of the Island Continent.

During my maiden trip to the Antipodes one man attracted my attention and excited my curiosity above all the rest. He was a picture of robust manhood, and from his demeanour I surmised he was a man who thought for himself, and that something would be heard of him later on. After a time a friendly feeling became established between us, and I discovered in him a man of high intelligence and of sterling worth, yet one who might be led into unwise courses by sheer impulsiveness. Still, he possessed important qualifications for a successful career—ambition,

energy, and courage. I need not apologise for mentioning his name in my memoirs. It belongs to the people of Australia. He has passed away to the Unknown Land. But for the services he rendered to the working classes, especially the miners, and the blow he struck at official despotism and corruption, the name of Peter Lalor should be kept green in the hearts of dwellers in these Colonies.

Although possessed of many attributes essential in a leader of men, he was wanting in others. As a trained military officer he would probably have been a great success—as a statesman he would have been a failure. As a demolisher of pernicious systems of government his services could be relied upon—as a builder of improved fabrics on their ruins he would have been found defective. And so it was to the advantage of Australia that the fight at Eureka Stockade went against him. Had he attained the object he risked his life for on that memorable Sunday morning at Ballarat, Australian independence would have been proclaimed; hostilities would have ensued with the Mother Country; and such bitter feeling as has existed against her for the past century among people of the United States of America might have been cherished in Australia. Apart from this, there was not the material in the colony at this time for forming a stable republican government, nor

was there sufficient population to repel Mongolian invasion ; and the probability is that if the military had been defeated at Eureka the greater part of Australia would have passed away, for a time at least, from the British race.

I speak of Mr. Lalor as I interpreted his character—and few had a better opportunity of knowing him. Descended from a family of high social status and political influence in Ireland, his leading characteristics were patriotic ardour and a warm attachment to the land of his birth. He never tired of descanting upon the wrongs of Ireland. I inferred from his conversations that either he himself or some of his relatives had been associated with the leaders of the rising of '48 ; and disgust at the ignominious collapse of that movement was his principal reason, as in the case of many other eminent Irishmen, for migrating to the Antipodes. The prospect of acquiring wealth on the goldfields did not seem to interest Lalor ; indeed, he appeared to have made up his mind before he left to engage in politics in the land of his adoption. I gathered that much from him one afternoon during the voyage out in the course of a discussion on Irish affairs. He was a strong believer in physical force for redressing the wrongs of his native country ; and when I ventured to remark that any effort in that direction against the immense power and wealth of Britain would be futile, and that the

establishment of a peasant proprietary on the land was the true solution of the difficulty, his reply was remarkably prophetic.

"Well," he said, "we shall see if a better state of things cannot be worked out in Australia. I intend to have a voice in its government before two years are over. The Lalors have always had a weakness for politics. My father sat in the British Parliament for Queen's County, and I intend to sit in the Victorian Parliament after I find out where improvements are needed."

At the time this prediction appeared to me improbable of fulfilment. Whether it was justified by events the sequel will show.

When gold was first discovered in Victoria the colony was ultra-conservative. The officials were mostly members of influential English families, and the management of public affairs was principally in the hands of pastoral tenants and bankers. These naturally viewed with alarm the irruption of a mining population. The stations became almost deserted for the goldfields, and before long drastic laws were enacted for harassing the diggers. Unfortunately, in such an emergency Victoria had in Latrobe a weak Governor. He possessed no administrative ability, and by the advice of his executive he issued a proclamation asserting the right of the Crown to all gold found on unalienated lands. He notified further that

no person would be allowed to dig or search for it without a licence, the cost of which would be 30s. monthly.

From the first strong objections were raised, but without effect, against the impost, and it was this unpopular tax that led to all the after-trouble between the miners and the civil authorities. The reason given for imposing the tax was that the Civil Service expenditure had increased so enormously, especially on the goldfields, that it was absolutely necessary. It was also contended that as the diggers had caused the difficulty, the burden should be placed on their shoulders; and later on it was decided that the fee would be increased to £3 per month.

Although many of the diggers had been fortunate, the great majority were only making a bare living, and some not even that. The first indignation meeting against the licence fee was held at Forest Creek, and so outspoken were the leaders, and so unanimous the miners on the other fields against the injustice of the increase, that it was withdrawn a fortnight after the issue of the proclamation levying it. But the mischief had been done. A feeling of discontent had been created that only required additional obnoxious legislation to be kindled into rebellion.

The climax was not long in coming. Unknown to Latrobe and his executive, in the rough



garb of diggers were men who had higher aspirations than mere gold-seeking. The few previous years had been eventful in Europe. Revolutions had broken out in Germany, Ireland, France, and elsewhere, and numerous collisions had occurred between the populace and the military. Many who had taken the lead in these contests were intelligent and experienced persons who came to Victoria mainly in the hope of building up a far better nation than could be found in misruled and soldier-ridden Europe. It was with men such as these that Governors Latrobe and Hotham had to deal when obnoxious proclamations were issued regarding goldfields management; but the one that exasperated the mining population most was that authorising bi-weekly digger hunts for licences by the police, who were composed principally of ne'er-do-wells of influential British families. A number of these black sheep arrived by every ship, bringing letters of recommendation from friends in high positions; and in a short time nearly all the Government offices were occupied by people of that class. Too lazy, or unused, to work, and ashamed to beg, a billet on the goldfields or enrolment in the police force was the only choice left to them. A trained police force would have understood the temper of the mining population, free as they then were from restraint and leading so independent an existence.

Governor Latrobe had been superseded by Sir Charles Hotham, a British naval captain, and, as might be expected from such training, pretty much of an autocrat. With quarter-deck absolutism he decreed that licence fees should be paid punctually, and that strict search for unauthorised miners should be made by the goldfields officials.

The Governor's advisers, and those acquainted with the temper of the diggers, suggested an export duty on gold as the fairest way to raise revenue from the mines, but, like most old-time man-of-war martinets, Governor Hotham stiffened all the more when opposition in any shape or form was offered to his arbitrary manifestoes, and his orders were zealously given effect to by the "new chum" policemen. A digger hunt to them was as exhilarating as a fox-hunt would have been in England, and on each occasion dozens of respectable men, whose only crime was that they were unfortunate, and were unable to pay the licence fee, were manacled like felons, and in that state exposed to public gaze. Such as could not be accommodated in the lock-ups were shackled to trees, and armed sentries were placed over them until punishment could be meted out to them.

The digger hunts were not, however, without their amusing features. For example, at a place near Creswick Creek, about the time of the Bal-

larat riots, there were some six hundred men, none of whom had a licence. One morning we received information from a horseman who had just arrived from Castlemaine that a body of police were coming the following day to collect the fees. The ground was a narrow flat, between steep ranges from 700 to 800 feet high. An impromptu meeting was held, and it was unanimously decided that no licences should be taken out, and that each of us should supply himself with rations and take to the ranges when the police appeared. A scout was stationed in the top of a tree to give warning of their approach, and when the signal agreed upon was made no more amusing sight could be witnessed than the retreat of the miners up the precipitous sides of the ranges, where in security they "Joe'd" and jeered the police to their hearts' content.

The *sobriquet* "Joe," by the way, invariably angered the police, especially when trumpeted from thousands of miners' throats. The gibe originated on the occasion of Governor Latrobe's first visit to Ballarat. Almost every month during the previous year proclamations had been issued on the different fields signed "Walter Joseph Latrobe," and when he first appeared at Ballarat with a tall hat and frock coat the diggers greeted him familiarly as "Joe." Later on the term was applied to the Commissioners and Civil Servants,

and ultimately to the police force when they approached the workings. Even unofficial visitors to the field were allowed no peace until they had donned the orthodox serge jumper and "billy-cock" or cabbage tree hat.

As it was impossible for the troopers to make use of their horses in precipitous ground such as that referred to, some of them dismounted, and succeeded in overtaking a few of the least active of the miners; but these were soon rescued, and their captors rolled to the foot of the hill. Meanwhile hundreds of fires were lighted on the shelves of the steep hillsides, and the "wall-flowers," pleased at having evaded the licence hunters, passed the time smoking, relating experiences, and singing old familiar songs of their native lands. An early moon was rising above the lofty trees on the summit of the wall-sided hills, and threw a weird sheen over the novel surroundings of a place that a few months before was in a state of nature.

Towards midnight it became evident to the officer in charge of the police that no fees could be extracted from the diggers on this occasion, and as he had directions to visit another new rush at some distance and be back at headquarters on a certain day, the order was given to mount, and the troop departed with a ringing cheer from the occupants of the hillsides. To do the police inspector justice, he enjoyed the retreat of the diggers

and the "chaffing" his men received quite as much as the miners themselves. If there had been more men like him in the force the disastrous fight at Eureka would never have taken place.

At Adelaide Gully, Bendigo, some time afterwards, I witnessed a digger hunt attended with similar ludicrous results. The workings were shallow, and the gully was tunnelled for fully two miles where the lead of gold had been uninterruptedly followed. There was also a network of side drives resembling a rabbit warren. With few exceptions the workers were in possession of licences; but they decided to have some amusement at the expense of the police. As the day on which they would visit the place was known, it was arranged that the miners should take to the workings, and enjoy a game of hide and seek with the licence hunters. Accordingly, when these put in an appearance, a general retreat was made to the underground drives, and orders were issued to the police to follow and arrest as many as possible. As it was dark as Erebus in the workings, the only result of their visit was to render the pursuers' uniforms useless for further service through contact with wet pipe-clay and mullock. None of the miners could be approached in the narrow, tortuous workings, and in the evening those of them who possessed licences came to the surface, produced them when requested, and

went unconcernedly about their ordinary business, to the disgust of the police; while those who had not the necessary authority to dig remained below until the signal was given that "the enemy" had departed.

The first actual collision between police and miners in connection with "digger hunts" occurred at the Ovens, where, in attempting to escape, a man was shot dead by a constable. One of Governor Latrobe's pets—as they were then called—nearly lost his life in a *mêlée* that ensued over that tragic affair.

The next disturbance took place at Forest Creek, where a store was burned down by an inspector of police on the supposition that the owner was a sly grog seller. There appeared to be no foundation for the accusation, and the man whose property had been thus wantonly destroyed was afterwards awarded some £400 by the Government.

Later on at Bendigo indignation meetings were held to denounce the gross mismanagement of goldfields affairs, and additional military and police forces were ordered there to overawe the miners. The leading spirit of the movement there was Captain Brown, who, as I have said, was made prisoner and sent to Melbourne to take his trial for incitation to breaches of the peace.

It was at Ballarat, however, that the most in-

flammable part of the population was assembled. The pioneers of the field were principally Irishmen, and they were soon reinforced by large numbers of their compatriots. Germany and other European countries also were strongly represented there. Unfortunately, on this field were stationed the most unpopular of the gold-fields officials—people without the slightest qualification for allaying the widespread irritation that prevailed. Many of them had scarcely attained to the age of manhood. “Here, you fellow, show your licence!” was a common style in which these fledglings would address the miners, many of whom, although dressed in rough attire, were of the best blood of Britain, and had graduated at Oxford or Cambridge, or at Scottish or Irish universities.

The sale of spirituous liquors had been prohibited on the diggings almost from their first discovery. But it was found after a time that cure for the evil was worse than the disease itself. No official supervision could prevent the smuggling of liquors, mostly of the vilest description, and it was decided after a time that the best way to control the trade would be to issue licences for their sale. Among those who were thus permitted to engage in the traffic was a ruffian named Bentley, who had served several years of convict life in Norfolk Island. His place—the Eureka

Hotel—was the resort of most of the camp officials, and it was understood that many of them were indebted to him for pecuniary assistance. The resident police magistrate acknowledged after his dismissal that several of the officials were even more corrupt than himself, and were indebted to Bentley for large sums of money. With such friends "at court" he was in the habit of acting high-handedly to visitors. So it came about that a miner, who called at his place one night for refreshment after closing time, and on being refused continued to demand it, was thrown out on the highway by Bentley, and in the scuffle lost his life. When the case against Bentley was dismissed by Police Magistrate Dewes, it was felt that the edifice of official mal-administration had received its coping-stone, and the tide of discontent rose higher and higher. The universal feeling was that a miscarriage of justice had taken place, and in the evening a large gathering of miners assembled in front of the hotel and threatened Bentley. The police were sent to protect the house, but their presence, and that of their unpopular chief, served but to increase the indignation of the crowd.

The lamp in front of the hotel was first demolished, and the crashing noise of the glass stimulated the miners to further mischief. In a few minutes all the windows were smashed, and then the work of devastation commenced in earnest.



The building was rushed, and beer, spirits, bedding, furniture, and everything contained therein were brought outside. A bonfire was made of the furniture, and casks and bottles of liquor were smashed, and the contents allowed to run to waste. Lastly, the building itself was burnt to the ground. Bentley and his wife barely escaped with their lives through the back entrance to the police camp. A shot was fired at him in retreating, and general regret was felt that the aim was inaccurate.

Three men were arrested for burning the building, and sent to Melbourne for trial. They were found guilty, and sentenced to various terms of incarceration. At the same sessions, Bentley, who had been re-arrested, was again arraigned for the murder of the man Scobie, and, being found guilty of manslaughter, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment with hard labour.

Delegates were now sent from Ballarat to Melbourne to represent the unfairness of punishing the three men convicted of burning the building, but they were unfavourably received by the Governor and his executive; and on receipt of their reply some 12,000 miners assembled on Bakery Hill and passed resolutions in favour of reform in the administration of goldfields affairs.

Further disturbances being feared, additional troops were forwarded to Ballarat. On their arrival, one of their vans was upset and arms and

ammunition were wrested from the soldiers. Several shots were exchanged, and some half a dozen of the military were wounded. This was the first serious collision with the troops.

Next day a gathering of some 10,000 miners was harangued by Peter Lalor and others. Lalor carried the meeting with him by his fervid denunciation of official misrule and corruption, and a resolution was unanimously adopted that all existing licences should be burned, and that no more should be taken out. Accordingly, fires were at once lit, and those present in possession of licences threw them to the flames. This act clearly indicated that if another digger hunt took place blood would be shed.

Notwithstanding the extreme gravity of the position, a further raid was instituted by the police, and eight unlicensed miners were taken to the camp as prisoners; and, as a result, there was a meeting in the evening, and the Australian flag, white stars on a blue ground, was unfurled. Lalor's stormy eloquence on this occasion carried everything before it. He warned the mercurial assemblage that a collision was inevitable if they intended to redeem the promise made to rescue any of their number who should be arrested, and he was unanimously chosen commander-in-chief.

A deputation was at once sent to demand the release of the eight prisoners. The effort was un-

successful, and no other course now appeared open than a contest with the military. From a man of Lalor's temperament, moderation, in the face of such official aggressiveness, was out of the question, so next day drill and the erection of a stockade on Bakery Hill were carried on vigorously, while some 500 men passed under the "Southern Cross" and swore allegiance to it in the presence of Lalor and his subordinates. The following was the wording of the oath administered: "We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly to each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties."

Meanwhile the camp officials were not idle. A Captain Thomas was in command of the military, and as it was considered risky to attack the stockade during the day, when the Government camp would be unprotected, he decided to strike a blow at the rebellion early on the following morning.

Accordingly, some 300 men, composed of troops of the line and police, approached the entrenchment at the time appointed. They advanced to within a few hundred paces of it without being observed, when a shot from the sentry inside the stockade announced that the crisis had arrived. The insurgent camp was immediately aroused, and several irregular volleys were fired at the military. So long as the conflict was confined to shooting, those inside the fence had the best of the fight. This was plain to the officer

in command of the troops, and so the order was given for a bayonet charge. The soldiers were soon inside the palisade, and ten minutes later, as might have been expected with the crowd of partially armed and undisciplined men, it was a case of *sauve qui peut*.

The attack upon a company of infantry from Melbourne a few days previously by a concealed party of insurgents had aroused the passions of the soldiers, and stimulated them to revenge when opportunity should offer. But to their credit, be it said, they fought fairly. In no case were they known to kill a wounded man. The dastardly proceeding of shooting and stabbing disabled miners was resorted to solely by the raw fledgling police, who lost all self-control when assured that the stockade had been captured and that the defenders were at their mercy. In one case, after the surrender of a number of miners to the military, a body of police rushed up, and would have shot them but for the determined interference of an officer of the 40th Regiment, who insisted that they were Crown prisoners in his charge, and would have to be dealt with by the civil authorities. One man had fifteen wounds on different parts of his body, most of which were received after he was disabled by a sabre cut on the head. Another miner was shot by a trooper when retreating from his tent, and, while bleeding to death, was

handcuffed by his captor. In this case the services of a blacksmith had to be obtained to cut the manacles from his wrists before the surgeon could probe the wound for the ball.

During the brief conflict forty were killed on each side, and about an equal number wounded, some of whom subsequently died from their injuries. A number of the wounded were also reported to have been burned alive in stores and tents where they had taken refuge before the police set fire to them.

To their discredit be it said, those of the insurrectionary leaders who had clamoured most for armed resistance were the first to consult personal safety when the crucial point was reached. A Hanoverian named Vern, who claimed to have had a military training in Germany and America, and who at the various meetings of the League was most declamatory in impeaching the Government, was observed, after the first volley from the troops, bounding over the palisades in the opposite direction, and was not heard of for months afterwards. As he was regarded as the most dangerous of the agitators, a higher reward was offered for his apprehension than in the case of the others. Several others of the leaders displayed not less celerity in clearing out at the first alarm; while others who had ostentatiously paraded the diggings and the main street the day before, levying toll on stores in

the name of the "Republic," ignominiously retreated down shafts and up log chimneys when the cry was raised, "Turn out—the soldiers are coming!" Indeed, the only two leaders who displayed courage during the fight were Peter Lalor and Wallace Ross, a Canadian. The former was maimed for life, the latter was shot dead near the pole on which he had hoisted the Southern Cross ensign the day before.

Lalor did not seek the unenviable office that had been thrust upon him. The choice of leadership lay between him and the German Vern, and when he was proposed, his demeanour and remarks contrasted so favourably with the truculent appearance and sanguinary utterances of Vern that he was almost unanimously elected as the fittest man for the work. Responding to the serious trust that had been imposed upon him, he remarked that, conscious as he was that a certain amount of military training was required for the position, he had no desire to occupy it, but that, as he was urged to allow his name to go to the vote, he would accept the responsibility and unflinchingly discharge to the best of his ability the duties required of him. Nor did he fail to fulfil his promise.

When the alarm was first sounded Lalor made strenuous efforts to organise an effective line of defence, but it was labour in vain. Many of the

miners had freely indulged in strong drink the previous night, and when they were hurriedly turned out at daylight in a semi-stupid condition, they failed to comprehend the orders that were issued, and utter confusion ensued on every side. There was no plan of action, no system, and no order could be evolved out of the crude material under Lalor's command.

"After the soldiers got inside," says an eyewitness of the fighting, "they fired a volley, killing two who were near me. At that moment I saw Lalor standing on the top of a shaft quite exposed. He had his revolver pointed towards the stormers, and the instant I saw him he suddenly grasped the left arm with the right and turned quite livid. He did not fall, but running down to us, shouted, 'Get away, boys, as quickly as you can; the stockade is taken.' 'You come with us,' I said. 'No, I can't go,' was his reply; 'get away and save yourselves.' He seemed faint from loss of blood, and sat down quietly on a pile of slabs. 'Drop in there, and we'll cover you up,' said my right-hand man, an American. We eased him down into a recess, and covered him with slabs, and left him there."

When the prisoners were taken to the camp, a number of Lalor's friends, who knew where he was located, helped him to an outlying tent, and later on to the residence of a Roman Catholic

priest, where his arm was amputated. After hiding in the ranges for some time, he was privately conveyed to the residence of a shipmate in Geelong, where, through the care bestowed upon him and his naturally robust constitution, he quickly recovered from the effects of his mutilation.

A number of the more prominent ringleaders of the League were forwarded to Melbourne for trial, but public opinion there was so pronounced on the misgovernment of the goldfields, and the indignities and unequal taxation the miners had been subjected to, that it was clear no conviction would ensue.

The first to be arraigned was a man named Hayes, who had acted as chairman when the League met to transact its ordinary business. His acquittal was the signal for suspending further proceedings, and a few days later the prosecutions were abandoned, and a general amnesty was proclaimed. Hayes was a jovial, even-tempered, peace-loving individual, but his fighting deficiencies were amply compensated for by his wife's pronounced combativeness. As a witness for the prosecution, Lieutenant Richards, of the 40th Regiment, deposed that when he ordered the arrest of Hayes, the prisoner's wife came up to him and told him that "if she were a man she would not have allowed herself to be taken alive," and added, "Why didn't you attack the stockade



yesterday, when we were prepared to receive you?"

What most surprised the prisoners and the general public was the fact that the leading evidence for the Crown was furnished by a man named Goodenough, who was one of the most trusted of the disaffected miners. He had been a constant attendant at their meetings, and every detail of their plans was furnished daily to the camp officials. It was on his suggestion that the attack was made at daybreak on Sunday morning. He had noticed that a large quantity of liquor was brought to a tent the previous day, and suspecting that a prolonged carouse would be held that night, and that a large proportion of the malcontents would be unprepared to meet an assault, he assured the officer in charge of the military that all, or nearly all, in the stockade could be made prisoners without opposition. Goodenough was a recent arrival in the Colony, and had been a detective in Ireland. Being in possession of trustworthy credentials, he was taken into the police service at Melbourne, and forwarded to Ballarat with the special object of gaining information regarding the aims and objects of the Miners' League. After the acquittal of Hayes he mysteriously disappeared, and although assiduous inquiries were made for him by former Ballarat acquaintances, no authentic information about him was ever forthcoming.

The collapse of the rising at Ballarat may be regarded as mainly attributable to the password given by Lalor on the night before the assault. Asked by one of the subordinate leaders of the revolt for the "night-pass," he gave "Vinegar Hill," where the Irish insurgents suffered a decisive defeat in '98 by English troops. Many at Ballarat who were disposed before that to resist the military now quietly withdrew from the movement. They concluded that Lalor's object was more to strike a blow for Ireland than at official despotism. So instead of there being, as in the morning, some 700 men inside the defences, there were barely 230 at the time of the attack. Bendigo, Forest Creek, and Creswick contributed contingents to assist in the struggle. From the latter place alone a thousand men were on the march to Ballarat; but when the news circulated that Irish independence had crept into the movement, almost all turned back.

It may be mentioned that both Bentley and Dewes—main factors in the Eureka tragedy—terminated their careers by suicide. After doing his three years for the manslaughter of Scobie, Bentley took to drink and performed the "happy despatch" with laudanum. On being dismissed from office, Dewes departed for America. Thence he gravitated to Paris, where he took his own life.

To the tact displayed by Sir George Nickle, commander of the military forces in Australia,

may, to a great extent, be attributed the assuagement of the angry feeling that supervened at Ballarat after the Eureka tragedy, especially against members of the police force accused of shooting and maiming surrenderers, and of leaving disabled men to be roasted alive in stores and tents that were fired after the stockade had been captured.

Sir George Nickle arrived at Ballarat two days after the conflict. His reinforcements consisted of 800 men, and comprised all the available military of the colonies, together with sailors, marines, and four pieces of artillery from H.M.S. *Electric*. The genial commander at once commenced the work of pacification by moral suasion. Addressing a large body of miners, he blandly ridiculed their ill-conceived scheme to change the government of the colony, and appealed to their self-respect and national virtues. He reminded Englishmen and Scotsmen of the reverence invariably displayed for law and order by their countrymen in the motherland, and assured them that the gold-fields laws then in existence were of an experimental nature, and that moral force would in time accomplish all the reforms they sought for.

He scathingly denounced the anarchical foreign element, asserting that these foreigners were mainly responsible for the loss of life at Eureka, and accusing them of abusing the hospitality and the privileges they enjoyed equally with the

owners of the colony; and he threatened to have them deported to some uninhabited South Sea island if they gave further trouble.

With the most numerous and most combustible portion of the assemblage Sir George got to be on the best of terms before he departed. Addressing the Irishmen, he warned them that the foreign agitators were simply making use of them for selfish purposes, and that if these were not kept under vigilant control, they would ultimately not only have the principal voice in the government of the colony, but would draw thither hordes of aliens, who would take complete possession of their rich goldfields.

An encouraging "Hear, hear!" to these remarks appeared suddenly to inspire Sir George with a piece of seasonable diplomacy. Britain was at this time at war with Russia, and the speaker had evidently been reading of some recent exploit of Irish soldiers in the Crimea. "I wish," he remarked good-humouredly, "that instead of you fellows making targets of yourselves for the bullets of your countrymen, I had you enrolled and trained as a troop of the Connaught Rangers, and that I was leading you in a tussle with the Russians at Sebastopol."

Nothing could have been more timely, and the Irishmen no less than the English and the Scots seemed to be quite won over. There can be little

doubt that had the speaker arrived at Ballarat a few days earlier and publicly used this conciliatory language, the troubles might have had a peaceful solution.

Although conscientious and painstaking, a more unsuitable man than Sir Charles Hotham could not have been selected to extricate the ship of state from the dangers and confusion that beset her at that time. As governor of a colony peopled by planters and negroes, he would have been in a congenial position, but in a self-governing offshoot of the motherland, inhabited by hardy, intelligent, and independent toilers, his limited administrative ability and haughty demeanour were a source of danger. Although he was accorded a magnificent reception on his arrival, his supercilious bearing effectually repelled popular sentiment. The suggestive advertisement that was so long a prominent feature of the Melbourne *Argus* when the first Governor, Mr. Latrobe, held office ("Wanted, a Governor for the Colony of Victoria"), voiced public opinion for a change, but after a short experience of his successor it was universally admitted that of the two evils Latrobe was the lesser. Sir Charles evidently arrived in the colony with the preconceived idea that he had to deal with rough adventurers, released prisoners, and convicts, and that the mines were to be used simply as so many sources of revenue; and it was elicited in

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the Legislative Assembly that, in the course of a conversation during his outward voyage, he sententiously remarked that "a little blood-letting would not do the unruly gold-miners any harm." It also came out that he was accustomed to communicate in cypher with the Commissioners on goldfields management, without consulting his responsible advisers. The Governor, however, was not so much to blame as those who appointed him. By instinct and training he was opposed to compromise or concession. His failure told on his health, and culminated in his premature death on the 31st of December, 1855, barely two and a half years after his arrival in the colony.

The Commission of Inquiry appointed later on by the Legislative Assembly to investigate the origin of the riots and loss of life, reported that "the diggers had been governed three times over," and that "while in certain cases they had been guilty of excesses, they had been goaded thereto by bad laws that were badly enforced."

The sacrifice at Eureka was a heartrending one, but beneficial effects ensued. When the torch of rebellion was finally extinguished reforms were immediately instituted in Victoria, and to the progressive measures then adopted may be distinctly traced the liberal legislation that followed in the other colonies of the Australasian group. The way was paved for constitutional government; the

unpopular Executive Council resigned office; the Ballarat officials were either dismissed or transferred elsewhere; digger hunts terminated; manhood suffrage was established; a general amnesty was proclaimed; and a few months earlier than the time he had named when midway between Britain and Australia, Peter Lalor was elected first member for Ballarat in the Legislative Assembly. About two years later he became a Cabinet Minister, and afterwards for a long period held the position of Speaker of the House.

In the dispassionate light that comes with mature age, I am free to say, as an eye-witness of the disastrous affair, that, while the Governor of the colony and his subordinates were the greatest transgressors, the Eureka tragedy would not have occurred had the principal leaders of the Miners' League displayed more discretion.

My last meeting with Mr. Lalor was in New Zealand, when on a holiday tour, in '78, and we then rehearsed the stirring scenes I have attempted to describe. Time seemed to have dealt kindly with him, and to all appearance he had many years of usefulness before him, but it was not long after this that his remarkable career reached its end. Like all mortals, he had his failings, but they were far outweighed by his many sterling qualities, and those who knew him best admired and loved him most.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## AN ADVENTURE WITH THE BLACKS.

SHORTLY after the Ballarat riots, while engaged in prospecting for new auriferous ground, I was rewarded by the discovery of "payable" gold in the vicinity of Mount Cole.

In less than a week after it had been declared to be a prospector's area, some forty men had set in to work in this out-of-the-way part of the world, and most of them were getting fair returns for their labour. Even in so small a community the ubiquitous sly-grog seller was soon doing a roaring business with his tainted wares, and the principal part of the miners' earnings found its way into his pockets. For revelry and drunkenness it was fairly on a par with Sailor Creek, albeit the residents had a higher sense of *meum et tuum* than those I had come in contact with there.

The new area was situated in the hunting grounds of the Mount Cole tribe of aborigines, who, with a view of participating in the prosperity, but more especially in the hope of indulging in cheap liquor, shifted camp to our vicinity.

Contact with civilisation had by this time, as



with the natives of Van Diemen's Land, nearly sealed the fate of the once numerous Victorian aborigines, and there were now only a few remnants of the various tribes to be met with. One of these was the people referred to, while another was located some fifteen miles distant, and known as the Mount William clan. By a sort of bush telegraphy the latter soon learned that the Coleites were in clover on the new diggings, and notwithstanding the strange relations that had existed between the tribes for some years through the abduction of a lubra (woman) from the Williamites, the latter soon put in an appearance.

Among the miners were three Irishmen, who had been in the colony but a short time. They had one of the best claims on the ground, and, like most Irishmen when prospects were bright, spent their money freely. One of the number was a powerfully built young fellow named Mike Conolly, known to us as "Big Mike." He was of a social turn—fond of amusement of every description, and possessing a fund of ready wit and quaint, dry humour. Mike had only heard of Australian blacks before the advent of the two tribes at the workings, and his greatest pleasure was to be among them at night, taking stock of their strange exhibitions, and cracking jokes at the expense of the oldest and ugliest hag in the encampment. This shrivelled creature Conolly christened "the

Colleen," and the comical way in which he addressed her, and pretended to make love to her, invariably evoked roars of laughter from the on-looking diggers.

None of the blacks had much knowledge of English beyond slang words and blasphemies learnt from ticket-of-leave men serving at the various sheep stations, and they appeared to be totally unconscious of the jokes that Conolly indulged in at the expense of "the Colleen," who was in reality a relict of the late chief of the Mount Cole people, and consequently, as "Old Queen Cole," a much more important personage among them than her miserable and almost naked appearance would lead one to believe.

The morning after the arrival of the Mount William tribe Conolly notified that he was going to have a lark with "the Colleen," and a number of the diggers accompanied him to join in the amusement. When we reached the ground we found that the clans had come to a temporary understanding, and were fraternising and drinking together as if no ill-feeling existed between them. "The Colleen" was lying helplessly drunk against the stump of a tree, while most of her companions were also far gone in liquor, and were either sleeping or stretched at full length on the ground near the fires.

One of their number had discovered on a neigh-

bouring hill the previous evening a valuable specimen, half quartz, half gold, weighing some seven ounces. This had been exchanged with the shanty-keeper for a liberal supply of bad liquor, and a heavy night's debauch had ensued. In that state we found them in the morning.

Helpless and repulsive-looking as they were, Conolly had come for amusement, and a mischievous idea at once seized upon him when he took in the situation.

"Oh, boys!" he exclaimed, "what a grand show for a rale ould-fashioned scrimmage! The two tribes have a down on one another, and it only wants the ball to be set a-rowlin' to have as purty a shtand-up fight as you'd see outside the ould sod."

Mike Conolly was an Irishman of the purest type, and what would be termed in the Emerald Isle a "broth of a bhoy." He loved fun, fighting, mischief, and whisky, and to judge by his healthy, fresh appearance and frolicsome disposition would love and be loved in turn by the colleens of his native country. He was a general favourite with us, and was allowed to have a good deal of his own way in our amusements.

Conolly's method of setting the ball "a-rowlin'" was novel, if blameworthy. Without disclosing his intentions, he proceeded to his tent, and returned with a sack in which he had placed

a quantity of flour. After giving it a few vigorous shakes, and bestowing a comical look of endearment at the sleeping "Queen Cole," he unwrapped her blanket covering and enveloped her in the bag. Then giving the mouth of the sack a few twists to "make her warm and comfortable," he demurely seated himself by the fire to await developments.

None of the half-drunken natives had noticed the manner in which "the Colleen" had been imprisoned. In their stupefied state the few who were awake appeared to be utterly unmindful of every sound and movement.

After several spasmodic efforts the imprisoned Queen succeeded in extricating herself—and what a spectacle! No description would adequately delineate the uncanny sight she presented—her whole body, except the wicked, fiery eyes, had turned milk-white.

The sudden metamorphosis in the unfortunate creature's appearance evoked uncontrollable laughter among the Europeans; and the amusement thus created at her expense increased her fury to white heat, affording Mike—who appeared the only serious spectator present—an opportunity to carry out his programme.

With what gravity he could muster, Conolly pointed in a deprecatory way to a member of the opposition tribe, who was peacefully sleeping

near the fire, and intimated by signs that he was the delinquent.

The apparent sympathy exhibited by Conolly caused "the Colleen" to believe his suggestion, and in her mad anger she seized a waddy lying near and struck the man a blow on the head with a force of which none would have thought her capable.

The yells that followed from the wounded man and the angry vociferations of the aggressive "Colleen," soon restored most of the blacks to wakefulness and some measure of sobriety; and on the woman explaining to her people the indignity that had been practised upon her, ranking words and threatening gestures were freely exchanged, indicating that what Conolly had been itching for—"a purty sthand-up fight"—would not long be delayed.

Some of us endeavoured to prevent hostilities, but a majority favoured Mike's views. He placed the matter thus plausibly before us: "These nagurs' heads 'id sthand any amount o' hammerin'. We'll take their shpears and tomyhawks from 'em, and let them fight with sthicks, so that they won't hurt theirsilves. Let 'em see it out. If they don't have a shindy now, they'll have it some other time about that crathur that was stholen—and maybe," he added somewhat pathetically, "there'd be no one there to see fair

play. Let things take their natural course, boys." This specious reason for letting the combat take place found favour with most of the diggers.

Fearing that an onslaught might be made upon themselves, most of the diggers procured their firearms, Conolly assuming thereafter the dangerous and onerous position of umpire, master of the ceremonies, bottle-holder, and general picker-up. His armament consisted solely of a miner's long-handled shovel. Marking a line on the ground, he warned the blacks that they were not to cross it except at the peril of their lives; and by way of enforcing instructions that there was to be fair play and no nonsense, he gave a wild whoop and threateningly gyrated the shovel over their heads.

The two tribes numbered about forty in all, but the Coleites had fewer men than the Mount William clan. The sticks referred to by Conolly were formidable weapons at close quarters, and a vigorous blow from one of them on the head would suffice to kill an ordinary white man. Although the Mount William warriors were in the majority, they were only allowed to fight man to man—each toeing the line marked by Conolly. Then, after seeing that the combatants were divested of their blankets and clad only in Nature's robes, he signalled, "Fire away!"

I will not dwell at length on what followed.

It was a sickening spectacle. But above the clashing of waddies, the cries of the wounded, and shouts of defiance from both tribes, might be distinctly heard the trombone-toned voice of the Hibernian umpire exultingly exclaiming at intervals: "Go it, ye cripples! I'll hould yer coats!" and (*sotto voce*, with delight beaming in his every feature), "Faix, I niver thocht I'd see sich fun outside the ould sod! 'Pon me conshens, it's grand!"

The waddy blows inflicted on the heads of some of the unfortunate creatures resulted in terrible injuries; but Mike's assurance that "nagurs' heads 'd sthand a lot o' hammerin'" appeared to be fully justified. Doubtless their thick, matted hair afforded them some protection. Although many of them were rendered *hors de combat*, they appeared to recover quickly after their wounds had been washed and bandaged by their women.

Repulsive as the sight was, one could not help feeling amazed at the cool audacity of Conolly during the combat. I have him now before me—with hands resting on the top of his shovel, legs expanded, and in a lynx-like way taking in the proceedings all along the line. If a black was felled by a waddy, Mike was there in an instant to prevent a fatal blow following. Then in a familiar and appreciative way he would poke

the handle of his shovel into the ribs or abdomen of the victor and tow him some distance behind his line to allow his ardour to cool. After this, taking the wounded man by his woolly hair, he would unceremoniously drag him to the rear of the European onlookers for protection, and deliberately return to his official duties as umpire.

When satisfied that the Mount Cole tribe—"the Colleen's" people—were faring worst in the combat, in an authoritative way he strode through the midst of the naked belligerents, and in stentorian tones bellowed out that they were to "drop sthicks."

Both sides were much exhausted, and did not appear disinclined to obey the mandate. Each of the blacks was then supplied by him with a liberal refresher of rum—those who had displayed most spirit and vigour being rewarded with a double allowance and an encouraging pat on their shoulders.

To prevent a renewal of hostilities, all the weapons that could be seen were collected and taken away by the miners when they returned to the workings. Shirts and handkerchiefs were given without stint to the lubras to bind up the wounds of the combatants, and the two tribes, after again encasing themselves in their blankets, squatted on the ground opposite each other,



smoked their black pipes, and assumed a silent but morose demeanour which indicated that the trouble between them was not concluded.

For the sake of being convenient to timber for firewood and to procure piles for the ground we were working, and likewise to be clear of the noise and revelry that prevailed every night at the grog shanty, my mate and I had pitched our tent at the head of a gully some distance from the workings. It was, however, a case of "out of the frying pan into the fire," for the blacks squatted down within a few chains of us, and made night hideous with their barbarous orgies. But as they had a wholesome fear of firearms, we had no apprehension of being molested by them. In addition to a double-barrelled gun and a Colt revolver, we had an invaluable sentinel in a sharp little Scotch terrier.

The fight between the hostile tribes of blacks had taken place on a Saturday. The following day was exceedingly sultry. The air was charged with electricity, and dark, low-lying clouds portended the approach of a heavy thunderstorm.

Just before night closed in I was seated against a tree, endeavouring to inhale as much fresh air as possible, when I noticed three blacks move out of the bush and make for a deserted shaft at the foot of the gully. They appeared to be carefully examining the depth of the hole, and

were jabbering to each other in their peculiar dialect. When they were about to depart one of them pointed to me, and after a further survey of the surroundings they retired the way they had come.

I did not attach much importance to their movements, as it was a common practice of the aborigines to search heaps of *débris* near shafts that had become exposed by heavy rains.

Shortly afterwards I turned in, but owing to the enervating atmosphere could not sleep. The expected storm came on about ten o'clock, and raged with terrific fury for some two hours. The thunder was deafening, rain descended in torrents, and occasional flashes of lightning made objects as plain as during noon-day.

About midnight there was a short lull, and, still awake, I fancied I heard a rending noise as if someone was slitting open the back of our calico tent. Almost simultaneously our little terrier became furious, barking viciously, and by the straining at his chain evidently trying to get at some intruder.

Scenting danger, in an instant we were on our feet, and a shot was fired through the roof of the tent as a warning. This and the ceaseless assaults of the enraged dog abruptly discomposed the intruder; for immediately after the revolver was discharged, the patter of bare feet hastily retreat-

ing towards the gully became distinctly audible, and, going outside to take observations, by the aid of a lightning flash I sighted three of the blacks racing at full speed down the gully. Another leaden messenger was sent in their direction as a reminder to keep at a civil distance, and we again betook ourselves to our blankets.

An appalling clap of thunder and a blinding flash of lightning (the latter rending to atoms a huge gum tree in our vicinity) followed immediately afterwards. This, with the general uproar of nature's forces, and the knowledge that the blacks were moving about and evidently bent upon mischief, made sleep impossible.

Thus we lay awake for about an hour, when a chopping sound was heard similar to that of an axe or tomahawk operating on some soft, pithy substance. Then an agonising shriek, clear and penetrating, cleft its way to our hearing through intervening space—through the ceaseless tumult of thunder, wind, and rain—and we knew that a tragedy was being enacted that we were powerless to prevent.

During the intervals between the flashes of lightning, the darkness was so intense that we could not distinguish objects an arm's length before us. This, with our distance from any help, convinced us that our only chance of safety lay in keeping within our shelter. Frail and insecure though it

was, we could rely upon our wakeful and plucky little terrier to give us warning of the approach of enemies, and so enable us at least to give them a warm reception.

As they had succeeded, however, in accomplishing what was apparently their main object, they did not further trouble us, for the only human sounds heard by us during the remainder of the night were incessant painful moanings from someone who had undergone dire maltreatment. At daylight we instituted a search for the sufferer, and discovered that the groans and cries came from the abandoned shaft the blacks had been examining the previous evening.

Having got assistance from the nearest tent at the workings, I descended by a rope, and found the shaft to be about sixteen feet deep, with a couple of feet of water and mullock at the bottom, and tunnelled for some distance. The sufferer had crawled into the tunnel, and, owing to the terrible injuries he had sustained, and the slimy surroundings, it was a most unpleasant task to bring him to the mouth of the shaft. There was not sufficient light to distinguish objects there, but as the body was unclothed, I concluded it was one of the blacks. With much difficulty I succeeded in fastening the rope under his armpits, and the unfortunate wretch was soon got to the surface. At first sight he was hardly recognisable as a human

being, owing to the barbarous way in which he had been hacked about. I will spare the reader a description of his appearance: suffice it to say that he had been mutilated in a manner that only an Australian black knows how to accomplish. The body had, in fact, been chopped to fragments, and was only held together by skin and tendons.

It has often been a mystery to me how any human being could exist for hours as that man had done in such an awful state. In a minute, however, after reaching the surface, with a convulsive gasp he yielded up life.

A "roll up" of the miners was called immediately, and a feeling of horror seized on all who beheld the frightful spectacle. A few of the blacks also had joined us, and endeavoured to recognise the remains; but for some time they appeared at fault to know to which of the tribes the victim belonged, so completely was the body hacked and battered out of human semblance. Ultimately it was found, from a leg mark, that he was one of the Coleite gang who had done much execution among the Mount William warriors the previous day; further, that he was the man who had abducted the lubra from the latter people.

Few partook of food that morning, and a council was convened at the grog shanty, when it was decided to at once muster all the blacks. That being accomplished, inquiries were made, but mine

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was the only evidence forthcoming. I at once identified the three I had seen examining the shaft the previous evening, and related the incident of our tent being slit open during the night.

Those suspected of having committed the murder were quickly bound to trees, nooses of rope placed around their necks, and the ends thrown over branches, preparatory to administering lynch law. In that position each was questioned as to his knowledge of the crime; but only one of the three vouchsafed an answer, and that was in the form of a request that he would be allowed to "bid his brudder good-bye," and an inquiry if "any white fella' had a chaw o' baccy?"

It being useless to think of getting evidence from the accused, and the consequences of lynching them being doubtful, one of the diggers was despatched to a station some five miles distant—the owner of which was a justice of the peace—to acquaint him with what had transpired. He returned in the afternoon, and stated that the magistrate had no police to assist him, and as he was about to leave for another part of the colony on urgent business, he could do nothing.

As evidence of the slight importance attached to the murder of a native at that time, it is worth noting that, although information of the crime was later on sent to the police, no one ever appeared to make official inquiry regarding it.

Another meeting of the miners was held in the evening, and there was a consensus of opinion that some show of law and order should be resorted to, if only to make a suitable impression upon the blacks; and it being assumed that age brings wisdom, the only bald-headed man on the field, a confirmed soaker, known by the sobriquet of "Daddy," was voted to the chair (an empty rum cask), while Big Mike adopted the *rôle* of Crown Prosecutor.

Let me try to picture the scene—"Daddy" acting as judge; a group of rough-looking miners standing near him, armed with guns, picks, and shovels; in the foreground the two savage tribes squatted on their haunches, and interestedly watching the proceedings; old Queen Cole in front of them, with a lean, hungry-looking dog lying alongside her; the three prisoners with ropes round their necks bound to trees, and unconcernedly smoking black clay pipes; and the mutilated remains of the black fellow covered with a dirty blanket in the centre of all.

In his official capacity Conolly inquired of the most ferocious-looking of the three prisoners if he was "king of either of the tribes." He was answered by a volley of curses that the man had doubtless heard from old hands on sheep-stations. Resenting the language as "contimpt av coort," Conolly seized the offender by the woolly hair, and by knocking his head against the trunk of the tree

he was bound to, restored some show of dignity to the proceedings ; but neither the supposed "king of the thirbe" nor his fellow prisoners made any response to further questions regarding the murder.

When it became evident that it was a waste of time to interrogate them further, "Judge Lynch" briefly but pointedly summed up the case : "Ye see, boys, these haythens don't know nothin' 'bout Brit'sh laws, nor 'bout Brit'sh mor'ls—nor—nor—nor—nor—timp'rance. That ere corpse lyin' afore us—that is, when 'twas alive—stole 'nother feller's lubra, an' as ye know, stol'n fruit's th' sweet'st—leastways I tho't so when I was a kid. But that's not th' p'nt I wants t' git at. When once wimmen folks gits mixed up 'mongst these varmint's rows there's Old Harry to pay. Ye can't make a white man out o' a nagur, no mor'n ye can make ropes out o' sand. They'se got no brains to speak o'. Besides, their ugly mugs are so blam'd alike that ye can't tell t'other from which, an' the wrong fellers might be noosed arter all. As there's no beak or bobby to be had, the Queen's writ counts for nothin' about Mount Cole. I votes we let 'em off an' liquor up."

That deliverance, although punctuated with numerous hiccoughs, the result of divers ante-meridian refreshers, found favour with the majority of the diggers. The three accused were liberated, and permission was given to bury the remains.



All the blacks were further notified to clear off the field that evening.

On the culprits being released, members of both tribes made preparations for the interment. Two sheets of bark were taken from trees; the remains being incased in one, while the other was used as a cover. These were lashed with pieces of rope to keep them together, and the rudely improvised coffin was conveyed into the thickest part of the bush. None of the miners witnessed the barbarous obsequies that followed, and where the victim was interred was known only to the blacks themselves.

The sequel to these events occurred a couple of years later. In prospecting wanderings I visited a shepherd's hut on Campbell's run (near Ararat goldfield) for rest and refreshment. No one was in the place when I entered, and I was awaiting the return of its usual occupant, when an aboriginal entered whom I at once recognised as one of the three we had tied up on the morning of the murder. I learned from him that he had left his tribe shortly after the events narrated, and was then acting as rouseabout on a sheep station. He was clothed in rough European attire, and could speak English sufficiently well to be perfectly understood. He made no hesitation in confessing that he was one of the three who had committed the crime. The lubra who had been

stolen was, he said, his property, and he boasted of the revenge he had taken on her abductor. Other information he volunteered that somewhat startled me. It was he who had cut open the back of our tent, and he candidly confessed that its occupants would have been tomahawked also but for the furious and unexpected way in which our dog had charged them. They had depended on getting into our tent when the noise of the thunder and rain was drowning all other sounds, and not being aware that we had a dog, became disconcerted at its fierceness and the alarm it created, and cleared off when the first shot was fired.

Asked what his object was in attempting to molest us, he gave me to understand that as I had seen them looking into the deserted shaft, for their own safety they had decided to silence us.

The threat that I would put the police on his track had only the effect of making him laugh heartily. He had learnt sufficient of our laws and customs to know that it was now impossible to obtain the necessary evidence to ensure a conviction; and from his general wily answers on the subject, I became convinced that my personal interests would be best served by not meddling further in the matter.

The truest friend of the miners in the early fifties was an intelligent and watchful dog. For

the valuable aid rendered by my own trusty little sentinel on many occasions during the times I am writing of, I experience, after a lapse of half a century, feelings of the liveliest gratitude.

In one of her works George Eliot makes a character (Bob Jakin) say: "A dog's a better friend nor any Christian. Lor's, it's a fine thing to have a dumb brute fond on you. It'll stick to you and make no jaw." Those who have been engaged in pioneering in lonely and dangerous parts, or in gold-mining in the old days, will not be slow to endorse this testimonial.

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC ON THE GOLDFIELDS.

AMONG the saddest of my memories of the early fifties are those connected with the free traffic that prevailed in spirituous liquors, and the insatiable indulgence therein by a section of the goldfields population. Friends and foes alike became its victims. From many years' close contact with the class of people most addicted to intemperance, the conviction has been forced upon me that effectual remedies are to be found only in early moral and intellectual culture, and in improving the social condition of the working classes. Compelled in self-interest to study character, especially the weaker points of humanity, I am satisfied that abrupt and absolute prohibition of alcohol, instead of curing, would materially intensify "the national curse," such miscalculating zeal being likely, as heretofore, to lead to a widespread illicit traffic.

In the early fifties, as I have said, the Victorian Government prohibited the sale of liquor on the goldfields, and at no period of its history was the

consumption so great, or crime, its natural consequence, so prevalent.

Among the many thousands of people congregated on the larger goldfields, such as Bendigo, Ballarat, and Forest Creek, although the sly-grog shops were freely patronised, drunkenness was not so noticeable as in isolated places such as those I happened to be located at. There especially, owing to absence of police supervision, every facility was afforded to "boosers" to gratify their cravings for alcohol.

A few months after my discovery at Sailor Creek, the grog cart called at regular intervals wherever scattered parties were located, and for weeks afterwards these places were perfect pandemoniums. For long the Government officials were puzzled to ascertain whence the enormous supplies of liquor were derived. The members of the police force were mostly new arrivals, and, having no special training for their duties, overlooked the fact that illicit distillation was carried on without let or hindrance in the then densely timbered parts of the colony. A large quantity of liquor also found its way from Melbourne and Geelong to the Bullarook Forest, which was used as a distributing centre. Thence it was taken in a roundabout way, known to old hands, to every gully on the principal diggings. The supplies from these latter sources were invariably adulterated. If water alone had

been mixed with them little harm would have resulted; but the principal consumers would not purchase liquor in that shape. They wanted something to scorch the palate, and unprincipled vendors soon learnt to manufacture an article that would meet "trade requirements." As death-dealing a compound as ever entered the human frame was then retailed at from 20s. to 30s. a bottle. Noticing the disastrous effects it had upon a party camped near me on Sailor Creek, I invested in a bottle to ascertain its composition. On uncorking it a powerful odour of turpentine was perceptible, and after swallowing a small portion a burning sensation was felt in the mouth and throat for several hours which repeated rinsings with cold water could not assuage. From the exhalation emitted when the cork was drawn, and the ill effects produced by its use, the liquor appeared to be a mixture of turpentine, tobacco juice, vitriol, and alcohol. The money I paid for my bottle, however, was not lost. Being stung by a scorpion one night, and for some time afterwards enduring intense pain therefrom, Burns's doctrine that "stronger poisons kill the weaker" occurred to me, and the liquor was applied with satisfactory result. Thereafter the bottle was duly labelled, "Remedy for snake-bites. For OUTWARD use only."

Let me illustrate a few cases prominent in memory of tragical results from the use of adul-

terated liquors at a time when alcohol was prohibited in Victoria.

About a week after the robbery of our gold on Sailor Creek, we had three fresh arrivals there—deserters from a ship at Port Phillip. They started work close to us, and soon got on paying ground. Being well-conducted men, they were desirable additions to the place, and from them it derived its name.

One of the three seamen was George Brentford. He had been an officer in the ship he had just left, and was a relative of one of the owners. George was of a bright, sunny nature, and in face and physique a splendid specimen of manhood. His ready jokes and hearty laughs dispelled the sense of loneliness we had been experiencing, and a friendly feeling sprang up between us. The ground they were working yielded excellent returns, and in a few weeks they had several pounds' weight of gold.

At this juncture one of the Bullarook grog carts made its appearance (on its way to Castle-maine), and our new friends purchased a case of liquor from its owner, ornamentally labelled "Martell's Pure Cognac." It was evident from the first glass he drank that Brentford's constitution would not stand much of it; but there was a fascination about the bright, fiery-looking liquid that he could not resist, and in a short time he

was in a state of helpless intoxication. Waking up from his drunken sleep, and without partaking of food, he insisted on being allotted his full share of the drink, and seized upon three of the bottles. From his light, volatile nature, the poison acted more swiftly and perniciously on him than it would have done on one less emotional. Strong efforts were made to wean him from the craving that had suddenly taken possession of him, and on two occasions he tried to pull himself together. But the grog cart still hung about the place, and the temptation was too near to be resisted. After consuming some half-dozen bottles of the liquor he appeared to have lost every human instinct beyond the knowledge that he had a mouth and a stomach. A few days later he became a raving maniac, dangerous alike to himself and others.

In that frame of mind his mates left him one morning, while he slept, to finish some necessary work at their claim, situated nearly half a mile from the camp. Shortly afterwards smoke was noticed issuing from ground near the tent, and with strong misgivings we hastened back. There was in the vicinity of the camp about half an acre of tall, withered kangaroo grass, which in his insanity Brentford had ignited, and then, almost in a state of nudity, he had deliberately walked through the burning mass. It was impossible to extricate him from his terrible position until the



fire subsided, and when we succeeded in getting him outside the furnace, what was only a week previously a perfect specimen of manhood had become a spectacle divested of human semblance. The face, breast, and arms were black as coal; the legs roasted to the bone. And that sickening object was (so his mates informed us) a widowed mother's only son, and her pride and joy. Well that she was spared seeing him that morning as he lay prone on the earth, foaming at the mouth and clutching at the grass in his fearful agony.

We could do little to alleviate his sufferings, and one of our number was despatched to the cattle station to arrange for a conveyance to take him to Melbourne. When the vehicle arrived his mates struck tent and accompanied him; but we learned later on that before half the journey was covered George's pains had ended.

The wretch who had been the primary cause of the tragedy moved to other fields when it became evident that his latest victim could not survive.

Of numerous other tragedies that came under my personal notice, that of a Bendigo miner has kept fresh in mind. Doubtless in this case, owing to an unevenly balanced brain, his mental equilibrium was disturbed through an unexpected piece of good fortune. He afforded a striking illustration of the heavy strain imposed upon some natures by sudden change of fortune, and of the frailty

of the barrier that divides reason from insanity. Many irretrievably break down through reverses that would only have the effect of stimulating others to increased activity and perseverance; while in the case under notice it was an unlooked-for acquisition of wealth that produced partial derangement.

Passing through a main thoroughfare of Bendigo one day, I descried a man riding towards me at a furious pace, and divested of clothing save a shirt and trousers. The wild appearance of his eyes denoted mental aberration. How he escaped being precipitated down one of the numerous shafts amid which he passed was a mystery to those who watched his wild, erratic course. But this immunity from disaster was not for long. Returning to camp the same way in the evening I encountered a cart, attended by a number of miners, containing the body of the unfortunate man. It seemed that he and his horse had fallen into a deep shaft at Stockyard Gully, and both were taken out lifeless. He had been only a few months in the colony; it was his first experience at gold-seeking, and he worked as a "hatter" (*i.e.* without a mate). Only two days before he had unearthed a 27-lb. nugget—one of the largest discovered on the field. He managed to get the nugget to the surface, and then commenced incoherently to address it, and caress it with outbursts of frenzied cries and

laughter. Fortunately, the attention of well-disposed men working close by was attracted by his gesticulations, and finding that he was temporarily deranged, they soothingly persuaded him to accompany them to the camp, where the nugget was taken charge of by the Government officials. Reason was to some extent restored when he realised that his treasure was in safe keeping ; but later on he was induced to visit a sly-grog shanty, and was there plied with drink—burning, adulterated drink—and became the maniac I had seen in the morning.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE MONGOLIAN IRRUPTION.

IN addition to the obnoxious licence fees, digger hunts, and general official mismanagement, fuel was added to the discontent that hovered over Victoria in the early fifties by the unrestricted incursion of vast numbers of low-caste Chinese and Tartars. Swarms of these aliens became permanently located on most of the goldfields, and it frequently happened that the richest portions of leads discovered by Britishers fell into their hands. The majority of them were composed of river pirates, and slaves, hired by wealthy Chinese syndicates for a specific term and under penal conditions to exploit the Australian goldfields. Recruited from the slums of Canton, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, they were, as might be expected, debased in morals, while their miserable pay was spent in gambling and at opium dens. These undesirables were formed into gangs of twenty-five or thirty, each being under the control of a serang or overseer, who was responsible to the employers

for their strict compliance with the conditions of the contract they had entered into. Immense quantities of treasure were regularly forwarded to the syndicates by their agents for a couple of years after the rich discoveries at Ballarat and Bendigo, when it became apparent to the miners who had decided to settle in the colony permanently that it was thus sustaining serious loss through exhaustion of resources that should help to build up the State. Frequent complaints on the subject were made to the authorities both on the goldfields and in Melbourne, but the government of the colony was at that time mainly in the hands of the runholders and banks, and it was considered that as almost all the male European population were located on the diggings, it was essential, in the interests of the wool growers, that no restraint whatever should be placed on immigration. The result was that the miners took the law into their own hands, and on some of the diggings, after burning the Mongolian camps, they effectually cleared out their owners. Those who witnessed the poltroonery exhibited by the Chinese on these occasions could scarcely help feeling contempt for the entire race, and certainly could not have been surprised that the Celestial Empire should have been brought to its knees a few years ago by Japan. It was no uncommon occurrence at the time I write of for half a dozen resolute Europeans to be

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seen driving before them like a flock of sheep hundreds of Chinamen.

One of the most amusing of my goldfields experiences was in connection with a Mongolian hunt. It occurred on the Maryborough field shortly after its discovery.

A number of social spirits had assembled at our tent on a Saturday afternoon, when the subject was broached of an immense incursion of some 200 Chinamen—then within a few miles of the place. It was felt that if active steps were not taken to clear them off, most of the European population would have to seek fresh woods and pastures new.

Amongst our visitors was a companionable little mortal known to us as "Dick the Gunner." Dick was short in stature and expansive in beam; swarthy in complexion, and furnished with a profuse crop of bushy black hair, whiskers, beard, and moustache, that nearly enveloped his every feature except a small snub nose and a pair of remarkable eyes—the one damaged by an explosion of powder, and the other, a dark brown orb, sparkling with mirth and mischief; his entire facial contour being closely analogous to that of an overgrown black poodle. Dick's quick, racy, sonorous manner of expressing himself made his company always acceptable, while his peculiar appearance exacted more than a cursory scrutiny. After listening ruminatingly for some time to a discussion on the

Mongolian raid on the Maryborough preserves, he chipped in with his customary vivacity. "Bet anyone £5," he said, "that, single-handed, I'll make the whole tribe scuttle like blazes before they put a pick in the ground." The wager was at once taken up twice over. Thereupon he betook himself to a neighbouring store, where he purchased a pot of red paint; then to his tent, where he remained until the clamour of the approaching Chinese became plainly audible from the camp, when he reappeared, covered from head to foot with a blue blanket.

Stealthily ascending the hill which the invaders would traverse, about halfway up he gained the shelter of a gum tree, and there waited.

On mounting the opposite side the Chinamen paused for a few minutes to rest. Each had on his shoulders the usual bamboo pole, with baskets at the ends, containing about 70 lb. of provisions and general digging equipments.

At a given signal from their serangs they resumed their burdens and commenced their downward march to the field, apparently, by their chatter and laughter, in a jubilant mood at the near termination of their journey, when, with an ear-splitting yell, the Gunner came into view, armed with an axe, naked as on the day of his birth, and smeared with red paint, to represent blood and scars, while his jet black beard and

moustache were profusely flecked with soap lather, as if he was frothing at the mouth. His whole aspect indicated to the astonished Chinamen that they were confronted by a dangerous lunatic. After his first fearful howl he commenced a series of acrobatic leaps and bounds, uttering at the same time loud, dog-like yelps, forcibly representing the wild movements and gesticulations of a ferocious maniac. Later on he threw himself on the ground and commenced to tear up tufts of grass and drag them through his teeth. Then, picking up the axe, he again sprang to his feet, and, after a searching scrutiny of the enemy, and assured that the desired impression had been created in their ranks, he wildly careered up the hill, uttering blood-curdling yells, menacingly brandishing his formidable weapon, and threatening in stentorian tones the wholesale slaughter of the Chinese race.

At first sight of the unnatural-looking object that lay in their path the amazed Celestials had come to a dead halt, and released themselves from their burdens, and before Dick had advanced fifty yards the entire panic-stricken contingent faced right about, and, with cries of terror, scampered back for dear life.

How can I convey to my readers the ludicrous aspect of the Mongolians as they fled from the harmless little Gunner? The louder he roared and threatened, the faster they ran. Owing to the



heavy burdens usually carried by Chinamen at each end of their bamboo sticks, and the necessity for preserving an accurate balance, a noticeable peculiarity in their gait is their wide spread of legs and wobbling, goose-like motion. Nothing of these defects, however, was manifest now. Down-right funk appeared to lend them wings, nor did one of them look back until the Gunner's voice had become all but inaudible.

Not only had Dick won the field, but the entire equipment of the invaders fell into his hands. After a final terrible yell by way of a parting shot, he commenced leisurely to examine the spoil. Nothing in their kits appeared worthy of notice until he came to one of larger dimensions than the others. It contained one of the idols the Chinese furnished their joss-houses with wherever they assembled in numbers. It appeared to shock the religious sentiments of the Gunner, who, with lusty strokes of his axe, quickly decapitated the monstrosity, and conveyed the trunk to his tent, where it was afterwards ignominiously used as a seat. After rehabilitation, he complacently visited us, apparently unconscious that he had performed any achievement worthy of notice. To do justice to those who made bets with him, they ungrudgingly handed him the stakes, feeling that they had value for their money. As to the Chinese, nothing more was seen of them, though not a ves-

tige of their belongings was to be found the following morning. They had taken possession of their property some time during the night, and silently retreated to other parts, as the Gunner had assured us they would do. It transpired later on that Dickie had been to Calcutta in charge of a freight of horses. Thence he found his way to Shanghai, where he resided for some time, and learned that the one thing dreaded above all others by the lower order of Chinese is contact with a furious madman. While, as a rule, they would stoically bend their necks for the stroke of the public executioner, they were accustomed to display abject terror of a lunatic.

The most serious of the collisions between the Asiatics and the European diggers was the regrettable battue at the Buckland River, near the Ovens, in 1853. The Chinese, though they were many hundreds strong, fled before some forty whites, armed only with sticks, and some of them were drowned in attempting to ford the stream. But under the ægis of police protection they returned to Buckland in greater numbers than ever, and by the middle of the fifties had almost completely denuded the entire Ovens district of its rich treasure.

Like the Hebraic race when settled in Canaan, the yellow men find in Australia a land flowing with milk and honey, and they intend to remain

in it. The heavy poll-tax at present in force prevents their landing in large bodies in the more settled parts, but no legislation can effectually guard against an irruption of Mongolian aliens into the solitary Northern Territory.

Having since the time I write of conformed to some extent to European usages, and being able to live comfortably on a third of what it would cost to maintain a colonial, John Chinaman has engaged extensively in several of the leading industries in the principal cities of the island continent—some, indeed, being exclusively in his hands—to the displacement of numerous trained workmen of British descent. This is one of the gravest social and political problems that the collective wisdom of the Commonwealth will have to solve. But a more difficult one to deal with will be an influx of Japanese into North Australia. These have developed into a powerful race, and, as they are more prolific than most other nationalities, their rulers have for some time been casting around for an outlet for their circumscribed countrymen. Russia has barred their progress in Korea, and the other great Western Powers object to their gaining a footing in any part of the Asiatic Continent which is under their influence or protection. But whatever the cost or risk, new territory will be added to Japan ere many years, and the almost uninhabited North Australia, with its auri-

ferous wealth and vast area, suitable for the settlement of a coloured race, but not of Europeans, is regarded by the rulers of Japan and China as the most eligible home for their surplus populations. The Commonwealth has pronounced in favour of a white Australia ; but a regenerated China and an overcrowded Japan will in due time have, I think, to be reckoned with. The enormous and ever-increasing population of those countries ; the advancement in arts, sciences, and industrial and commercial pursuits ; their possession of powerful armaments ; and the fact that at present in numbers, wealth, and influence they hold the first place in the Northern Territory of Australia, forbid the assumption that they can be prevented from becoming fixtures there without a resort to force.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## SOME BUSHRANGING EXPLOITS.

THE continued immunity from punishment of the perpetrators of crime in the fifties attracted to Victoria criminals not only from other parts of Australia, but also from distant lands. One of the outrages committed at this period was the robbery of gold from the ship *Nelson*. She had come from Geelong to Hobson's Bay to complete loading for London. In addition to a valuable cargo of wool and other produce, she had on board twenty-four thousand pounds' worth of gold. The vessel was moored a couple of miles down the bay, and, through the watermen at Sandridge or Williamstown, information as to the unprotected treasure aboard had become known to gangs of thieves located about Melbourne. The night before her intended departure two boatloads of these ruffians, numbering about twenty, put off from Sandridge pier and, with muffled oars, boarded her. There was no watch on deck at the time, and the only members of the ship's company aboard were three seamen and the chief officer. The latter resisted the attempt to seize the gold, and was fired at and severely wounded. All the firearms, including a

heavy carronade, were thrown overboard to prevent signals being made, and having secured their prisoners, the robbers succeeded in getting away with the entire booty—most of which, it was alleged later on, was sold the same night at thirty shillings an ounce on St. Kilda Beach to a store-keeper, who appeared to have been in the “lay,” but against whom no conviction could be obtained when he was brought to trial.

Encouraged by the success of this audacious outrage, the influx of criminals to Victoria was unprecedented in the history of any country. Nearly 9,000 convicts and ticket-of-leave men found their way to Victoria in eighteen months during '52 and '53, and that number was supplemented by several hundreds of the same class who had arrived by ships from foreign parts. Great was the indignation of law-abiding people at the unrestrained lawlessness that prevailed, and it was decided towards the end of the latter year to take prompt action to put an end to it. The police force was reorganised by weeding out useless members and augmenting it by experienced, able-bodied men from South Australia, Tasmania, and by ex-members of the Irish Constabulary, large numbers of whom were arriving from the Emerald Isle.

Soon the most dangerous of the criminals were in custody, and a greater sense of security began to prevail. The prisons were filled to overflowing, and to provide the additional accommodation re-

quired for the safe keeping of gaol-birds five more penal hulks, or "floating hells," as they were aptly termed, were stationed off Williamstown.

Let me now recall the story of the McIvor gold escort robbery. Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, I am indebted for many details to the *Melbourne Argus*.

It was not an uncommon event for the main Bendigo escort to have in its safe keeping as much as two tons of gold *en route* for Melbourne. The revenue from this service became highly profitable, and went far towards meeting the cost of maintaining an expensive staff of Government officials on the various goldfields. Later on, through the influence of prominent supporters of the party in power, sanction was given to the establishment of what were known as private escorts. These latter worked from the more remote fields to certain stations on the main road, where their charges were transferred to the Government convoy. The men employed in the latter consisted of picked infantry soldiers, selected from the various regiments in Australia; while the former were principally composed of active young fellows—new arrivals—who, after undergoing a brief training, were duly sworn in as special constables.

The escort of seasoned soldiers afforded Victorian rascality slight chance of a successful raid on the gold boxes in course of transit to Melbourne. The officer in charge was known to be an old In-

dian bush-fighter of fearless character, and he took care at all times to have his men so judiciously scattered when travelling through timbered country that no attack could be made without risk of failure. Hence, the attention of the robbers was directed to the branch deliveries from McIvor, Forest Creek, Jim Crow, and other remote fields.

One of the gangs of bushrangers had for some months meditated an attack on a private escort, and after taking close stock of the officers and men employed in the various services, and making a careful examination of the line of route they had to pass through, they decided that the convoy from the newly opened McIvor district was the best to attack. It had long been suspected by diggers that an attack would be made some day on one of these private escorts in the bush country, but the Government officials thought differently. They were rudely awakened, however, from their sense of false security about the end of July, 1853, when the news was circulated that the McIvor escort had been bailed up and robbed of nearly 3,000 oz. of gold and over a thousand pounds in notes and coin.

The escort was travelling to Kyneton to catch the main Bendigo convoy. It was in charge of a superintendent, a sergeant, four supernumerary troopers, and the driver. The sergeant was riding in front, and as he came round a bend of the road he noticed a tree lying across the track, ap-



parently to form a barricade. Some of the branches had been cut away, and behind the screen thus formed two of the bushrangers had taken shelter. The others were posted behind trees on the slope of a hill that commanded a full view of the road. As the sergeant approached the fallen tree he became suspicious, and holding up his hand as a signal, he called upon his companions to halt. The bushrangers immediately opened fire on the cavalcade, bringing to earth, severely wounded, the four troopers. The sergeant dashed through the barricade, and, after exchanging several shots with the bushrangers, rode to the nearest police-station for assistance. The superintendent also fired on the gang until his ammunition was exhausted, and, as his horse had been seriously wounded, he returned to McIvor.

Within fifteen minutes from the time the sergeant cried a halt, the entire contents of the waggon, except about £150 in the boot, which was overlooked by the robbers in their hurry, fell into their possession.

After unharnessing the troopers' horses and driving them for some distance from the scene of the outrage, the gang rode through the bush in the direction of the Campaspe River, where, after throwing their guns into the water, they divided the gold with a powder flask, and went off in different directions.

There were six men in all concerned in the

robbery—namely, Gray, Wilson, Melville (not the noted captain), Atkins, and two brothers named Francis. Gray, the organiser of the attack, was evidently a most daring criminal and the most astute of the gang. After receiving his share of the plunder, he at once cut himself adrift from his companions, and notwithstanding a diligent and protracted search for him by the police, no trace of him was ever afterwards discovered. It was thought at the time that he had made his way to Adelaide, and escaped thence in a homeward bound ship; but it is more likely that he was one of the numerous ruffians who cleared out of the colony in the *Madagascar*, which was then lying in Hobson's Bay, ready for sea, and that he was secreted on board when the police visited her in search of men who were "wanted."

A reward of £5,000 was offered for the apprehension of the gang, but although nearly four hundred men, police and diggers, were engaged in searching for them, all except George Francis managed to get to Melbourne, by different roads. Francis returned to McIvor, and as his absence from the field on the day of the robbery had been noticed by miners camped near his tent—amongst whom he was held in bad repute—suspicion was aroused, and being unable to account satisfactorily for his movements on that day, he was placed under arrest. Subsequently he made a full confession, and was forwarded as a prisoner to Mel-

bourne. He did not, however, reach it alive. Remorse at having betrayed his late companions, especially his brother, appears to have taken possession of him, and managing to procure a razor at one of the accommodation houses, he performed the "happy despatch" by cutting his throat from ear to ear.

Wilson, one of the more prominent members of the gang, had paid for his passage to London by the *Madagascar*, and he and his associates in the crime would probably have escaped if he had had sufficient self-denial to abstain from strong drink a few days longer.

When the police visited the ship in search of ticket-of-leave men, Wilson managed to elude their notice. Probably elated at their inability to recognise him in the disguise he had assumed, and feeling that all danger of arrest had passed, he freely indulged in liquor, and in a semi-intoxicated state created a disturbance by drawing a revolver and threatening the life of a passenger with whom he had been playing cards. The water-police were at once signalled for, and he was placed under arrest and transferred to their boat. When being taken ashore, it seems that in his half-drunken condition he concluded that one of his associates had turned traitor, and that he was a doomed man. Under that impression, he decided to give the whole show away, and requested the officer in charge of the police-boat to pull alongside a barque about

to sail for the Mauritius. Arrived there, he inquired if George Melville was aboard, and on that worthy making his appearance, he intimated, in the presence of the officer and crew of the boat, that he (Wilson) was "copped," and desired Melville to "look after his wife in the event of anything serious occurring."

This gave the police just the clue they required. They had been searching for Melville for some time on another charge, and he was at once placed under arrest and conveyed ashore with his friend. By judiciously pumping them, the detectives were able next day to apprehend John Francis and Atkins, both with large sums of money and gold dust sewn up in their wearing apparel and at their lodgings.

No difficulty was found in getting a member of the gang to turn Queen's evidence. John Francis owed his recent liberty to his having become an informer in a burglary case at Hobart Town. That much was known to the police authorities at Melbourne, and it was concluded that to save his neck he would not hesitate to betray his late companions in the escort robbery. The surmise proved correct. Like his brother George, he disclosed every incident of the outrage; and on this evidence Wilson, Atkins, and Melville were convicted and executed.

Melville had only a short time previously married a good-looking barmaid, and a feature of the

trial was their display of attachment to each other. The young wife was present during the whole course of his trial, and her eyes scarcely ever wandered from her husband. When asked if he had anything to say before sentence of death was passed upon him, he made a furious attack on the informer Francis. Reminded by the judge that he should divest himself of all malice at such a serious moment, his mood instantly changed, and with an agonising look at his wife that impressed those who watched him, he fervently exclaimed: "Then may God forgive me, as I forgive the informers George and John Francis."

Of all the missing vessels trading between the Mother Country and Australia none has excited so much surmise as the *Madagascar*, the boat on which Wilson was arrested. She was one of Green's frigate-built Blackwall liners, and had on board, in addition to pastoral produce, some £60,000 worth of gold, besides a large number of homeward-bound diggers who had made their fortunes. But unfortunately there were also on board many of the most hardened felons and ticket-of-leave men whom the penal depots in Australasia could produce. So much was ascertained a few days after she sailed. Some of these had been implicated in the daring robbery from the *Nelson*, others were wanted for bushranging and murder on the roads to Melbourne from the gold-fields. No reliable tidings of the fate of the *Mada-*

*gascar* have been forthcoming since the day she passed out of the Port Phillip Heads.

A few years afterwards a rumour flew abroad that a dying man in a hospital at Monte Video had confessed that he was one of ten who shot down the captain and officers of the *Madagascar* when off the coast of Patagonia, and that they had taken to the long boat with the treasure and provision, after boring numerous holes in the ship's sides and bottom.

I had a special reason for inquiring into that report, having entrusted to the care of one of the passengers—a Bendigo acquaintance, who had realised an independence—a small parcel of nuggets for presentation to home friends. I communicated with the British Consul at Monte Video, and in due time was informed that all evidence in the matter had disappeared during one of the periodical revolutions to which the country was subject.

Possibly the *Madagascar* was destroyed by fire, or went down with all on board through collision with an iceberg ; but as human monsters had taken passage in her who were capable of surpassing in atrocity the deeds of the pirates of the Spanish Main, it is not at all unlikely that the ship was scuttled.

I come now to the famous Ballarat Bank robbery.

Among the more daring of the ticket-of-leave

men on Ballarat in 1854 were four named Bolton, Marriott, Quinn, and Garrett. These had completed long terms of penal servitude in the chain gangs at Port Arthur, and although their backs were scarred by the cat, and their ankles waled by leg irons, they appeared as ready as ever to engage in any nefarious enterprise that would afford them the means of indulgence in their vicious propensities.

The Bank of Victoria at Ballarat occupied a somewhat isolated position. It was known as the "Iron Pot"—a framework of wood, covered with galvanised iron, and it was surrounded by trees and logs, which offered cover to any who chose to assail it. One Saturday afternoon, when closing hour had arrived, the gang I have mentioned entered, and, presenting revolvers at the officials, threatened their lives if they spoke above a whisper. Resistance was useless, and in a few minutes their legs and arms were fastened together, and, like trussed fowls, they were thrown on the ground face downwards, one of the burglars standing sentry over them while the others appropriated some £18,000 in notes and gold. This they divided into four equal shares at an appointed rendezvous—the drive of an abandoned shaft near the Gravel Pits. Most of the £50, £20, and £10 notes had arrived at the bank by escort that same morning. Fortunately, a record of the numbers had been taken by one of the clerks, and they were widely adver-

tised in the various colonies and in printed posters on the goldfields, together with a large reward for the apprehension of the thieves.

For some two months all efforts to discover the perpetrators of the outrage were fruitless, and owing to the threatened civil outbreak the event was nearly forgotten, when a clue was obtained by the arrest of a well-known courtesan and seller of illicit grog for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. On her being searched, one of the stolen £10 notes was discovered in a bag attached to one of her stockings. It was elicited from her that the note had been given to her by Garrett, and the police were immediately put upon his track. Now Garrett was the only one of the four who displayed any astuteness in evading arrest. Like Gray, the leader of the escort robbery, he had at once cut himself adrift from his associates, and that same night was on his way to Melbourne with his share of the plunder. Thence he took passage to Sydney, where he arrived just in time to procure a berth in an outward-bound ship for London.

Marriott and Quinn conveyed their shares of the booty in a covered waggon to Geelong, where they put up at a boarding-house kept by a Mrs. ——. The recklessly prodigal way in which they spent money for some days after their arrival excited the suspicion and curiosity of their observant hostess, who, taking advantage of their absence one forenoon, made, with the aid of a duplicate



key, a diligent examination of the contents of their bedroom. She was rewarded by the discovery of bank-notes, nuggets, gold dust, and a promiscuous assortment of coins hidden under the floor covering, inside the mattresses, and in their "swags."

For some time there had been serious friction between Mrs. — and her husband, and she had been proceeded against for assaulting him. News had just reached Geelong that a bank had been bailed up at Ballarat, and that money and valuables had been stolen. Putting this and that together, Mrs. — thought she saw within easy reach an effective solution of her troubles. A liberal supply of the loot was at once transferred to a capacious portmanteau, and, accompanied by a male friend who was not her husband, she was soon *en route* for Sydney.

On the return of the burglars in the afternoon, the disordered state of their rooms showed them that someone not more scrupulous than themselves had been at work. Inquiry for their landlady elicited that she was *non est inventus*, and a protracted and earnest consultation ensued as to what should be done. The result was, as Mrs. — had foreseen, a decision to maintain strict silence over their loss. The fugitive had left them fully two-thirds of the plunder, and Marriott, who was something of a philosopher, appeased his more ruffled companion by reminding him that they had at all events the "biggest share of the cake."

Meantime, the visions of enjoyment indulged in by Mrs. — at the expense of the Bank of Victoria were brought to an abrupt termination a week after her arrival at Sydney, when she attempted to pass a £20 note at the shop of a tradesman who was in possession of a list of the stolen notes. Arrested on the charge of participating in the pillage, she furnished the information that led to the capture of Quinn and Marriott at Melbourne and of Bolton at Adelaide, the latter on the eve of departure in an outward-bounder.

Garrett, the most wily of the gang, succeeded in landing by the pilot boat before the ship reached London. But a craft from Melbourne had arrived a few days earlier and brought particulars of the robbery and a description of the fugitive. Scotland Yard detectives were speedily on the track, and by clever strategy he was finally brought to book.

Sauntering after his quarry one day in Regent Street, the detective in charge of the case shouted out: "Hullo, Garrett, when did you arrive?" Taken thus suddenly unawares, Garrett immediately turned round and faced the emissary of the law. For some moments he was so bewildered at the sudden and confidential way in which he had been accosted that he could only stare helplessly at his interlocutor. Then, slightly recovering himself, he nervously inquired, "Who the h—l are you?"

The detective at once realised that he had the right man, and without further parley Garrett was laid by the heels. A great deal of the stolen property was discovered at his hotel, and a week later he was re-shipped to Melbourne, where he arrived shortly after the conviction of Marriott and Bolton, against whom Quinn had turned Queen's evidence.

Although the most ignorant and crime-stained of the four, Quinn, like the notorious New Zealand murderer and approver Sullivan, displayed much self-possession, shrewdness, and readiness of retort while undergoing cross-examination at the trial of Bolton and Marriott. Asked by counsel if he was not in Geelong when the Governor of the colony arrived there, like a flash he replied, "I don't associate much with governors, except governors of gaols or penitentiaries, and I don't care much for their society."

Habitual criminals who received heavy sentences found no sympathisers in those days, except among those of kindred instincts, and the sentence of ten years with hard labour passed on each of the bank robbers met with general approval.

The reckless extravagance of the gang during the short period they were at large after the robbery will be understood when it is stated that only £10,000 out of the £18,000 stolen was recovered.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## BIDDING GOOD-BYE TO A GOLD-DIGGER'S LIFE.

SINCE I commenced penning these recollections I have been asked why, with so much to attract early arrivals on the goldfields, I was led to abandon them when they had not yet reached the zenith of their prosperity, and to forsake a life that promised the readiest way to acquire an independence.

Well, I may at once avow that the severance of my connection with gold-hunting was caused by an incident that effectually dispelled my interest in the occupation and demolished all my castles in the air.

Although my first six months' experience in Victoria had been an almost continual encounter with peril, for some five years later I enjoyed the life, and participated in several rich discoveries. Then occurred the event referred to, which inspired a sudden and unconquerable aversion to the occupation.

The hotel I stayed in after the unfortunate termination of my venture in mercantile pursuits in '53 was crowded with all sorts and conditions of people. There might be seen those who had

made fortunes on Ballarat, Forest Creek, and Bendigo, as well as those who had spent their all on the fields without any return, and who now loafed about the building in the expectation of remittances from friends at home, or in the hope of getting some light employment in the city. There also might be seen seasoned colonists who had been engaged in pastoral pursuits, as well as recent arrivals from lands afar.

The man who will be the subject of this chapter was one of the latter. On the look-out for a suitable partner for my next trip to the gold regions, my attention was attracted to the James Torrence whom I have mentioned in an earlier chapter. He had just arrived at Hobson's Bay by a Liverpool ship, and I at once recognised in him, despite his attire, a culture and an air such as I had seldom seen in the colony up to that time.

While most of the other *habitués* of the hotel were smoking, drinking, or gambling, Torrence appeared to be a close but silent observer of what was going on. At times he seemed to be deeply absorbed in thought, as if endeavouring to solve some difficult problem, and I conjectured from his manner that he was undecided as to what occupation he could most advantageously engage in. But I was especially drawn towards him one evening when, in a secluded corner of the room, and unconscious that any were observing him, he was

v \*

engaged in letter-writing. During occasional pauses in his task his features would wear a pensive, far-away expression, and I surmised that thoughts of home and kindred were occupying his mind.

When his correspondence was concluded I entered into conversation with him for the first time. A little later we had a long ramble in the outskirts of the city, and so favourably was I impressed with his character that I offered him mate-ship in my next venture. As he had nothing else in view my proposal was accepted, and when retiring that night I felt that I had fallen in with a man after my own heart—one whose aims, objects, and temperament were very similar to my own, and who could be relied upon for fair dealing and for readiness to accept a full share of the hazards, responsibilities, and toil incidental to the life we were about to engage in.

James Torrence was some thirty-two years of age—a native of Morayshire, Scotland, and an engineer by profession. He was married, and had left his wife and two children in the hope of being able to better their condition, as it was impossible for him to do in the overcrowded Old World.

Torrence was a man of robust constitution, magnificent physique, prepossessing in appearance, of untiring energy, and one who would meet every reverse or freak of fortune manfully, hopefully, and

uncomplainingly. Almost from the first a bond of friendship and sympathy became established between us and continued uninterruptedly to the last. During nearly five years we worked on almost every goldfield in the colony with varied success. Long spells would frequently occur without any adequate return for our labour, but occasionally rich discoveries made up for lost time, and at the end of that term we were both possessed of deposit receipts for sums that ran into four figures.

After my late sojourn among coarse, unlettered men, the company of Torrence, bright, refined, sympathetic, self-reliant, and well informed as he was, amply rewarded me for hard toil and irregular remuneration; and I think we could claim to have enjoyed as much happiness in each other's society as any on the goldfields.

Towards the end of the fifties Jim and I found ourselves on the Pleasant Creek (now Stawell) goldfield. Alluvial workings had been discovered there some six months previously, and at the time of our arrival a deep lead had been struck, and quartz reefs were being developed that have since proved to be the richest and most permanent in Victoria.

It was our luck to mark out a claim from which we received highly encouraging returns. We had apparently exhausted the resources of the ground when the important discovery was made

that a layer of red cement over the bottom wash, some eighteen inches thick, was exceedingly rich in the precious metal, and we commenced to take it out bodily with the view of stacking it and having it crushed at a mill that had just been erected on the field.

The work proved to be tedious and laborious, and, owing to the hardness of the ore, blasting operations were resorted to. After a short trial that method of attaining our object was also abandoned, as the explosions had the effect of shaking the ground, especially about the mouth of the shaft, and additional supports were found necessary for our safety.

On the first discovery that the ore was "payable," Torrence signified his intention of rejoining his wife and family when it was worked out, and, anxious to finish up speedily, he suggested that the readiest method to clear it out would be to remove every second prop or timber that supported the roofs of the drives, so as to allow the auriferous cement to separate easily from the stratum immediately above it.

Having noticed that the air had begun to penetrate the lower layers of gravel and earth, causing fissures, and warning us that the ground was settling down bodily upon the supports, I endeavoured to dissuade him from what I considered a hazardous step.



Overjoyed, however, by the bright prospects that had so suddenly been presented to view, and looking forward to a speedy reunion with his family, he could not be convinced that the experiment would be dangerous; but as a compromise it was arranged that we should make a limited trial in the way desired, and if the indications showed that there was risk, the slower and safer course might be again resorted to.

It should be explained that our shaft measured 4 ft. by 2 ft. 6 in., and was some 115 ft. deep, and that, having made step holes in the side walls, we were able to descend and ascend without any assistance beyond the rope that was always securely fastened to the windlass.

Our first day's trial of the proposed method of taking out the cement was highly successful. We were enabled thereby to procure six times as much as by the ordinary method of working with gads and sledge-hammers; and satisfied that but slight danger was to be apprehended from the new system of conducting operations, and being assured that we had dropped on a "real good thing," we decided that night that Jim should leave for England by the next outgoing mail steamer (a month later), while I was first to have a holiday tour in the United States, and afterwards rejoin him in the Mother Country.

The next day's work showed even more pro-

mising indications, and towards dusk ore was broken out that we calculated would yield at least fifty ounces to the ton.

“A homeward bounder, and no mistake!” exclaimed Jim, his eyes sparkling with exultation, as he handed me a wedge of the cement studded with nuggets.

For half an hour we examined the ground and discussed the valuable discovery we had made. Darkness then setting in, I suggested that it was time to re-timber where we had worked during the day, and brought into the drive the props that had been lying in the bottom of the shaft.

While I was thus engaged, Torrence was occupied in picking out some pieces of amazingly rich ore he had come upon, and so interested and elated was he that he expressed a desire that, although it was his turn to perform the service, I should prepare the evening meal while he “fos-sicked” out a few more samples, which, he said, he would bring up with him to test their value by burning and rough crushing.

When the customary signal “Below!” was made without my getting from him either his usual cheery “Aye! aye!” or the slightest sound to indicate that he was at work, a vague dread took possession of me that something untoward had occurred; and when it flashed upon me a little later that the timber supports had not been placed in

position before I came to the surface, a choking sensation seized upon me.

Hastily descending with a lighted candle, I saw at a glance that my worst fears were realised. The drive where the rich cement was discovered was full of *débris*, and if I entertained any hope that my friend might be rescued with slight injuries, it was dispelled when there came in response to my call an agonising groan, as if life had been all but crushed out of him.

Several tents were within a few chains of ours, and in less than five minutes from the time I discovered his fearful plight fully a dozen stalwart miners had assembled around the claim, eager to assist in the rescue, while a messenger was despatched for a medical man who resided at the further end of the lead. Some slight delay occurred through our having to place fresh timbers in the neighbourhood of the shaft to ensure the safety of the rescue party, but wonderful energy was displayed, for Torrence was known to and respected by all of them.

Within half an hour we succeeded in removing the tons of earth that had fallen bodily upon him. Bruised, mangled, and discoloured, with features distorted by pain, and the lower part of his body completely paralysed, he presented a sickening contrast to the superb specimen of manhood I had left such a short while before.

The doctor's examination only confirmed the general impression that his earthly course was near its termination. The spinal column was fractured, the left arm broken, and he had besides received internal injuries that no human being could survive. "All I can do," said the doctor, "is to give him temporary relief by soothing medicines, and thereby enable him to express his desires regarding his worldly affairs."

In company with a storekeeper who had enjoyed Jim's friendship, I passed most of the night by the side of his rude pallet, sorrowfully watching the premonitions of his approaching end. Towards morning, judging by his cold and nerveless hand that his end was near, I poured some of the medicine down his throat. A little later he gave me a glance of gratified recognition as his eyes rested on me, and he made signs that he wished us to be alone. My fellow-watcher having withdrawn, in faint, tremulous tones he made his parting request. "Break it gently, mate, to Janet," he said. "She was ever to me a true, God-fearing partner, and she'll bow submissive to His will when you let her know that my last desire was that she would live bravely for the children's sake. Ah, if I could only now hear her sing her favourite hymn—

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide ;  
The darkness deepens : Lord, with me abide.

Tell her this thing happened for some wise purpose that cannot be fathomed by erring mortals. See that she gets my savings. My deposit receipt lies in the Bank of New South Wales at Melbourne. Do as you would be done by in this matter. Write on a slip of paper that I appoint you administrator of my affairs for the benefit of my wife and children, and I will try to sign it."

So far gone, however, was he at that time that his autograph could only be obtained by guiding his hand over the paper. Then, with an apparent sigh of relief, he lapsed into a seemingly pleasant, refreshing slumber. In that state he continued for nearly two hours, when, suddenly raising his head, he invoked in barely audible tones Divine protection on behalf of his wife and children, and pleadingly articulated: "Break it gently, mate! In life—in death—O Lord—abide—with me!"

These were his last words. A few minutes later came a spasmodic lifting of the breast, a heavy sigh, the hand that had so often grasped mine in the warmth of friendship relaxed, and with the peace of eternity on his features he rested from his toil, and his spirit fled to Him who gave it. Thus passed away one of the staunchest comrades and the most trusty adviser and companion I have had in all my life. I missed him as I never missed man before. My feelings were to

a great extent shared by all who knew him ; and when a couple of days later we laid him in the then almost untenanted God's Acre at Pleasant Creek, of the numerous rough-clad and rough-handed men who stood around his grave to pay their last respects to his memory, there was not one who was not visibly affected.

The property of my deceased friend, including half the proceeds of the sale of our claim, was duly transmitted to his wife, together with his last request ; and that duty completed, I renounced for ever an occupation that had entailed upon me so heavy a bereavement.

Nearly half a century has spun round since I parted company with Jim Torrence, but he still keeps green in memory ; and when in retrospective moments thoughts revert to my lonely vigil by his bedside as he was about to journey into the undiscovered country, I feel no shame in admitting that the springs of feeling well up ; for at such times in fancy I again see his almost pulseless hand moving towards mine for our last parting, and hear once more his last words.

In conclusion, I am fain to pay a tribute of respect to the typical pioneer miners of Australia and New Zealand. After engaging in the exciting life of the gold-hunter, a large percentage of them settled down to more humdrum pursuits, and be-

came leaders of thought and progress in the legislative assemblies. By them old-world systems of government were recast, and a code of laws was initiated which has been pronounced by competent judges from over-sea to be a great improvement upon the body of laws to be found elsewhere, and which is now being extensively adopted by the Motherland and by the more progressive nations of Europe, as well as by America. Although the pastoralists are more usually credited with having laid the foundations of Australasia's prosperity, in reality the credit belongs to the pioneer miners, who laid the foundations of the inland cities. Had the progress of Australasia depended mainly on the flock-owners, settlement would not yet have made any considerable advance beyond the seaboard. While not undervaluing the enterprise of the men who, surrounded by hostile natives and exposed to much discomfort and privation, engaged in pastoral pursuits, it must be admitted that to the courage, enterprise, resolution, and endurance of the gold-miners in the face of disappointments, hardships, and oppressive legislation, the colonies are mainly indebted for their present flourishing position. If not heroes in the more romantic sense, these hardy English-speaking prospectors and miners have renewed the youth of the old parent stock, and have done, with but slight acknowledgment, the most effective pioneer-

ing and colonising work. Through their explorations and discoveries a stimulus has been given to immigration from overcrowded Europe, and civilisation and commerce have been introduced to parts where they were unknown, while by fraternising with people of other nations who followed in their train, and working harmoniously with them, they have materially assisted to promote the brotherhood of humanity. None may lay better claim to the tribute paid to Britain's nation-builders by the gifted author of "England and her Colonies," when he writes—

They are still her ancient seed,  
On younger soil let fall—  
Children of Britain's Island breed,  
On whom the Mother in her need,  
Assured of help, may call.



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