

In Australian Wilds

And Other Colonial Tales and Sketches

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Introduction.

SUCCESSFUL attempt has recently been made to bring before the British public a collection of stories and sketches by Australian writers resident in England. The present volume takes a wider range. All the tales now presented are from the pens of writers who, if not actually born in the Colonies, have at least had practical experience of Colonial life, and are personally familiar with the scenes which form the background and permeate the action of their respective productions. All save one of the pieces here included have for their basis incidents of life and adventure, not in Australia alone, but in the great sister dependencies of New Zealand and British North America. The volume may therefore claim a greater breadth of interest than could attach to a collection based upon the experiences of one colony or group of colonies merely. The extreme similarity of life and habitude in all the widely separated sections of Greater Britain is nevertheless a most striking feature, and cannot fail to impress the most casual reader; for take away the physical surroundings, and vary a few local terms and pseudonyms, and the whole bent and *morale* of one colony is as nearly as possible identical with the bent and *morale* of every other. The uniformity thus discoverable rather tends to enhance than to destroy interest; proving, as it does, that our emigrant population are impressing the same type upon the most diverse races and in the most distant settlements, and that it is not by accident, but by the possession of inherent backbone and indispensable qualifications that Englishmen have vindicated their claim to be considered the first of colonizing peoples. The prevailing appetite for personal details respecting authors is becoming every day more keen, so that even in the case of a collection of short stories it seems necessary to touch, however briefly, on the *personnel* of the writers.

Mr. B. L. Farjeon needs no fresh introduction to the reading public of Great, or Greater Britain, his name being a household word in connection with a distinct and most enthralling class of sensational fiction. Belonging purely, as his best-known productions do, to English literature, his fleeting experiences in Australia and New Zealand form but a passing episode in his varied and enterprising career. Going first to the gold-fields of Victoria, where the scene of the story here given is laid, Mr. Farjeon had the usual experience of the ups and downs of Colonial life, until ultimately he approached more nearly to his true vocation as a journalist in New Zealand, in which colony he became associated with Sir Julius Vogel, the ex-premier, who, after a career of great practical distinction, has recently invaded what, by a figure of speech, are

called the flowery paths of literature, and is about to publish a romance with the *à la Jules Verne* title and purport of A.D. 2000. With this indefatigable politician Mr. Farjeon was associated in the proprietorship of the *Otago Daily Times*, one of the most influential and intelligently conducted of existing New Zealand journals. Mr. Farjeon's later career since his return to England has been marked by the production of a succession of tales, which need not be further particularized than to say that they form so many milestones in an exceptionally rapid and triumphal progress in public favour and appreciation.

The name of C. Haddon Chambers, who contributes three short stories, was comparatively unknown two or three years ago. To-day it is familiar to all. This circumstance is mainly attributable to the production in June of last year at the Haymarket Theatre of this young writer's original four-act play "Captain Swift," which, splendidly played by Mr. Beerbohm-Tree and a carefully selected company, secured the emphatic approval of the critics, and a success with the play-going public almost unexampled in this generation. The success of "Captain Swift" is often compared to that of Sir Charles Young's "Jim the Penman"; and when it is remembered that at the time the latter play was produced its author was past middle age and a dramatist of many years' standing, whereas the author of "Captain Swift" is, to employ the language of one of the critics, "scarcely more than a boy," it is not surprising that in these latter days, in which people complain of the decadence of the English drama, and of the too persistent appearance of adaptations from the French and German on the English stage, the youthful author of so powerful, polished, human, and interesting a play as "Captain Swift" should receive so warm and enthusiastic a welcome from critics and lovers of the drama as Mr. Haddon Chambers has experienced. Charles Haddon Chambers is a son of the late John Ritchie Chambers, a North Irish gentleman of Scotch descent, who for the last twenty years of his life held a high position in the New South Wales Civil Service. The future dramatist went to the public schools in Sydney, and at the age of sixteen qualified for the Civil Service by passing the necessary examinations at the Sydney University. Since then he has played many parts, all of which doubtless helped to qualify him for the career he has finally adopted, and in which he is already so eminently successful. He has been, among other things, a clerk in the New South Wales Civil Service, a land agent, a boundary rider, a miner, and a journalist. He has lived in most of the Australian colonies, and has been in Cape Colony and Egypt. Mr. Haddon Chambers, who landed in London four or five years since with only a quill pen in his pocket, proved in a short time that he could succeed both as a journalist and a novelist. His contributions to society papers in London and to the *Sydney Bulletin* (which paper he represented for some time) were much esteemed, and the many short and serial stories he wrote found a ready market among the magazines; but a tentative effort at dramatic writing in the shape of a one-act play proved so successful that characteristically he abandoned everything for the writing of plays. The result has more than justified his pluck and judgment,

and to-day, on the success of almost one great play alone, Mr. Haddon Chambers, though still in his twenties, stands in the first rank of contemporary dramatists. Many moving and successful plays from his pen may be expected; but readers of his early stories still hope also to find his name on the covers of some novels.

Coming to the widely known author of "Ginx's Baby," who contributes a Canadian story to the present collection, one trenches *per force* as much on the domain of English and Imperial politics as on that of literature. Mr. Edward Jenkins may be said to be by his birth and experiences a typical Imperialist Briton. He was born in Bangalore, East Indies, on July 28th, 1838, and after living at Malta and in England was in his ninth year attending school at Montreal in Canada. There he was educated at the High School, and at McGill University, and subsequently read for the Bar at the University of Pennsylvania. On the outbreak of the Civil War, Mr. Jenkins abandoned his intention of remaining in America, and went to London, where he entered at Lincoln's Inn, and, having been called to the Bar in 1864, practised successfully for some years. But, coming fresh from the new societies of America, Mr. Jenkins, who had not been in England from his childhood, had his eyes open to many things which from familiarity pass unnoticed by the most intelligent people who are brought up among them. Contrasting the conditions of labour and poverty in Great Britain with those of the United States and Colonies, he was led to study the subjects of Emigration and of the relations of the Colonies to Great Britain. In this connection he became the leading spirit of an organization known as the Emigration League; which, whilst advocating the transfer of the surplus population of this country to our great dependencies beyond the seas, by a natural corollary ardently identified itself with the opposition to the disintegration policy ably championed by Professor Goldwin Smith, and practically adopted by the then Liberal Government. Among the prominent advocates of the League was Sir George Grey, a man of extraordinary eloquence, and in other respects one of the most remarkable proconsuls ever sent forth to a British dependency, his career in New Zealand displaying the unexampled spectacle of a governor descending from the vice-throne to the political forum, and becoming premier of the Colony in which he had been the Queen's representative. In company with Sir George Grey and other like-minded apostles of the new gospel, who, in fact, were the precursors of the modern Imperial federationists, Mr. Jenkins stumped the country, and was largely instrumental in convincing the public mind of the advantages attaching to the retention of our Colonial Empire. Meantime, on Home questions Mr. Jenkins showed strong reforming tendencies, which found a popular expression in his "Ginx's Baby," figuring forth, as it does with uncommon candour, the only too common fate of the "slum" child, between the kicks and knocks of a hard world, and the muddled philanthropy and mistaken religious zeal, which are scarcely more merciful in their treatment. "Little Hodge" and "Lord Bantam" followed, the three forming

a kind of trilogy, the town labourer, the agricultural labourer, and the privileged class being each symbolized in the three babies, whose tragic and humorous histories are known wherever the English tongue is spoken. The success of these books was assured and remarkable. "Ginx's Baby" has been translated into Russian, German, Italian, French, Hungarian, Spanish, and the Scandinavian languages. Following these came, in one season, two fresh successes — "The Blot on the Queen's Hand," of which, in a few weeks, nearly one hundred thousand copies were sold; and "The Devil's Chain," which reached its twenty-fifth thousand, in its dearer form, in the course of a few months.

In 1880, on the dissolution owing to the defeat of the Beaconsfield Government, Mr. Jenkins's health obliged him to retire, and he devoted himself to literary and other pursuits. In the comparative quiet of succeeding years Mr. Jenkins's views on some political questions became modified; and he was unable to follow the Liberal party in its new developments. More recently Mr. Jenkins has edited the *Overland* and *Homeward Mails*. His later books are not in the vein of his early satires, being studies rather of men and manners. "Jobson's Enemies" was written to exhibit the extraordinary variety and widespread ramifications of society and relations in the British Empire. "A Paladin of Finance" is a story which the *Academy* said was the best French novel ever written out of France, and we believe was founded on facts. "A Week of Passion" and "A Secret of Two Lives" have since followed.

Madame Couvreur, whose maiden name was Miss Jessie Huybers, is a native of the most Edenlike (not exactly in the Dickens sense) of island colonies, Tasmania, where her family occupied a prominent position, and where, and in the more pushing adjacent colony of Victoria, she spent her life until the last ten years. Madame Couvreur began about a dozen years ago to contribute occasional essays and tales to Australian periodicals, with whose readers, under the *nom de plume* of "Tasma," she became a universal favourite. Coming to Europe, she lectured upon Australia in Paris, under the auspices of the Geographical Society of that city. She also contributed to the *Nouvelle Revue*, adhering in all her published productions in Europe to her old pseudonym "Tasma." Three years ago she was married to Monsieur Couvreur, the distinguished Belgian publicist, with whom she lives in Brussels a life of lettered and refined simplicity.

Mr. H. B. Marriott Watson, who personifies literary New Zealand, where he has spent most of his life, was born in 1863 in the Melbourne suburb of Caulfield, of which his father, himself an author of repute, was the Anglican incumbent. Mr. Watson went at nine years of age to Christ-church, New Zealand, where he was educated at the Grammar School and at Canterbury College, where he graduated in 1882. Three years later Mr. Watson came to London, and commenced a journalistic career by contributing a poem to *Punch*. In December 1887 a romance, which he had written during the previous few months, was accepted by Messrs. Longmans, and published by

them under the title "Marahuna." It has been very favourably received, and is likely to be the precursor of a series of successful works of fiction.

Mr. Edmund Rawson, who contributes a Queensland sketch, makes no pretensions to literary finish; but he depicts with graphic pencil scenes and incidents of which he has been an observant, and far from unintelligent, eye-witness.

Enough has been said of the *personnel* of the writers, and it now only remains to express the hope that what has been written may commend itself to the constantly increasing numbers who have either themselves visited, or who have friends and relatives in one or other of the great dependencies, some of the characteristic phases of which are here described, and in which the scene of all but one of the stories is laid.

Whatever may be the results of the present agitation, which in one direction tends to the initiation of closer relations, and in another to the snapping of the existing bonds between the colonies and the mother country, one thing is certain, that for a generation or two at least Colonial literature — or the literature of any one particular colony — will establish no claim to be regarded as a distinct entity; but that, on the contrary, for many years to come the productions of Colonial writers will continue to form but an item in the great sum of English literature, and to find their chief and most receptive market in the Old World. None the less, however, Colonial writers individually may be expected to contribute valuably to English literature. They have already given an earnest of their quality; and in the meantime the colonies have afforded inspiration to such accomplished English authors as Henry Kingsley and Rider Haggard, to mention no others; whilst they themselves have produced such a novelist as Mrs. Campbell Praed, of whom Queenslanders are justly proud. It is with a view to illustrating what Colonial writers can accomplish in one department of literature that the present volume has been produced.

In Australian Wilds, and Other
Colonial Tales and Sketches.

In Australian Wilds.

B. L. Farjeon

Author of "Grif", "Great Porter Square", etc.

WE were in the bush, Lilly Trot and I. Lilly Trott was my squire. Business of a particular nature had rendered it necessary that I should travel some distance into the interior of Victoria, one of the two greatest of all the Australasian colonies. Travelling by oneself was not a very safe undertaking in those days, for the bushrangers were about, and when they meant mischief a man or two more or less in a party they intended to attack was not of much consequence to them. I knew that well enough; and the reason that I chose Lilly Trot for a companion was not because I thought he would be an additional protection from danger, but because I did not like the idea of travelling by myself through the dreary solitudes of Victorian forests.

There is no disguising the fact that Lilly Trot was a convict. He did not disguise it himself; nor did he seem to have any particular delicacy with respect to its being known. He had his ticket-of-leave, and he was not backward in the showing of it. Perhaps his state of feeling arose from the circumstance that he was not alone in his misfortune. There were many hundreds of men in the Australian colonies whose journey to the Antipodes did not cost them as much as a ride to Chelsea would cost you or me, and who walked about with as independent an air as you or I would assume in walking through the Strand.

We were on horseback, with blankets before us on our saddles, to provide for our getting bushed. We were prepared for rough times. I carried my revolver, and Lilly Trot had a villainous-looking black life-preserver up his sleeve, ready at a moment's notice for any emergency. He professed a contempt for guns and pistols, and held his black guttapercha stick, with its heavy leaden knob, to be more than a match for the best revolver ever made. He had the reputation of nursing carefully in his body two or three bullets, which did not seem to cause him the slightest inconvenience, and this may account for his contempt for anything that contained a bullet.

We trotted along a melancholy track, thinly lined on each side with

miserable half-starved trees. The lynx eyes of Lilly Trot were busy in all directions, and every now and then he pointed to some gully or hill-sidelong as a likely place to find gold, if a man searched for it. It may be supposed that these last six words are unnecessary, on the assumption that gold could not be found unless it *were* searched for. But it was a very common thing, in the early days of the gold-diggings, for gold to be found on the surface of the soil; perhaps on a track where auriferous stones had been worn smooth by the tread of many feet and the roll of many wheels, until the dust upon them had been rubbed off, and their treasures revealed to the next passers-by; or perhaps on a hill crown after a storm, when the loose earth had been washed away by a heavy rain, leaving the bright little nuggets glistening in the sunshine that smiled when the rain-pour ceased.

Said Lilly Trot: "Some day there will be a rush here" (meaning a rush of gold-diggers to the spot indicated), "and perhaps the discovery of a new gold-field;" or, "Some day I shall come here with my pick, and look for gold;" or, "If gold is ever found hereabouts, I should select that piece of ground, where the hill is like a saddle; that's where the heaviest bits will have settled." Some gold-diggers have a kind of second sight with respect to where the heaviest gold will be found.

The remarks of Lilly Trot served in a small measure to beguile the tedium of the journey. It was a sad-hearted track over which we were trotting, and it grew more despondent-looking and more gloomy every hundred yards. The occasional barking of a dog, the appearance of a stray hut, and the coming suddenly upon a party of sun-burnt men sawing timber, had been the only breaks in the monotonous solitude of the dismal woods. And now it was afternoon, and the unceasing cawing of thousands of ugly black crows jarred distressingly upon my ears. For three wearisome hours we rode along without meeting with the shadow of a human being. For three dull hours we rode through the almost trackless forest, and for all the signs of human life we saw, we might have been the last representatives of the human race existing upon the earth. For three seemingly interminable hours we rode past the same trees, over the same black stumps and branches, and under the same white staring sky. For three long hours we saw, as far as sight could reach, the same grand arch of timber, in the solitudes of which imagination built many an airy mansion, and the same leaden-looking hills and ranges that loomed upon us in the early morning. It was a dull, melancholy scene. We might have been riding through the Forest of the Dead, everything about us was so still and quiet; we might have been riding through the Forest of Despair, everything about us was so sad and gloomy; we might have been riding in the regions of Dreamland, everything about us was so strange and unreal.

I had fallen into a kind of listless dejection, when I suddenly found

myself listening delightedly to a gush of the sweetest melody that ever flowed from mortal lips. It was simply Lilly Trot whistling, but whistling divinely, if such a term may be applied to what is usually considered a vulgar accomplishment. As I gazed at Lilly Trot, and heard him breathe beautiful melody from a pair of the coarsest lips that ever deformed a human mouth, my amazement grew very strong. He was whistling the principal airs from "La Sonnambula," and I never heard them more artistically rendered. The softest-toned flute could not have produced sweeter music, and, as I listened, the skill of the whistler raised about me the village where Elvino and Amina lived and loved, the mill, the stream, and the thousand pleasurable traditional associations by which all such simple love stories are surrounded. The pleasant effect remained long after Lilly Trot ceased whistling, but when the rusty cawing of the crows forced itself again upon my attention, I noticed that the sun was sinking behind the distant ranges.

"We shall have to bush it, mate," I said.

"That's so," said Lilly Trot, unconcernedly; but looking about him sharply, despite his apparent carelessness, for a suitable spot to camp on.

There is but little twilight in Victoria, and the shadows were deepening around us when "Spell O!" sang out Lilly Trot suddenly, and at the magic cry we rolled off our horses, and began to gather dry leaves and dead wood for a fire to boil the tea. This was soon accomplished, the water being fetched from a water-hole which my inexperienced eyes would never have discovered, but Lilly Trot pointed it out. While the tea was boiling we hobbled our horses, and took the saddles and blankets from their backs. Then we rolled to the fire a tree that had been blown down, and soon it was in a blaze. All this was done neatly and expeditiously; and in a few minutes we were sitting by the fire, drinking tea and eating sandwiches with an appetite which only bushmen can possess. Then we filled our short cutty pipes and lighted them, and our happiness was complete. Not a word passed between us during the smoking of our first pipe; but when we had filled and re-lighted I said to myself, "Now is the time for a story, and there is the man who can tell it." And then I said aloud:

"Lilly, yours must have been a queer sort of life."

He smoked on in silence, and merely replied by a smile. I saw it in the flicker of light that blazed up as I spoke. His manner was encouraging, and I knew he would speak presently, as he did.

"Why, yes," he said; "it *has* been a queer life, mine. I know you want to draw me out, matey, and I don't see much objection. What sort of story would you like? I can tell you lots of them, about all sorts of people, from pickpockets to murderers. I suppose you don't much care which? Just hold on a bit and I'll give you one."

He paused, as if considering which theme to choose; and having made

up his mind, proceeded:

“It's about a match box, so we'll call it ‘The Story of a Match Box.’ ”

In the first few months of the gold-digging mania — when men scarcely knew if they stood on their heads or their heels, and when the whole country was so mad that it ought to have been put into a strait waistcoat — there were all sorts of strange things occurring, and all sorts of bad things done. Not a few men started for the gold-diggings, who were never more heard of and never will be. They were hardly missed. Many of them had no friends or families; their very names were often fictitious, and if anything was whispered about in connection with them it soon died away, and no efforts were made to discover if they were dead or alive; everybody was too busy, and nobody cared. Two mates would go on a prospecting tour; months would elapse, and one of them would be working in one of the gullies of Castlemaine or Ballarat; of the other nothing was ever heard, and nobody asked any questions. What business was it of anybody's if a man ran away from his wife, and shaved himself or let his hair grow, so that neither she nor his friends could know him again? A good many men were glad to run away and commence a new life and take a new name, and perhaps a new wife. I had a mate once who was married five times; it didn't matter to him. When he left his wives they got married again themselves. On one gold-diggings he lived in the next tent to an old wife of his, who had married a few weeks after he left her, and, do you know, they got quite friendly again. My mate and his old wife's husband used to go out regularly on the drink together. A nice kind of family arrangement, I thought it, when he told me the story, and we used to laugh at it rarely. He was a sinner, and I wasn't a saint, mind you; not a bit of it, mate.

You see, it was so easy for a man to lose himself. Take a clerk out of a city office, sprucely dressed, and with a nicely trimmed moustache; send him on to the gold-fields, and let him grow his beard and dress himself in moleskin trousers and Scotch twill shirt; let him work for a few weeks at the bottom of a twenty-foot shaft, or stand at the windlass all the day with his sleeves tucked up to his shoulders, with a black cutty pipe in his mouth and an old billycock on his head, and the sun blazing down upon him and browning every bit of flesh it could get at — why, in six months his own wife wouldn't know him! Perhaps the case was different. Perhaps he was knocked on the head, or tumbled into a hole, or was lost in the bush. It isn't at all an uncommon thing for diggers to find human bones at the bottom of deserted shafts; shafts that haven't been touched for twelve months perhaps. Sometimes a short-handled shovel will be found, with blood and hair sticking to it. They might have belonged to a man, or they might have belonged to a goat — it didn't matter which. In the old country they would kick up a regular row at such a discovery. All the doctors would be quarrelling whether it was a man's hair or a goat's,

or a man's blood or a bullock's. The newspapers would be full of it; *they* wouldn't let it rest, you may take your oath on it. But here we don't kick up a row about such a trifle; we are not so squeamish.

I remember, continued Lilly Trot, nursing his knees and looking as much like a hedgehog as possible, — I remember the first time I heard of the gold-diggings. We were camping near the Porcupine — Sandy Jim, German Alf, and me. The country was ragged enough at that time, I can tell you. No tobacco or tea to be bought for love or money. We had neither love nor money, so we were forced to help ourselves from the nearest sheep-station. We tied up the overseer and an old woman, slaughtered a sheep, made up a little assortment of flour, tea, and sugar, pocketed all the tobacco we could lay hands on, took out of the paddock three of the best horses — not forgetting the saddles and bridles — and then made tracks as fast as we could with the booty. German Alf wanted to ill-use the old woman, who must have been nearer sixty years of age than fifty, and I had to threaten to shoot him before he would desist. Sandy Jim, too, swore he would rip him open if he wasn't quiet; and the pair of us got him away without any mischief being done. He was a tarnation thief, was German Alf; as black-hearted a thief as ever drew breath. The devil's got tight hold of him now, that's one consolation.

I'll tell you something. That old woman called to me just as I was going out of the room. She was tied up, and couldn't move, so I had to go back to her to know what she wanted. "You're a bad wicked man," she said; "but you're not as bad as your mate, jerking her head as if she would have liked to jerk it at German Alf. "You have a little good left in you. Have you got a mother?"

Do you know, mate, that question struck me all of a heap. Something got into my throat which prevented me from answering her, and I went out of the hut dazed like.

When we were well away from the station we got off our horses, and sat down to our mutton and damper. We were at the end of our meal when a horseman rushed through the bush, and almost sent us flying. We were up in a moment, and in a twinkling the flying horseman was on the ground, roaring for mercy. We only did this in self-defence, you know; and in self-defence we thought it necessary to search him, for fear he should have loaded weapons about him. Sure enough we did find a neat little revolver, a bowie knife, and a small chamois leather bag full of yellow metal, which looked like brass.

"Hallo, mate!" exclaimed Sandy Jim, "what the devil do you carry brass about you for?"

"Brass!" screamed the simpleton; "it's as much brass as you are! It's gold, that's what it is! It's gold!"

Simpleton or not — and he must have been mad, or something very near it, to let out the secret to such a rough lot as we were — he would

have been a dead man in a very short time if it hadn't been for me; for German Alf had thrown himself on the fool at the mention of gold, and was pressing the life out of him. He was a devil, was German Alf; you were never safe with him. He would come behind you and throttle you without a word of warning, and smoke his pipe afterwards as cool as you like. I had to hug him pretty tight before I could get him off; and when he did let go he was almost as black in the face as the man he was trying to choke. I'm not over particular myself; but the flying horseman had never done me any harm, and, besides, I wanted to get out of him where he had found the gold. We had heard of gold being discovered, and didn't know whether to believe it or not; but now it seemed as if we were on the track of it. Upon our promising the flying horseman that we wouldn't hurt him, he told us that he had found the gold at Bendigo, that there were a hundred men there digging up as much as they could carry, and that we could get a ton of it if we liked.

You may guess how excited we were. We determined to start off at once, and we made our new friend go with us. He refused at first, but when we threatened to kill him, and indeed had a rope round his neck, he changed his mind, and led the way. We went a little off the track to borrow tools from a station, and we succeeded in getting two shovels and a double-headed pick.

We got to Bendigo all right, and set to work at once. We couldn't get any ground in Golden Gully, where the diggers were making twenty ounces a day, so we crossed a hill into the next valley, where we began to work with a will. Three feet down we came to the gold. We called the gully Dead-dog Gully, because we found two or three dead dogs there. We worked there a fortnight; then we shifted our tent to Murdering Flat, where the gold wasn't found in such large pieces as in Dead-dog Gully, but there was more of it. Then we went to Jackass Gully, where we came upon a nugget that weighed seventy ounces. Altogether we did very well, and as there were not too many diggers on the gold-field for the first few weeks, there wasn't much squabbling about the ground. There was more than room enough for all of us who were there. We washed a hundred and twenty ounces out of one bucket of earth, and we might have made big fortunes if we hadn't been fools. But we took to drinking and knocking our money about, and laying silly wagers. We got the gold so easily, and thought so little of it, that when we went to a grog shop to drink, we'd give the storekeeper a big pinch of it for three glasses of whisky. If we wanted new shirts or boots, we'd go into a store and fit them on. We were mighty particular about our water-tight boots; we liked them to fit well and to look smart, and never asked the price. When we'd bought the things we did want, and plenty of things we didn't want, we used to throw a wooden match box filled with gold on the counter, and say to the storekeeper, "Take it out of that, mate." And the

storekeeper did take it out of that. We never knew how much was in the match box, and we never cared to know how much the storekeeper took. He would pretend to be very particular about it; would open the box carefully, and put a few pinches of gold into the scale, and put a little back, and take a little more, and look at the scales just as they balanced, and then look at us, as much as to say, "See what an honest fellow I am!" Or as much as to say, "How wrong it is of you to be so careless with your gold! But if you don't take care of it yourself, I must take care of it for you." I've heard diggers lots of times, when the boxes were handed back to them, say to the storekeeper, "Here, take another pinch, mate," as if it was snuff. And the storekeeper would take another pinch — not a small one — and then ask his customers if they'd have a drop of grog. That was a thing they never refused. And after that perhaps they'd buy something else they didn't want, and throw the match box to the storekeeper, that he might help himself again. The storekeepers on the gold-diggings made a fine thing out of the folly of reckless gold-diggers.

Every night we used to assemble at a shanty called the Go-a-head Restaurant, and there we used to drink ourselves blind, often winding up with a fight, in which knives would be used and some ugly wounds given. Lucky diggers would play cribbage, or brag, or euchre, for ounces or nuggets of gold, and hundreds of pounds would be lost and won in an hour. There was one gambling digger we called Double-or-Quits, because when he lost the game he would cry, "Double or quits!" and losing that, would cry, "Double or quits!" again; and then, "Double or quits!" and "Double or quits!" again and again, until he had nothing left to double with. He was one of the luckiest of all the diggers round about; wherever he stuck his pick, gold seemed to spring up, and beg of him to take it. He worked like a nigger all day, and when he had made forty or fifty ounces, he would get rid of it at "Double or quits." He had a drop of drink in him once — it wasn't the only time he had it, mate — and he kissed a barmaid. When she boxed his ears for it — which wasn't what they always did — he caught her round the neck, and cried, "Double or quits!" and kissed her again. He came to a queer end. He had a quarrel with a digger, and they agreed to fight it out. They staked money on the fight — I forget how much — and Double-or-Quits licked his man, and won. "I'll fight you again to-morrow," said the man who was licked. "All right," said Double-or-Quits, "we'll fight to-morrow for the same amount — double or quits." They fought the next day. Double-or-Quits came with a rush. "Double!" he cried, as he delivered a stinging blow. "Quits!" cried the other man, and he hit Double-or-Quits a tremendous blow, and knocked him senseless. Double-or-Quits never recovered from that blow. He took to his bed, and died a week afterwards. He was crazed all the time he was ill, and didn't know any one about him. But all the week he was playing cards with shadows, and crying out, "Come

along — cut again! Double or quits!” A minute before he died he jumped clean out of bed, and looked before him in a fright, thinking that Old Nick was by his side, and had come to fetch him. “No, no!” he screamed. “Keep off — keep off! Double or quits!” And then, as if he had played and lost, he threw up his arms, and dropped down dead.

One night, when we were at the Go-a-head Restaurant, a digger related a story about an aboriginal, who had told him that great lumps of gold were lying on the surface a hundred miles away. When the digger asked in which direction the wonderful land lay, the aboriginal pointed in the direction of the Murray River, and said, “White man find plenty yellow stone there.” The diggers' tongues were very busy over the story, and nothing else was talked of all the night. As we walked home to our tent, Sandy Jim and German Alf, who were tremendously excited, did all they could to persuade me to start with them on a prospecting tour to find out the place. But I had led a hard life of it in the bush for a good many years, and I had made up my mind to go down to Melbourne for a spree. I proposed instead that the three of us should make tracks for Melbourne, spend a fortnight there and have a jolly spree, and then start for the interior. No, they wouldn't listen to it. They were mad to get to the new country, though they had no idea where it was. German Alf was determined not to stop in Bendigo another day; Sandy Jim sided with him. They were resolved, so was I, and that night we parted.

The next morning I was off to Melbourne, with my gold in a belt fastened round my waist, and my life-preserver slung handily on my wrist. German Alf and Sandy Jim started for the country where the gold was lying in big lumps on the surface; they started in the dead of night, for fear that they should be followed. I wasn't sorry to part from German Alf, he was too treacherous for me; but I did regret parting from old Sandy Jim. We had shared dangers and hardships in each other's company, and he had always stood by me like a man. We were once pretty nearly starved, too, in the bush; another hour would have cooked us, I believe. That sort of thing binds fellows to each other, you know. Sandy Jim and I didn't whimper when we separated. I gave him a match box — a metal one — that I had had for a dozen years, and he gave me a knife, a first-rate Dover, and we bade each other good-night, as if we were going to meet the next morning. I never saw him again alive.

I wonder if there ever will be another such a city as Melbourne was in the first year or two after the discovery of gold. I don't think it. All the world was there, Spaniards and Parleyvoos, Greeks and Malays, Russians and Indians. John Chinaman wasn't there; but he came afterwards, worse luck! Such drinking and squandering of money were never seen before, and will never be seen again. We were all mad. I had heaps of money in the shape of nuggets, so I put up at the biggest hotel in Melbourne, and drank champagne at two pound a bottle — Number Two

we called it — for breakfast, dinner, and tea. I was just as bad as the rest of them. I was drinking phiz at the Criterion bar, when a mate I had known on the diggings came in and clapped me on the shoulder. “Hallo, Trot!” said he. “Hallo, mate!” said I. And I called for another bottle of Number Two, and knocked the neck off, and poured the champagne into pewter pots. When we had drunk it we exchanged news, which only consisted of the intelligence that we had both come to Melbourne on a spree, and were jolly glad to see each other. Little as that was to say, we took a long time saying it, and we might have stood there I don't know how long, if a voice that sounded three parts like a man's and one part like a woman's hadn't screamed out, “Now then, Tom; how much longer are you going to be?”

Tom dropped the pewter pot, and said, “Hang me if I wasn't forgetting; that's my wife!”

“Didn't know you were married, mate,” I said.

“More I was,” he said, scratching his head, “till an hour ago. Come out and see her.”

I went with him to the hotel door, and there in a coach was his wife, dressed in pink silk, a great red-faced Irishwoman, ten years older than Tom. A younger woman, but almost as big, was sitting next to her.

“Only met her yesterday, Trot,” whispered Tom, “and married her to-day. That's the proper thing to do.”

“Plenty of her,” I whispered back.

“Isn't there?” he answered, exultingly. “Can't get such a woman as that every day in the year.”

“Very sudden marriage, mate,” I said.

“Not at all,” he said; “it's the fashion. Barney the butcher was married yesterday, and Fighting Phil the day before.”

“Were they, though!” I said; “I knew both of them well.”

“And it's the proper thing to do, eh, mate?”

“No good coming to Melbourne without doing it,” he said.

“Who is that bouncing girl in the coach, mate?” I asked.

“That's Rattling Bet,” he said. “Jump in, and stick up to her. Show her your nuggets, and she'll have you.”

In I jumped by the side of Rattling Bet, and before the day was over we arranged to get married.

She was a stunner, was Rattling Bet. She wouldn't get married in anything but white satin, and she stipulated that on the day we were married we should drive through Melbourne in a carriage and six, and treat all the diggers we knew. She got blind drunk on the wedding day; but as I got blind drunk as well, I hadn't much to grumble at.

Of course I didn't know it at the time, but I believe that girl had gone through the ceremony of marriage twenty times. The only thing I did know about her was that she was a stunning big girl, with eyes as black

as cherries, and hair down to her waist. If she'd been born in a tiptop family, she'd have been thought a regular beauty. She pretended to be in love with my whistling, and I believed her, like the fool I was. She'd say, "Whistle, Trot!" and I'd sit before her, like a great donkey, whistling away for my life; and I daresay she was laughing at me all the time she was pretending to admire me. It wasn't my whistling she was in love with; it was my nuggets. She had made up her mind to have them, and have them she did. There was nothing namby-pamby about her. We'd been married just three weeks when I was brought to my sober senses by the discovery that Rattling Bet had rattled off with another lucky digger. She had rattled off with my nuggets as well; but I had a few ounces of gold on deposit in a Melbourne bank, and I drew it out and spent it in following her. Without success, though, for she had sloped off to the Sydney side, and I had my own particular reasons for not showing myself there just then. I soon gave up the hunt, and went back to Jackass Gully; but I found when I got there that the best of the gold had been dug out. I went from one gully to another, and from one diggings to another; but although I always got gold, I never got much of it. I heard nothing of Sandy Jim and German Alf; and I used to wonder if they ever reached the diggings they'd started for. I inquired for them wherever I went, but nobody could tell me anything about them; and it wasn't till fifteen months afterwards that I came plump upon German Alf at a New Rush thirty miles from Bendigo.

"Hallo, Alf!" I exclaimed. "How are you getting along?"

"Mein Gott, Leely!" he cried, making as though he was ready to jump out of his skin in his delight at seeing me, although I knew at once from his face that he was far from being pleased at my coming across him.

But we did the first thing that old mates always do when they meet — we went and had a drink. When I asked him about Sandy Jim, he told me, in a way that I thought was a bit flurried, that they had not been able to agree, and had parted. I was not surprised to hear that; but I *was* surprised to hear that Sandy Jim had gone home to the old country. Because Sandy Jim had told me, half-a-dozen times, that if he had the choice, and had a thousand a year, he wouldn't go back to the old country, but would prefer to live and die in Australia. If he had the choice, I say — because he didn't have the choice. He would have found it too hot for him in the old country, for the reason that he was sent out for life, the same as I was. That is why I was so surprised to hear that Sandy Jim had gone home. German Alf told me about himself; he was doing well, had a good claim on the New Rush, and intended soon to give up gold-digging. We didn't get along very well together in our talk, and in the middle of a silence German Alf pulled out his pipe for the purpose of having a smoke.

It is wonderful what a great deal sometimes comes out of a very little.

If German Alf hadn't pulled out his pipe, I shouldn't be telling you this story now. For if you want to smoke a pipe you must light it; and to light it, if you haven't a log fire, a match is necessary, and matches are usually kept in a match box; and the match box that German Alf pulled out of his pocket when he was going to light his pipe was the very one I had given to Sandy Jim fifteen months ago.

The sight of that match box gave me a shock. I'm not a nervous man, and I don't take shocks easily; but I did get then a most awful turn. "For," says I to myself, "if Sandy Jim is the man I take him to be, he wouldn't have parted with that box willingly." I knew it by my own feelings. I wouldn't part with the knife he gave me for a hundred pounds. "And then," says I to myself again, "if Sandy Jim didn't part with that match box willingly, he parted with it unwillingly; and if he parted with it unwillingly, what then?" All this ran through my mind while German Alf was lighting his pipe, and I determined, come what might, to find out if my old mate Sandy Jim really had gone home or not; and if he hadn't gone home, to find out what had become of him. When I asked German Alf how they had got on when they went prospecting for the big nuggets, he told me a rum sort of a story about their travelling a hundred miles through the bush, and that then they had quarrelled as to which was the proper track to follow, and had parted, one going one way, one the other. When I asked him how he knew that Sandy Jim had gone home, he said he had it from a mate who came up from Melbourne, and who said that he saw Sandy Jim on board ship an hour before it sailed. "That is all I know about it, Leely," said German Alf. I nodded, and said I supposed that Jim had really gone home, and that I was sorry I hadn't seen him before he left. I never said a word about the match box. "Can you give me a shake down to-night, Alf?" I asked. No, he said, he couldn't. He was so sorry, almost ready to cry; but his tent was only eight feet by ten, and two of his mates slept in it besides himself. "O-ho," thought I. "You've got something in that tent you don't want me to see." With that, I wished him goodnight. But I didn't lose sight of him. Not I. I tracked him to his tent that evening. It wasn't an eight by ten, the lying thief! It was double that size. And what do you think was chained to the side of the tent? Why, Sandy Jim's dog! My old mate's dog Lion, that he wouldn't have parted with for his life! Directly I cast eyes on that dog I said to myself, "Lilly Trot, there's been foul play with your old mate, and you've got to find out what has become of him."

(And here Lilly Trot, having worked up his story dramatically, dropped the curtain of silence upon the act, and paused awhile. The night by this time was somewhat advanced, and a distant rolling of thunder betokened the approach of a storm. I could only see my companion's face when it was lighted up by the glare from the blazing tree, and then it looked strangely weird. The shadows that were created by the flickering fire

seemed to be imbued with life, and to mock the element that shaped them. Lilly Trot dug his heel into the blazing trunk, and a shower of sparks flew upwards, and a thousand fantastic shades tore at the bosom of the earth; then, as the bright sparks died in the gloomy night, and fell to earth, the dark shadows ran up the trees and leapt from branch to branch, from trunk to trunk, until they were lost in the black depths of the surrounding forest. I could imagine them creeping on us, when the fire was extinguished, like stealthy devils, gliding towards us from tree to tree, until they came upon us while we slept, and struck us dead. The scene was drear enough for the creation of these and other fancies as strange, and I was glad when Lilly Trot resumed his story.)

The sight of that dog, he continued, did give me a turn. I felt as if a flash of lightning had lighted up my brain. I had fifty pictures in my mind in a moment; but the ugliest of them all was the picture of dear old Sandy Jim lying dead upon the ground, and German Alf grinning over him. Lion was the most faithful creature I ever knew. I often heard Sandy Jim say he would rather be a poor beggar all his life with Lion for a companion, than a rich cove without him. He was a brave dog, too. It was a difficult matter getting out of his clutches once you were in them, if his blood was up. He would hold on like grim death, and in former times had been the terror of every low-bred cur in his neighbourhood. He was cut and bitten all over from the battles he had fought. How the dickens German Alf managed to get hold of him and kept him was more than I was ever able to discover. The best part of all this came into my head while I was having my tea in a grog shanty near German Alf's tent. For after I caught sight of Lion I crept quietly away; it wasn't dark enough yet for me to do anything, and I didn't want German Alf to see me skulking about his tent. I made inquiries about him, and I found out that he was generally disliked, that he didn't associate with any of the gold-diggers, and that he was spoken of by nearly everybody as a miserly, rich, surly German thief. One thing I made up my mind to, and that was to have Sandy Jim's dog that very night.

So when it got dark I watched German Alf out of his tent, — where he was living all by himself, and not with two mates, as he had told me, — and when he was well out of sight I crept near to the dog's chain. Not near enough for him to get hold of me; I knew his nature too well for that. Lion's chain rattled as I approached, and I knew by that and by a low kind of a growl he used to give, that he was aware some person was near him who, perhaps, had no right to be. There was an old tune that Sandy Jim used to whistle, a tune I never heard from any other man; he called it. "The Ploughman's Delight." So, while the dog was growling, I commenced to whistle this tune in exact imitation of my old mate. As I whistled, Lion's growling became fainter and fainter, until it stopped altogether; and then I knew he was puzzled, and was considering; for

Lion and I had always been good friends, and he had heard me whistle a good many times. I whistled the tune right through, and then I called softly, "Lion! Lion!" In a moment the dog came towards me, as far as the chain would allow him and then I took courage to creep closer, and to put out my hand. He knew me directly. He licked my hand, and I crept quite close to him. He jumped about me with such delight that I thought he'd break his chain; and sure enough he did break it, wrenching it clean away from the stake. I couldn't have wished for anything better. German Alf, when he found that Lion was gone, wouldn't suspect I had made off with him; and I didn't want to arouse Alf's suspicions.

I walked off at once into the bush, the rattle of the chain along the ground telling me that the dog was close on my heels; and when we got to what I considered a safe distance I knelt down and twisted the collar from Lion's neck, and threw it away.

"Now, Lion," I said, placing his forepaws against my shoulders, and looking into his eyes — it was dark, but I could see them blazing — "now, Lion, I want to find out what has become of Sandy Jim, your old master. I don't believe he's been rightly dealt with; and if anything foul has happened to him, I'll find it out, so help me God! and you shall assist me to do it."

Upon my word, the faithful old rip knew what I was saying as well as I did myself; and I do believe he swore an oath as strong as mine that he would assist me to discover what had become of his old master.

In a week from that time I was in Jackass Gully, on the very spot where I had last seen German Alf and Sandy Jim together. The old tent was there, very ragged and dirty; but the man who lived in it didn't know anything of my mate. I was precious hard up at the time, and I fossicked about Jackass Gully in some of the old spots, which weren't rich enough for us when we first went there. I went down the shaft we sunk, in which we had got so much gold, and as luck would have it I found a little bit of the golden gutter which we had neglected to take away; and out of that bit of earth — not four bucketsful altogether — I washed ten ounces of gold. That was enough for me just then, and, blessing my stars, I started off the next morning in the direction that German Alf and Sandy Jim had taken when they went to hunt for the surface gold a hundred miles away.

It was on the afternoon of the first day that I stood at the opening of the two tracks — one to the right, one to the left — puzzled which to take. I had made up my mind to take the one which was the most trodden, and had walked along it a dozen yards, when I felt Lion pulling at the chain which I had put round his neck. I didn't take much notice of him at first; but when his tugging got inconvenient, and when I heard him whining as if he was in trouble, I turned to see what was the matter. I had no sooner done so than Lion jerked the chain clean out of my hand, and ran to the other track, where he stood looking towards me, and wagging his old tail.

Now, that made me consider what could be the reason of Lion's anxiety, and why he didn't seem inclined to follow me in the way I was going.

And strike me dead! exclaimed Lilly Trot, so excitedly that he made my blood jump through my veins, if it didn't come upon me like sudden daylight, that the dog knew the road his master and Alf had taken, knew that I wanted to take the same track, and wanted to lead me to a place where I should get some clue to the mystery. There's more in dogs than we know of, mate. They can't speak our language; but they've got senses of their own equal to ours. They are better than us, too, for they never forget.

“And they're worse than us, Lilly,” said I, speaking for the first time, “for they never forgive.”

That's true enough; though how Lion ever let German Alf come near without snapping at him is a puzzler. When that dog stood upon the track I had left, and looked towards me, begging of me almost, I made up my mind that he could take me to the very spot Sandy Jim and German Alf had passed in their prospecting expedition; and I made up my mind, too, to let him lead me where he choose. So, walking up to him, I stooped and patted the faithful beast's head, and holding the chain loosely followed at his heels. He was wiser than any human creature could have been, for he never hesitated a moment. Sometimes we came upon three or four tracks, leading different ways, but Lion always took one of them without hesitation. On the second day we came to a large tent, with a few bottles of gingerbeer upon a bench outside. There Lion made a dead stand. I didn't lug at his chain, but, going into the tent, asked the owner if he had anything stronger than gingerbeer.

After looking at me a moment to see if I was a detective — for it was a sly grog shanty, and the detectives are down upon these stores for selling grog without a license — he seemed satisfied that I wasn't an informer, and he served me a nobbler of whisky, and took one himself upon my invitation. When I paid for the drinks, he came to the door and saw Lion.

“I've seen that dog before, mate,” he said.

“Long ago?” I asked, in an easy tone, though my heart was beating quick.

“A matter of more than a year ago, I daresay,” he answered.

“There were two men with him then, mate,” I ventured to say, pretending to be busy with the dog's collar.

“Yes,” he said; “but you weren't one of 'em.”

“No, I wasn't,” I said. “So long, mate.” And I walked away. Only for a dozen yards, though, for turning back to the man I said, “Did you see them when they returned this way?”

“I saw one of 'em,” he said.

“Which one?”

He laughed, and gave me a queer look, as if he thought I had a tile

loose.

“How should I know which one?” he answered.

“The dog was with him,” I remarked.

“Yes,” he said, “the dog was with him, all bloody. Looked as if he'd been badly beaten and cut about.”

That was enough for me. I bade him good-bye again, and walked away. When we were out of sight of the tent I threw myself upon the ground, and Lion stretched himself before me, watching me with his bloodshot eyes.

“Two of them went this way, Lion,” I said, “and only one of them came back. Which one, good dog? Sandy Jim or German Alf?”

Lion wagged his tail in the dust, as much as to say, “I'd tell you if I could speak; but you should know without my telling.”

“I do know,” I said, just as if Lion had spoken the words. “If it had been Sandy Jim you wouldn't have been all bloody and cut about. Your old master never gave you a blow; he had no need to. You knew every note in his voice, didn't you, Lion? and you were only too glad to obey him. It was German Alf who brought you back, and who beat you into submission. Then, where did you leave your master and my dear old mate? tell me that, Lion.”

The dog rose — never tell me that dogs don't understand what you say — and said in a sorrowful bark, “Come along; I'll show you where we left him.”

I solemnly swear that I had nothing to do with it. I was like a man in a dream, waiting for something which Lion was going to show me. That dog picked out the places where he camped for the night; picked out the grog shanties on the road, and made me stop and drink; picked out the creeks where I got water to boil for dinner and tea; and led me through thick and thin, till we came to a wooden hut, a dozen miles away from the nearest tent on the road. It was noon when we came to this hut. The dog had behaved very strangely all the morning; he wouldn't let me have a moment's rest. He was whining and jumping about the whole of the time, and running before me, as if I wasn't quick enough for him. We had been out five days, and had walked a matter of a hundred and forty miles. Within the last mile or two I had noticed a few shallow shafts sunk a long while since, and I thought it likely that they had been sunk by Sandy Jim and German Alf. But with the exception of my notion that there had been foul play, and my faith in Lion, and my belief that he was leading me to a spot where I should make a discovery, I had nothing to guide me. When we came to the wooden hut, Lion behaved as if he was really going mad. He barked and whined to such a degree that he set two other dogs at the back of the hut barking and whining in chorus. The noise brought a man to the door, who asked what the hot place I wanted hanging about his tent for, and whether I saw anything that didn't belong

to me that I'd taken a fancy to.

"Do you take me for a thief?" I asked, in a pretty quarrelsome tone, for my blood was up.

"Yes, I do," he said, "and that's flat. I suppose your two mates are close behind you?"

"What two mates?" I asked.

"What two mates?" he shouted, in a furious passion. "I'm not a greenhorn, you skulking thief! Do you think I don't know that dog there? The last time I saw him, the two skunks that were with him stole my tea, stole my sugar, and stole my axe, curse them! They wouldn't have stole much more, I can tell you, if I'd caught them. I'd have shot them down, as lief as I would a dingo."

I was civil in a minute. "That was more than a year ago, mate," I said.

"Yes, it was more than a year ago, mate," he repeated, in a sneering tone that made my blood boil again. "And you pretend not to know anything about it! Look here, now. I'm going to fetch my gun, and if you're not off when I come back I'll put a bullet into your thieving carcass!"

With that he ran into his tent to fetch his gun.

He meant what he said, I knew, and as I didn't want to quarrel just then I walked away. I was so confused with passion and doubt that I didn't for a few minutes discover that we were off the track; but when I did notice it I wasn't troubled, for Lion was scudding along in front of me, with his chain trailing loose, and his nose close to the ground.

We must have gone about six miles from the hut, and were in the middle of thick bush, when Lion made a sudden stop, about fifty yards ahead of me, and commenced to scratch at the earth furiously, and toss it wildly about. When I saw that, I was prepared for anything.

I went away from the spot where Lion was tearing at the earth, and the dog looked at me wistfully, as if he thought I was going to give up the search at the last moment. But I didn't intend to do that. I was going farther into the bush to see if I could discover something — I did not know what; perhaps a button off Sandy Jim's clothes, perhaps a cap, handkerchief, any article that I might be able to identify. And I did make a discovery. Soddened down into the earth by rain, buried beneath fallen twigs and branches, with its handle worm-eaten and rotten, and its steel black with rust, I found — an axe. The very axe, perhaps, that German Alf had stolen from the hut. I took it up very carefully, for I thought that some of the rust upon it might be the rust of poor Jim's blood. I went back to the dog. He was standing in the middle of a hole he had scratched out, and he was whining in a most distressful manner over some charred bones. As the dog raised his head, the tears were running down his face, and his whining sounded like a lamentation for the dead and an appeal for justice. I thought, how strangely things come about. Here was a foul

murder discovered all through a little match box not worth twopence. I knew how the murder had been committed as well as if I had seen it done. Here was my poor old mate asleep. Above him stood German Alf with the axe, ripe for murder and robbery — for Jim had gold. Down comes the axe, once, twice — aye, and again and again, to make sure. Good-bye, poor Jim! You've got your ticket-of-leave in real earnest, and nobody can cancel it now. Then German Alf had lifted the body on to a log fire, and, impatient to get away, had buried what he couldn't get rid of.

I hadn't had anything to eat all the day, but I didn't feel a bit hungry; I was filled with something else. I talked to Lion, and he whined and lamented as I told him the story; and when I finished his face was as stern as mine — he had resolved to avenge his master's murder.

I was no time making my way back to the hut, and making friends with the hut-keeper; I was no time getting a sack, and placing in it everything I could find that would bring the guilt home to the murderer, including the remains of poor old Jim. I was as little time as possible getting back to the New Rush, where German Alf was working. I walked all the way, with my swag on my back, and the sack safely secured in the middle. It was night when I got in. I don't know how it was that I didn't think of taking anybody with me — I was too excited, I suppose. I walked straight to German Alf's tent. There was a light inside, and I kicked at the door. German Alf, who was undressing, came and asked, with an oath, who was there.

“Lilly Trot,” I answered, and I gave another kick.

He opened the door, and I pushed my way in, with Lion at my heels.

“Got dam, Leely!” he cried. “What the devil bring you here? My dog, too!”

I suppose there was an expression on my face which made him pull up short. He was about to say something else, but instead of saying it he began to swear. I waited till he was quiet, and then I said:

“Do you see this sack?”

He nodded, “Yes.”

“Do you know what there is in it?” I asked.

“No,” he said.

“Can't you guess?”

“No,” again, with the blood deserting his lips.

“You cursed villain!” I said, almost choking with passion. “Sandy Jim's bones are in it. I've been home for them. You murdered him, you infernal scoundrel; and you shall swing for it, as sure as there's a God in heaven!”

I had scarcely finished when he levelled a revolver at me. I wrenched it from his hand. He turned, caught up a short-handled shovel, and was swinging it down upon my head when Lion sprang upon him, and, bearing him to the ground, tore away at his throat. I went to the door, and

fired the revolver in the air. A score of diggers rushed to the tent, and I told them the story in a few words; and they took the dog away, all bloody about his mouth, and tied German Alf hand and foot.

Of course the black-hearted villain was hanged for it; the evidence was too strong for him. I've got the match box to this day, concluded Lilly Trot, pulling it out of his pocket, and holding it in the bright glare of the blazing tree; and I often think of poor old Jim when I strike a match. It's strange, isn't it, that such a little thing as this should have been the means of bringing to light one of the coldest-blooded murders that were ever committed?

The “Ne’Er-Do-Weel.”

A Doctor's Story

C. Haddon Chambers

“OH, Billy has gone wrong altogether,” said Tom Finch; “and I'm afraid he'll never come right again. You know he was engaged to be married to little Bessie Hardwicke. Well, he carried on so outrageously that her people were obliged to break it off. You see, he got mixed up with a bad set, and it's quite a rarity to see him sober now.”

“I'm sorry to hear it,” said the doctor.

“Yes,” I remarked, “Billy is a confirmed ‘ne'er-do-weel.’ ”

“Don't say that!” said the doctor, quickly.

“Why not?” I asked, surprised to see a rather pained expression on his face.

After a moment's pause he replied:

“Because the term cannot be applied literally to any man. You may be sure that there is some good in Billy Smart. Some day it may come out. Shall I tell you a story of a ne'er-do-weel?”

“Yes, do!” we all cried; and the doctor began:

The first practice I had in the colonies was some hundreds of miles in the interior of New South Wales. I was located in a small township called Wambat; but my practice really extended over a district somewhat larger than Wales. I have frequently ridden over a hundred miles to attend a case, and I soon began to think very little of such a journey through the bush. My patients, of course, had to pay in proportion, and altogether the practice was not unremunerative, while the life was eminently healthy, if sometimes a little solitary.

Twelve miles from the township was situated the “homestead” of a wealthy squatter named Macpherson, with whom and his family I soon became intimate. Macpherson was a splendid type of the genus squatter: a tall, wiry old fellow, with a keen, hard head — but not a hard heart — giving fair value for what he received, and exacting the worth of his money; calculating, but generous; proud of his horses, his breed of sheep, his “station” — which covered about one hundred and fifty thousand acres — and his family, which included a wife, three daughters, and a

boy. I hope I may never meet a worse man than old Ben Macpherson.

“Nor worse girls than his daughters,” put in Tom Finch, with a knowing wink, in which there was perhaps a little port and water.

“Nor worse girls than his daughters,” assented the doctor. “It is not impossible that you will meet one of them — the eldest — some day. Never mind the congratulations now. I will tell you more some other time. Don't interrupt me again, please.”

Well, as I have told you, I became intimate with the Macphersons. They were immensely kind to me, and I was soon a constant visitor at the “homestead,” which was called Badjally. I have said that it was twelve miles distant from Wambat. By the road it was really sixteen; but by following a rough bush-track, passing through some slip rails, fording a creek, and jumping a few fences, four miles could be saved. In the daytime, and on moonlight nights, I always chose the latter route; but on dark nights the road was preferable, as being safer and more comfortable.

Among Macpherson's station hands was a young fellow they called Ruffy; whether as an allusion to his appearance and manners, which were rough and unpolished, or to his resembling the second Norman king in the possession of a great shock of red hair, I never knew; nor did I ever learn his real name. I know, however, that he came from England, and I believe of respectable parents, and that he had no relations in Australia; whither, I have reasons for suspecting, he was sent, like many another English boy, as hopelessly incorrigible.

Among many vices Ruffy had two virtues: he was the most daring and skilful rough-rider in the district, and he was passionately devoted to Macpherson's little son Harry. As a rider I can honestly say I never saw his equal. He was more at home on horseback — whether with or without saddle — than on foot. No buckjumper could shake him off. His manner of catching and breaking a wild horse was to me as novel as it was daring.

Armed with a halter, and mounted on a fleet animal, he would ride into the bush, and, having found a mob of wild horses, charge them. In the stampede which followed he would ride alongside one of the flying brutes, and, halter in hand, leap from his own horse upon its back. Then he would stretch along its neck, put the halter on its head, and simply ride it into subjection.

But such feats as those, in a country where horsemanship is not only a very general accomplishment, but very often with many squatters a *sine qua non* in the engagement of station hands, were not of sufficient value to admit of Ruffy's many failings being winked at. It was virtue number two that covered a multitude of sins in the old squatter's eyes, and had that not been accompanied by devotion of another kind, I believe that his laziness, untrustworthiness, and his many other moral blemishes would have been overlooked.

Ruffy was a confirmed inebriate. The only way to keep him from the bottle was to keep the bottle from him, and as you know that drunkenness, like every other form of lunacy, is attended with the cunning of the serpent, that was a task almost beyond human ingenuity. I have seen Ruffy at noon perfectly sober. I knew that there was no public house or "shanty" within twelve miles, and that the store keys were in Macpherson's own pocket. I could conceive of no possible means of his obtaining drink, and yet I have stumbled across him within an hour perfectly incapable.

I remember once living for a short time near an institution where men of means were sent by their friends to be cured of intemperate habits. From what I learned of it, I believe the system pursued to have been an admirable one, and I know that the institution annually turned out a large number of eminently satisfactory cases. No alcoholic drink of any kind was kept in the establishment; patients were not permitted to go outside the grounds unaccompanied by one of the attendants, and their friends were not allowed to see them until it had been ascertained that nothing alcoholic was being conveyed to them. And yet, in spite of these precautions, I was informed that patients frequently succeeded not only in getting drink, but also in getting drunk.

So it was with Ruffy; the most careful and systematic precautions failed in keeping him sober. It was his youth that made the case so utterly sad and deplorable. He was but twenty-three or twenty-four, and he was a drunkard and a ne'er-do-weel.

One evening, old Macpherson and I were sitting on the verandah at Badjally, smoking and talking. The conversation turned upon Ruffy, who was giving little Harry a lesson in riding in a paddock in front of us.

"What am I to do with that fellow?" asked Macpherson, pointing in the direction of the paddock with the stem of his pipe. "He's sober now, you see; but he managed to get blind drunk before eleven o'clock this morning, and last week he narrowly escaped an attack of the horrors."

"I'm afraid he's a very bad lot," I said. "I wonder that you have kept him on so long."

I really did not wonder, for I knew that Harry, the most winning and high-spirited boy you could imagine, was the apple of his father's eye, and that the devotion between the child and Ruffy accounted for a world of forbearance. Ruffy's fidelity was perfectly dog-like, and as I then looked at them out in the field, they struck me as resembling a slim, sleek greyhound, and a great, rough, homeless mongrel.

"To tell you the truth," said Macpherson, almost apologetically, as he too looked at the pair in the field, "I can't get rid of the fellow. You know that I'm not the sort to keep idlers about my place. If he didn't drink so terribly I'd overlook his laziness, and keep him on as a sort of servant for Harry. I assure you, I've given him the sack scores of times, but, like all

ne'er-do-weels and bad pennies, he always turns up again after his bout. Last week I thoroughly made up my mind that he should go. I gave him a blanket, something to eat, and a couple of weeks' wages, and I told him that if ever I caught him on the station again I should give him a taste of the stock-whip. Well, he went. For the next two days little Harry did nothing but cry and mope; but on the third day he recovered his spirits, and I congratulated myself upon having at last got well rid of Master Ruffy. But, as you shall see, I cried before I was out of the bush. On the fourth day, I was riding along the creek down yonder, when I came across a very pretty picture. Harry stood on the bank with a long rod in his hand fishing for perch, and his friend Ruffy sat alongside of him, getting outside the remains of a leg of mutton and a lump of plum duff, which Harry had fetched from the house in a piece of newspaper. I found that my gentleman had camped there since I turned him away, and that he had contrived to see the youngster and effect the pleasant little arrangement."

"Well, what did you do?" I asked.

"Do? What the dickens could I do? I believe I swore a little at first, and then I flourished my whip. I meant to use it, too; but I caught my boy's big eyes fixed on me, and — well, I hadn't the heart."

As old Macpherson prided himself upon his firm and unyielding character, he made this confession with no little shame.

"All I did," he continued, "was to take Harry up on the horse in front of me, and turn homewards. At a signal from the youngster, Ruffy shouldered his swag and followed, which I believe he'd have done without any encouragement. Doctor, that child was sent to make a fool of me in my old age. It's a very singular thing that the only man who has ever bamboozled me is my own boy."

After delivering himself of this delightful and unconscious Irishism, Mr. Macpherson sank back upon his chair and vented his feelings in thick clouds of yellowish-brown smoke. The sun had just sunk beyond the wooded hills in the west; the soft, golden glare, which had lingered caressingly upon the hilltops for a space, had almost melted away, and with the sudden swiftness of the south the darkness was spreading over the trees. With the disappearance of the sun, the locusts in the bush ceased their monotonous humming, but the night was welcomed in by the great world of crickets under the old verandah suddenly bursting into chirping chorus, and by the croaking of a huge frog, which had found home in the water-tank hard by. Couple with these sounds the occasional cry of some strange bird in the trees, and the distant tinkling of the cow-bells, and you may imagine yourselves seated that evening with old Macpherson and me on the verandah at Badjally.

The long silence which ensued between us — the result, I believe, of the melancholy influence of the hour in the lonely bush, when day

swiftly fades into night — was broken by Harry, who, having been called indoors by his mother, had come to say good-night. As he put his arms round the old man's neck he said:

“Dad, I want to whisper.”

“Very well, darling,” answered Macpherson, tenderly. “But how feverish you are, and your hair and coat are quite wet with dew. You shouldn't have been out so late with that nasty cold you have. Be quick and whisper, and then run off to bed.”

“You mustn't ever send Ruffy away again, dad,” I heard the child whisper, “because he's promised to be good, and never to drink any more.”

Then he kissed us both and disappeared.

Again a silence fell upon us. Macpherson smoked with a violence which was suspicious. He was a rough squatter, and by many who did not know him intimately he was looked upon as a stern and hard, although a just man; but though I did not turn to look at him (in any case, I should not have been able to see his face through the darkness and smoke), I could swear that there were tears upon his cheeks just then.

“What do you think of the temperance lecturer, doctor?” he asked, at last.

“I think that he is more likely to succeed with this case than Father Mathew himself would have been.”

“I fear that neither would ever succeed with that ne'er-do-weel,” remarked Macpherson, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. “He's made the same promises to me scores of times. He's a hopeless case.”

“Good-night, doctor,” said the squatter, a little later, when I mounted my horse. “It's very dark, and looks overhead like gathering for a storm, so you'd better go home by the road. And, I say,” he added, before turning to go indoors, “I don't think, after all, that it was to make a fool of me that little Harry was sent.”

As I rode along the lonely road, pondering upon my host's last vague and yet simple remark, I suddenly realized that his prognostications about the weather were well founded, for lightning began to flash in the thick darkness above, followed by crashes of thunder and heavy drops of rain. When I reached home, I was drenched to the skin. Having made my horse comfortable (at that time I had not been able to secure a servant of any kind to live at the cottage), I changed my clothes, lighted a fire, and made myself some hot grog. Before turning into bed I looked out at the weather, and found that, although the thunder still growled like some angry beast retiring into its lair after a fight, the storm had abated and the rain had ceased. The moon, too, had risen; but its light was mostly obscured by the heavy black clouds which were chasing each other in disorder across the sky.

At the end of about two hours' heavy and dreamless sleep I was

awakened by a noise at the back door. I sat up and listened, and as the noise — which sounded like the thumping of a fist against the door — was repeated, I sprang up and pulled on some clothes, mentally deploring the bad taste of Mrs. Higgs, the publican's wife, in choosing such an unearthly hour to present the world with a little Higgs.

The surprise I experienced was not unmixed with alarm, when on opening the door I saw Ruffy half lying on the step.

He crawled into the room.

“What is it?” I demanded, anxiously.

He turned his face upwards, and by what light the moon afforded I saw that it was very pale, and that his eyes had a bleared, filmy look, with also a strange wild expression. I swear to you they might have been the eyes of a man bordering on *delirium tremens*. His head was bared, and the red matted hair beaten about his cheeks added to the weird repulsiveness of his appearance at that moment. He could not stand; he seemed unable to articulate. I concluded that he was drunk.

“What is the matter?” I demanded again, angrily. “Speak, you idiot!”

His features writhed most horribly, and he opened his mouth, but for a moment no sound came. Then I heard the word “Harry!”

It was evident that something was wrong with the child; but, so that I might go provided for any emergency, it was necessary that I should learn some particulars.

“What is the matter with him?” I asked.

Again his features writhed as though he were making desperate efforts to conquer his inability to speak. It seemed to me that, notwithstanding his condition, he was terribly conscious of the importance of his mission.

“Croup!” he managed to ejaculate thickly. “Dying! Go!” And raising one of his arms on which he was leaning, he waved it with a backward movement as if imploring me to lose no time. Then he rolled over on the floor helpless and insensible.

“Even in a matter of life and death — the life or death of the child he professes to love — the brute could not keep sober,” I thought, and with my foot I spurned the worthless heap that lay in the dim light of the moon.

Then I hurried to the stable, where I fortunately had a fresh horse, and was soon galloping at full speed along the road to Badjally.

At the slip rails about a hundred yards from the house, I found Macpherson standing bare-headed, his long, thin hair blown about by the wind. His terrible anxiety was painful to witness.

“How could you delay so?” he said, with intense reproach. “My boy may now be dead.”

“Delay?” I cried, as we hurried to the house. “Look at my horse. I cannot have been much more than an hour on the road; the delay was your messenger's. He is drunk.”

“The scoundrel!” said Macpherson, grinding his teeth with rage. “If my child dies I’ll shoot him!”

I found poor little Harry in a sad plight. If you have never seen a child suffering from croup you can have no conception of the height which childish agony can reach. When I first saw him, Harry was writhing and twisting his poor little body in the fearful and vain effort to draw a breath. I am perfectly certain that had I arrived a quarter of an hour later I should have found a corpse. As it was, I saved him. At the end of about three hours, during which I never left his side for a moment, he was in a deep sleep and out of danger.

Then I sought Macpherson, to whom the good news had been carried by one of the girls. He was in the garden, whither he had fled unable to bear the sight and sound of his darling's agony.

I found him utterly overcome by the reaction, and sobbing like a woman. His excess of gratitude was almost painful to me. I believe that had I asked him then for half his wealth he would have given it to me.

In the morning before I left Macpherson spoke of Ruffy.

“Don't let me see that fellow again, doctor,” he said; “I couldn't bear it. My child has been spared to me; but had it been otherwise, I should have looked upon Ruffy as his murderer. Send him away somewhere. I will pay his fare to Sydney if you will have the kindness to see that he goes; only never let me look upon him again.”

“I can't understand his getting drunk,” I said, thoughtfully. “Was he sober when he left?”

“Apparently as sober as a judge,” replied Macpherson, “or I should have gone myself. He was sleeping somewhere at the back, and was the first of the servants to hear the alarm. He ran in to me, and said that he would fetch you quicker than any one else could. Black Mary was fortunately in the stockyard close handy. She's only half broken, but you know she's as fleet as the wind, coming as she does of a racing family, and Ruffy would ride any horse that was ever foaled. So I told him to go, and he ran to the yard, put a bridle on her, jumped on her bare back, and was out of sight and tearing along the bush-track in less time than it takes to tell it. I can only suppose that he had a bottle of spirits in his pocket.”

“It is certainly very strange,” I said, beginning to feel vague misgivings. “I can't imagine that he would drink at such a time; nor can I understand his getting intoxicated so quickly. And it strikes me now — which I did not remark in the excitement — that I did not see the mare when Ruffy arrived at the cottage. I think I'll be off now,” and I shook hands with him; “and,” I added to myself, my misgivings regarding Ruffy becoming more intense, although not more tangible, every moment, “I'll go home by the bush-track.”

It was a beautiful morning. A warm sun reigned in the perfectly clear sky. The rain had been a boon to the trees and grass, which looked

greener and brighter than on the previous day. The bush had had a long-needed shower-bath, and it seemed very much the better for it; while the teeming myriads of birds, insects, and reptiles it sheltered expressed their gladness and gratitude in a ceaseless humming, buzzing, and chirping.

At another time I might have ridden leisurely along, smoking, reflecting, and enjoying nature's carolling.

But the thoughts which filled me then urged me forwards. All along the track I could follow, without slackening my pace from the quick canter in which I had started, the traces of Black Mary's hoofs, and I could judge — by their depth, their distance apart, and by other signs — of the speed to which her reckless rider had urged her. I jumped my horse over two fences where Ruffy had crossed on the stormy night just over. I followed the mare's tracks to the creek — which was now somewhat swollen with the rain — forded it in the same place, and then on for three or four miles to the sheep fence which bounded the station about a quarter of a mile from my cottage. This fence was composed, like many sheep boundaries in Australia, of fallen trees and branches laid together to a height varying from three to five feet. It was an easy hurdle enough in some places, and I have taken a pony over it scores of times. I was riding at it now, when I saw something which caused my heart to jump. The animal I was riding saw it too, and when about to take the leap he stopped so suddenly as almost to send me over his head. A horse lay on the other side apparently dead — *a black horse!*

Having crossed the fence a little lower down I rode to the spot. Yes, it was Black Mary. She had fallen upon her head, which was twisted underneath her. Her neck was broken. The explanation of the accident flashed across me in a moment. A broken branch lay half under the mare's body. I remembered having noticed it standing up from the fence only a few days before at that place. At a moment when the moon was obscured by the clouds Ruffy had ridden at the fence, the ill-fated mare had struck the branch, and here was the result!

But did the catastrophe end here? I asked myself. Ruffy had been unable to either speak or stand. Had he escaped unhurt? Then why did he crawl? — the idea of drink having been the cause had now altogether fled from my mind — and why did he twist and contort his features? I could think of nothing else as a cause but physical agony, and a great shudder of fear passed over me, mingled even then with a feeling of unutterable self-reproach. I feel it now, boys, and shall to the end of my life — for *I had kicked him*. The ground in that place was bare of grass, and wet and muddy with the heavy fall of rain. I examined it closely and quickly, but could find no impression of Ruffy's boots. All that I could see was a thick, irregular trail, as though some body had been dragged over the soft ground in the direction of the cottage.

I galloped home, rushed into the house, and found Ruffy lying there

upon the floor as I had left him. I bent over and examined him. Nearly all the ribs of his left side were broken, dented right in, and one of his legs was fractured just above the ankle. Filled with a devotion heroic and sublime, he had dragged his poor, mangled body foot by foot over a quarter of a mile of rough ground on that wild night, suffering with each movement worlds of intense agony which cannot be even partially imagined, which must be known only to Him who, judging not his weakness and imperfections, but only his great last sacrifice, took him home to Himself that night.

Yes, Ruffy was dead! As I knelt on the floor by his side in an agony of spirit, I lived through the scene of his coming again — the efforts he made to speak without betraying his own sad plight, and the manner in which he waved me away. He must have seen my anger and disgust when I questioned him, and he must have guessed the erroneous impression I was under. And so, even as he allowed me to leave him to die, he allowed me to go misjudging him. Ruffy, you see, was a true martyr.

Clasped in his right hand, which was pressed against his breast, I afterwards discovered a little tin match-box containing a piece of paper, on which were scrawled, in a childish handwriting, the following words:

“I promis not to drink any mor.

“*Sined*, RUFFY.

“*Witnes*, HARRY.”

And I remembered the child's words: “You mustn't ever send Ruffy away again, dad, because he's promised to be good and never to drink any more.”

“That, boys,” concluded the doctor, “is my story of the ne'er-do-weel.”

Jim's Ghost.

A Queensland Mystery.

Edmund Stansfeld Rawson

I WAS engaged to take charge of a thousand store bullocks from Nemo Downs, in Queensland, to Melbourne, in Victoria, and returning by sea, after a short spell in the southern capital, to a port on the north-eastern coast where I had friends, I had there purchased a couple of horses, and after a fortnight's steady ride had arrived at Nemo Downs ready for work again.

We were mustering on the outside of the run some twenty miles away from the head station. The great rolling plains, extending, as an old stockman said, into the "dim blooming distance," were the dread of the unpractised bushman, and on a cloudy day without a compass it was no easy matter even for an old hand to make a bee-line across them. I knew the country pretty well, however, having assisted at a former muster, besides being sufficiently expert to take a new line going south the year before over almost unknown districts, so had no fear of being bushed. I was riding alone, having been directed to go to a certain bit of downs, where a small mob of cattle usually ran. I had just emerged from a patch of scrub which fringed the plain, and crossed a shallow, dried-up watercourse, when my horse gave a violent plunge, which, as I was thinking of nothing in particular at the moment, nearly unseated me. With a loud snort, ears stiff, and nostrils distended, he stood staring at something half hidden among the tussocks of grass at the edge of the gully. I looked and saw that some one had evidently been camping there quite recently, and wondering who could be in that extremely out-of-the-way place, I dismounted to make a closer inspection. Yes, there was the blanket with the fresh impression of a man's form still on it; the saddle at its head, saddle-cloth, pint and quart pots, ration bags, and the ashes of a fire. Everything usual to an ordinary camp was there, but the *bridle and the owner were not*. Now, who and what was the absent man? Was he a bushranger escaping from the districts where his bloodthirsty raids had struck terror into the hearts of all the settlers? Perhaps a cattle-stealer, spying out the best place for a good haul; possibly a horse-stealer.

Anyhow, he was miles away from any known track, and Nemo Downs was the extreme outside station in those days. He couldn't be exploring for new country, otherwise he would have had a larger supply of rations and a pack. I was riding a splendid young horse, a temptation to any thief to possess, and furtively looked round, half expecting to find myself "covered," and to hear a gruff voice ordering me to "Bail up!" No; all was perfectly quiet — a faint crack of a whip, and the distant murmur of cattle, the only sounds in the dead still air.

I can't explain why, but when a bushman finds himself near a fire, he instinctively takes out his pipe, gives the remnant of his last smoke (he always has a "draw" left) a ram down with his finger, takes up a fire stick and proceeds to light up. He will even go to the trouble of blowing on the stick for some time, or perhaps pick up a piece of red-hot charcoal and jam it down the bowl, notwithstanding that he may have plenty of matches in his pocket all the time. Such an inspiration seized me, and I drew a small stick from the ashes to light up, and ponder on the situation. The fire was out; moreover, the ashes then struck me as being old and flattened down. I took hold of the blanket, — possibly a valise or paper or some clue to the owner might be underneath; fresh and even *warm* as it looked, it crumbled away in my hand. I touched the saddle — it fell to pieces, exposing the rusted iron tree, like the blackened rib of a skeleton. I lifted the quart pot — the bottom remained on the ground, and the dust of what had once been tea leaves went up in a little puff. Saddle-cloth, ration bags, all were absolutely rotten! *Where was the bridle, and where the owner?*

It was a startling discovery, and a creepy, sick feeling came over me, as I slowly mounted my horse and rode off in the direction of the camp where we were to muster.

As I jogged along my thoughts wandered away for a possible solution to the mystery of this solitary camp. I had no doubt that the unfortunate man, whoever he was, had perished. He had evidently gone to look for his horse and never returned. Had he lost his way, and wandered over those limitless plains till reason forsook him, and rendered his death perhaps a happy release; or had he been suddenly and cruelly murdered by blacks? There was a township down the river about seventy or eighty miles away; perhaps he was one of the many victims to the greed of the bush publican. His cheque — the result of many a month's hard and honest labour — "knocked down" in a single night, and he, after two days of oblivion induced by doctored rum, glad to escape with his horse and blanket. In a semi-stupefied state he might have been trying to make Nemo Downs in search of work, got off the uncertain track, and perished uncared-for and unknown. It will be a heavy day's reckoning, I warrant, for some of those old scoundrels, who filled their kegs with bluestone and tobacco, when they are called upon to give an account of their

stewardship!

I had no time for yarning when I reached the camp, as the hands were already at work cutting out the bullocks, and it was almost sundown when we got them safely into the yard. This had lately been erected for outside mustering, and was close to the "Long Waterhole," in the Camara river, the western boundary of Nemo Downs.

The horses were hobbled and supper over; each man had selected his particular soft spot for the night, having first cut an armful of the long grass near the water's edge to serve as a "hipper." We were smoking our post-prandial pipes, stretched in various attitudes round the fire, when I broached the subject which had haunted me all day, and described what I had found.

"By Jovey!" exclaimed Jim Lendhan, the head stockman, as he removed his pipe, expectorated unerringly into one particular bright hole in the fire, drew his knuckles across his bristling moustache, and brought his open hand down on his knee with a ringing smack, "*that was the man!*"

"What man?" came at once from every tongue except that of Peter, one of the oldest hands on the station, who half turned towards Jim and muttered something about "that blooming ghost again!"

"Well," said Jim, after a pause, "when I came here first with the B Z cattle, I was out one day on this very spot. I was after that old red poley's mob, *you* remember, Peter." Peter nodded with a half-pitying smile, as if he'd heard all this before. "I struck the Long Waterhole," Jim continued, "about half a mile up from here. It's pretty deep there, and wide, as you know, and there ain't any crossing for two miles above that again. It was a real blazing day, and I got off to get a drink. I was riding old Uncle Tom, and he was always mighty shy of water. He nearly got drowned in the Marauva on the trip up; Peter there and I had to swim in and cut the pack off the old brute; didn't we, Peter?"

Peter again smiled gently.

"Well, I was just hitching my whip to the end of the reins when I saw a big buck nigger coming along the opposite bank. He hadn't seen me, so I stood still and watched him. He struck into a cattle track leading to the water, right abreast of where I was, and came down it. By Jovey! boys, it wasn't a nigger at all, but a *white man*, as sure as I sit here and tell you. He hadn't a rag on him, and his body was brown with the sun. He was a real big chap, and his hair and beard were red. I waited a second or two, and then 'cooeed.' Lord, how he jumped! He was up that bank in the twinkling of a mosquito's eye, and off across the plain like a real old moon-lighter. I hollered and yelled, but he never looked up or round, but simply went.

"I couldn't follow across that water, but I wasn't long in getting the old moke away, and we came down here, round the end of the hole, and up

the other bank at a pace which meant business, I tell you. I picked up his tracks at the water-side, guessed the line he had taken, and followed on. The old horse was as fresh as paint, and though the sweat was flying off him his wind was good, and I never drew rein till I struck that patch of brigalow about two miles from the river. I reckoned I ought to have caught him, but I didn't even *sight* him; and what's more, I couldn't find a trace of him going into the scrub, though I got off my horse and followed along the edge carefully for over a mile. Well, I went in that night and told the boss. That was the year before you came, sir" (this to Jack Raymond, the manager, who was out with us). "We had no black boys to track, and the ground was as dry and hard as an iron pot; besides, some cattle had been down the very place where I'd seen the man and destroyed all signs of footmarks." Here Peter was observed to be suffering from suppressed emotion. "However, we all turned out to search, and searched for days, didn't we, Peter? But we never found anything, did we, Peter? And the chaps used to say always after that, that I'd seen a ghost, didn't they, Peter?"

Peter, thus repeatedly appealed to, grunted an assent, and again muttered something with a "blooming" in it.

A grim silence fell upon all.

At length I said, "Well, there's no doubt that some one has been lost, and I'll show you the place to-morrow, Jim."

Here I accidentally caught Peter's eye, and its expression was sarcastic, to say the least of it.

Presently all hands were rolled in their blankets, their saddles for pillows, and the bright star-lit sky forming the softest and loveliest canopy that nature could furnish.

Next morning at daylight we started the bullocks for the station, and after helping to steady them a mile or so on the way, Jack Raymond, Jim, the sceptical Peter, and I returned to visit the solitary camp I had discovered, and to pack up and bring home the remains of our own camp of the night before.

An hour's ride brought us to the ill-fated spot, where everything was as I had left it. We all got down and examined the things tenderly and minutely, but not a trace of anything by which to identify the owner could we discover.

Peter carefully picked up the rusty stirrup-irons and solemnly strapped them to the side of his saddle. Then he scratched his head in thought for a second and said, "Well, Jim, I always did think you'd had a touch of the blooming thingamies when you spun us that yarn; but blow me if you weren't right, and that *was* the man after all."

Jack Raymond and I hardly spoke all the way home as we rode along at a short distance behind Jim and Peter, who were driving the pack horses. Those two, however, kept up an animated discussion all the time, and

when we dismounted at the stables Peter concluded by saying, "And if any man ever tells me, Jim, that you saw a ghost, blowed if I don't tell him he's a blooming liar!"

That night, as I gazed at the peaceful stars, my thoughts reverted again and again to the probable fate of that unfortunate man. Did he wander for days and nights before his reason left him, or did he succumb at once under the blazing sun across those seemingly never-ending plains? Those very stars had watched him when perhaps he was powerless to take advantage of their beacon lights to guide him to a haven. That he had water was evident from Jim's story; but it seemed also evident that instinct alone had led him to it; unless, indeed, he were some criminal flying from justice, to whom the advent of a white man would be only less terrible than an onslaught of blacks.

It is solely on this, or the mad theory, that one could account for the startling effects of Jim's "cooee," or otherwise to the belated wanderer it would have been a revelation of joy and rescue, disclosing to him — unless, of course, he were the veriest of new chums — the lucky approach of a friend and deliverer. As it is, the fate of this unfortunate being adds but one more to the long catalogue of unsolved mysteries of the Bush. How long he lived, and after what pangs and complications of suffering he at length gave up the ghost, will never be known till those rolling plains and the treacherous sea alike give up their dead.

Monsieur Caloche.

Tasma

Author of "Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill, an Australian Novel."

Chapter I.

A MORE un-English, un-Colonial appearance had never brightened the prosaic interior of Bogg & Co.'s big warehouse in Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Monsieur Caloche, waiting in the outer office, under fire of a row of curious eyes, was a wondrous study of "Frenchness" to the clerks. His vivacious dark eyes, shining out of his sallow face, scarred and seamed by the marks of small-pox, met their inquisitive gaze with an expression that seemed to plead for leniency. The diabolical disease that had scratched the freshness from his face had apparently twisted some of the youthfulness out of it as well; otherwise, it was only a young soul that could have been made so diffident by the consciousness that its habitation was disfigured! Some pains had been taken to obviate the effects of the disfigurement, and to bring into prominence the smooth flesh that had been spared. It was not chance that had left exposed a round white throat, guiltless of the masculine Adam's apple, or that had brushed the fine soft hair, ruddily dark in hue like the eyes, away from a vein-streaked temple. A youth of unmanly susceptibilities perhaps, but inviting sympathy rather than scorn, sitting patiently through the dreary silent three-quarters of an hour, with his back to the wall which separated him from the great head of the firm of Bogg & Co.

The softer-hearted of the clerks commiserated him. They would have liked to show their good will, after their own fashion, by inviting him to have a "drink," but the possibility of "shouting" for a young Frenchman, waiting for an interview with their chief! ... Any one knowing Bogg, of Bogg & Co., must have divined the outrageous absurdity of the notion. It was safer to suppose that the foreigner would have refused the politeness. He did not look as though whisky and water were as familiar to him as a tumbler of *eau sucrée*. The clerks had heard that it was customary in France to drink absinthe. Possibly the slender youth, in his loose-fitting French paletot reaching to his knees, and sitting easily upon shoulders

that would have graced a shawl, had drunk deeply of this fatal spirit. It invested him with something mysterious in the estimation of the juniors, peering for traces of dissipation in his foreign face. But they could find nothing to betray it in the soft eyes, undimmed by the enemy's hand, or the smooth lips set closely over the even row of small French teeth. Monsieur Caloche lacked the happy French confidence which has so often turned a joke at the foot of the guillotine. His lips twitched every time the door of the private office creaked. It was a ground-glass door to the left of him, and as he sat, with his turned-up hat in his hand, patiently waiting, the clerks could see a sort of suppression overspreading his disfigured cheeks whenever the noise was repeated. It appeared that he was diffident about the interview. His credentials were already in the hands of the head of the firm, but no summons had come. His letter of recommendation, sent in fully half an hour back, stated that he was capable of undertaking foreign correspondence, that he was favourably known to the house of business in Paris whose principal had given him his letter of presentation; that he had some slight knowledge of the English language; that he had already given promise of distinguishing himself as a *homme de lettres*. This final clause of the letter was responsible for the length of time Monsieur Caloche was kept waiting. *Homme de lettres!* It was a stigma that Bogg, of Bogg & Co., could not overlook. As a practical man, a self-made man, a man who had opened up new blocks of country and imported pure stock into Victoria, what could be expected of him in the way of holding out a helping hand to a scribbler, a pauper who had spent his days in making rhymes in his foreign jargon? Bogg would have put your needy professionals into irons. He forgave no authors, artists, or actors who were not successful. *Homme de lettres!* Coupled with his poverty, it was more unpardonable a title than gaol-bird. There was nothing to prove that the latter title would not have fitted Monsieur Caloche as well. He was probably a ruffianly Communist. The French Government could not get hold of all the rebels, and here was one in the outer office of Bogg & Co. coolly waiting for a situation.

Not so coolly, perhaps, as Bogg in his aggrieved state of mind was ready to conclude; for the day was a hot-wind day, and Bogg himself, in a white waistcoat and dust-coat, sitting in the cool depths of his revolving chair in front of the desk in his private office, was hardly aware of the driving dust and smarting grit emptied by shovelfuls upon the unhappy people without. He perspired, it is true, in deference to the state of his big thermometer, which even here stood above 85° in the corner; but having come straight from Brighton in his private brougham, he could wipe his moist bald head without besmearing his silk handkerchief with street grime. And it was something to be sitting here in a lofty office, smelling of yellow soap and beeswax, when outside a

north wind was tormenting the world with its puffs of hot air, and twirling relays of baked rubbish and dirt. It was something to be surrounded by polished mahogany cool to the touch, and cold iron safes, and maps that conveyed, in their rippling lines of snowy undulations far away, suggestions of chill heights and mountain breezes. It was something to have iced water in the decanter at hand, and a little fountain opposite gurgling a running reminder of babbling brooks dribbling through fern-tree valleys and wattle-studded flats. Contrasting the shaded coolness of the private office with the heat and turmoil without, there was no cause to complain.

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

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

It was known that Sir Matthew had worked his way to the colonies, acting indiscriminately as pig-sticker and deck-swabber on board the *Sarah Jane*. In his liverless, paunchless, and titleless days he had tossed for coppers with the flat-footed sailors on the forecastle. Now he was bank director, railway director, and a number of other things that formed a graceful flourish after Sir Matthew, but that would have sounded less euphonious in the wake of plain “Bogg.” Yet “plain Bogg” Nature had

turned him out, and “plain Bogg” he would always remain while in the earthly possession of his round, over-heated face, and long irregular teeth. His hair had abandoned its lawful territory on the top of his head, and planted itself in a vagrant fashion in small tufts in his ears and nostrils. His eyebrows had run riot over his eyes, but his eyes asserted themselves through all. They were eyes that, without being stronger, or larger, or bolder than any average pair of eyes to be met with in walking down the street, had such a knack of “taking your measure” that no one could look at them without discomfiture. In the darkened atmosphere of the Flinders Lane office, Sir Matthew knew how to turn these colourless, unwinking orbs to account. To the maliciously inclined among the clerks in the outer office, there was nothing more amusing than the crestfallen appearance of the applicants as they came out by the ground-glass door, compared with the jauntiness of their entrance. Young men who wanted colonial experience, overseers who applied for managerships on his stations, youths fresh from school who had a turn for the bush, had all had specimens of Sir Matthew's mode of dealing with his underlings. But his favourite plan, his special hobby, was to “drop on to them unawares.”

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

From the days when Bogg had the merest shred of humanity to bully, in the shape of a waif from the Chinese camp, the minutes slipped by with a symphony they had never possessed before. As fulness of time brought him increase of riches and power, he yearned to extend the terror of his sway. It was long before he tasted the full sweetness of making strong men tremble in their boots. Now, at nearly sixty years of age, he knew all the delights of seeing victims, sturdier and poorer than himself, drop their eyelids before his gaze. He was aware that the men in the yard cleared out of his path as he walked through it; that his managers up-country addressed him in tones of husky conciliation; that every eye met his with an air of deprecation, as much as to apologize for the fact of existing in his presence; and in his innermost heart he believed that in the way of mental sensation there could be nothing left to desire. But how convey the impression of rainbow-tints to eyes that have never opened upon aught save universal blackness? Sir Matthew had never seen an eye brighten, a small foot dance, at his approach. A glance of impotent defiance was the only equivalent he knew for a gleam of humid affection. He was accustomed to encounter a shifting gaze. The lowest form of

self-interest was the tie which bound his people to him. He paid them as butts, in addition to paying them as servants. Where would have been his daily appetizer in the middle of the day, if there had been no yard full of regulations impossible to obey; no warehouse to echo his harsh words of fault-finding; no servile men, and slouching fast-expanding boys, to scuttle behind the big cases, or come forth as if they were being dragged by hooks to stand with sheepish expression before him? And when he had talked himself hoarse in town, where would have been the zest of wandering over his stations, of surveying his fat bullocks and woolly merinos, if there had been no accommodating managers to listen reverentially to his loudly given orders, and take with dejected, apologetic air his continued rating? The savour of life would have departed, — not with the bodily comfort and the consequence that riches bring, but with the power they confer of asserting yourself before your fellow-men after any fashion you please. Bogg's fashion was to bully them, and he bullied them accordingly.

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

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

Monsieur Caloche had carefully wiped away from his white wristband the dust that it had driven into his sleeve, and now the dust on his boots — palpably large for the mere slips of feet they inclosed — seemed to give him uneasiness; but it would seem that he lacked the hardihood to stoop and flick it away. When finally he extended

surreptitiously a timid hand, it might have been observed of his uncovered wrist that it was singularly frail and slender. This delicacy of formation was noticeable in every exterior point. His small white ear, setting close to his head, might have been wrapped up over and over again in one of the fleshy lobes that stretched from Sir Matthew's skull. Decidedly the two men were of a different order of species: one was a heavy mastiff of lupine tendencies; the other a delicate Italian greyhound, silky, timorous, quivering with sensibility.

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

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

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

Would the knife descend on the instant? Would the mastiff fall at once upon the trembling foreigner, advancing with sleek uncovered head, and hat held in front by two quivering hands? Sir Matthew's usual glare of reception was more ardent than of custom as Monsieur Caloche approached. If every "foreign adventurer" supposed he might come and loaf upon Bogg, of Bogg & Co., because he was backed up by a letter from a respectable firm, Sir Matthew would soon let him find out he was mistaken! His glare intensified as the adventurous stripling glided with softest footfall to the very table where he was sitting and stood exactly

opposite to him. Not so adventurous, however, but that his lips were white, and his bloodless face a pitiful set-off to the cruelly prominent marks that disfigured it. There was a terror in Monsieur Caloche's expression, apart from the awe inspired by Sir Matthew's glare, which might have disarmed a butcher, or even a mastiff. His large soft eyes seemed to ache with repressed tears. They pleaded for him in a language more convincing than words. "I am friendless — I am a stranger — I am — — " but no matter; they cried out for sympathy and protection mutely and unconsciously.

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

"What brought you 'ere?"

"Please?" said Monsieur Caloche, anxiously.

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

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

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

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

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

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

He cast such a glance of withering contempt on the tapering white fingers with olive-shaped nails in front of him, that Monsieur Caloche instinctively sheltered them in his hat. "Go and get your traps together! I'll find you a billet, never fear!"

“*Mais, Monsieur — —*”

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

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

Chapter II.

THE station hands, in their own language, “gave Frenchy best.” No difference of nationality could account for some of his eccentricities. As an instance, with the setting in of the darkness he regularly disappeared. It was supposed that he camped up a tree with the birds. The wit of the wool-shed surmised that “Froggy” slept with his relatives, and it would be found that he had “croaked” with them one of these odd times. Again, there were shearers ready to swear that he had “blubbered” on finding some sportive ticks on his neck. He was given odd jobs of wool-sorting to do, and was found to have a mania for washing the grease off his hands whenever there was an instant's respite. Another peculiarity was

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

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

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

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

clear tan that had overspread his scarred cheeks and forehead, it was white as freshly drawn milk.

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

But to the head of the firm of Bogg & Co., taking note of scattered thistles and straggling wire fencing, warmth and sunshine signified only dry weather. Dry weather clearly implied a fault somewhere, for which somebody must be called to account. Sir Matthew had the memory of a strategist. Underlying all considerations of shorthorns and merinos was the recollection of a timid foreign lad to be suspected for his shy, bewildered air; to be suspected again for his slim white hands; to be doubly suspected and utterly condemned for his graceful bearing, his appealing eyes, that even now Sir Matthew could see with their soft lashes drooping over them as he fronted them in his darkened office in Flinders Lane. A scapegoat for dry weather, for obtrusive thistles, for straggling fencing! A waif of foreign scum to be found out! Bogg had promised himself that he would "drop on to him unawares." Physically Bogg was carried over the ground by a fast trotter; spiritually he was borne along on his hobby, ambling towards its promised gratification with airy speed.

The working manager, being probably of Bacon's way of thinking, that "dissimulation is but a faint kind of policy," did not, in his own words, entirely "knuckle down" to Sir Matthew. His name was Blunt, — he was proud to say it, — and he would show you he could make his name good if you "crossed" him. Yet Blunt could bear a good deal of "crossing" when it came to the point. Within certain limits, he concluded that the

side on which his bread was buttered was worth keeping uppermost, at the cost of some hard words from his employer.

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

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

“Ah!” said Sir Matthew.

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

Blunt fidgeted uneasily. What power possessed the boy to make him show off his riding at this juncture? If he could have stopped him, or turned him back, or waved him off! — but his will was impotent.

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

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

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

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

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

“You can ga-lopp to hell!” said Sir Matthew, with furious mimicry. “I’ll teach you to ruin my ‘orses’ legs!”

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

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

Sir Matthew prowled around the homestead the second morning after Monsieur Caloche’s flight in a manner unaccountable to himself. That he should return “possessed” to his elaborate warehouse, where he would be alone all day, and his house of magnificent desolation, where he would be alone all night, was fast becoming a matter of impossibility. What sums out of all proportion would he not have forfeited to have seen the white-faced foreign lad, and to be able to pay him out for the discomfort he was causing him, instead of being bothered by the sight of his “cursed belongings” at every turn! He could not go into the stable without seeing

some of his gimcracks; when he went into the kitchen, it was to stumble over a pair of miniature boots, and a short curl of hair, in silken rings, fell from the ledge at his feet. There was only one thing to be done! Consulting with Blunt, clumsily enough, — for nothing short of desperation would have induced Sir Matthew to approach the topic of Monsieur Caloche, — he learned that nothing had been seen or heard of the lad since the moment of his running away.

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

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

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

Sir Matthew saw the cause of Blunt's ejaculation, — a recumbent figure that had probably reached “the quiet haven of us all,” it lay so still. But whether quiet or no, it would seem that to disturb its peace was a matter of life or death to Sir Matthew Bogg. Yet surely here was satiety of the fullest for his hobby! Had he not “dropped on to the ‘foreign

adventurer' unawares"? So unawares, in fact, that Monsieur Caloche never heeded his presence, or the presence of his working manager, but lay with a glaze on his half-closed eyes in stiff unconcern at their feet.

The clerks and juniors in the outer office of the great firm of Bogg & Co. would have been at some loss to recognize their chief in the livid man who knelt by the dead lad's side. He wanted to feel his heart, it appeared; but his trembling fingers failed him. Blunt comprehended the gesture. Whatever of tenderness Monsieur Caloche had expended in his short lifetime was repaid by the gentleness with which the working manager passed his hand under the boy's rigid neck. It was with a shake of the head that seemed to Sir Matthew like the fiat of his doom, that Blunt unbuttoned Monsieur Caloche's vest and discovered the fair white throat beneath. Unbuttoning still — with tremulous fingers, and a strange apprehension creeping chillily over him — the manager saw the open vest fall loosely asunder, and then — — Yes; then it was proven that Sir Matthew's hobby had gone its extreme length. Though it could hardly have been rapture at its great triumph that filled his eyes with such a strange expression of horror as he stood looking fearfully down on the corpse at his feet. For he had, in point of fact, "dropped on to it unawares;" but it was no longer Monsieur Caloche he had "dropped on to," but a girl, with breast of marble, bared in its cold whiteness to the open daylight, and to his ardent gaze. Bared, without any protest from the half-closed eyes, unconcerned behind the filmy veil which glazed them. A virgin breast spotless in hue, save for a narrow purple streak marking it in a dark line from the collar-bone downwards. Sir Matthew knew, and the working manager knew, and the child they called Monsieur Caloche had known, by whose hand the mark had been imprinted. It seemed to Sir Matthew that a similar mark, red-hot like a brand, must now burn on his own forehead for ever. For what if the hungry Australian sun, and emotion, and exhaustion had been the actual cause of the girl's death? he acknowledged in the bitterness of his heart that the "cause of the cause" was his own bloodstained hand.

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

So here was a sort of insight into the mystery. The "foreign adventurer" might be exonerated after all. No baser designs need be laid at the door of dead "Monsieur Caloche" than the design of hiding the loss which had

deprived her of all glory in her sex. If, indeed, the loss were a *real* one! For beauty is more than skin deep, although Monsieur Caloche had not known it. It is of the bone, and the fibre, and the nerves that thrill through the brain. It is of the form and the texture too, as any one would have allowed who scrutinized the body prone in the dust. Even the cruel scars seemed merciful now, and relaxed their hold on the chiselled features, as though “eloquent, just, and mightie death” would suffer no hand but his own to dally with his possession.

It is only in Christmas stories, I am afraid, where, in deference to so rollicking a season, everything is bound to come right in the end, that people's natures are revolutionized in a night, and from narrow-minded villains they become open-hearted seraphs of charity. Still it is on record of the first Henry that from the time of the sinking of the *White Ship*, “he never smiled again.” I cannot say that Sir Matthew was never known to smile, in his old sour way, or that he never growled or scolded, in his old bullying fashion, after the discovery of Monsieur Caloche's body. But he was none the less a changed man. The outside world might rightly conjecture that henceforth a slender, mournful-eyed shadow would walk by his side through life. But what can the outside world know of the refinement of mental anguish that may be endured by a mind awakened too late? In Sir Matthew's case — relatively as well as positively; for constant contemplation of a woman's pleading eyes and a dead statuesque form might give rise to imaginings that it would be maddening to dwell upon. What a wealth of caresses those stiff little hands had it in their power to bestow! What a power of lighting up the solemnest office, and — be sure — the greatest, dreariest house, was latent in those dejected eyes.

Brooding is proverbially bad for the liver. Sir Matthew died of the liver complaint, and his will was cited as an instance of the eccentricity of a wealthy Australian, who, never having been in France, left the bulk of his money for the purpose of constructing and maintaining a magnificent wing to a small-pox hospital in the south of France. It was stipulated that it should be called the “Henriette” wing, and is, I believe, greatly admired by visitors from all parts of the world.

The Settler's Tragedy.

A Legend of Muskoka.

Edward Jenkins

Author of "Ginx's Baby".

"YES, that's a queer-looking place now, ain't it? It's the best piece of land you've seen anywhere in this day's drive, and that's a good deal to say; and, likewise, it was once the prettiest spot along this road. Why, I mind the time when that porch was all a glory with roses, like a 'ouse in a hopera bouffe, for all the world. An' right in the front there, where you see all them docks an' mullen a-growin', that was chock full o' beds of Lonnon pride, an' Chinay asters, an' roses, an' stocks, an' marigolds, an' sweet mignonette; you could smell the place a mile off on a warm summer's night. Ah! she was a fine girl, she was, that lived up there, an' a terrible story that 'ouse tells. It ain't just pleasant to be on the next lot to it."

Mr. Wellbeloved — for I had stumbled in my Muskoka ramble on a person of that name — thus spoke of a log-house and lot which had attracted my curiosity. On one of the best stretches of arable land, lying well up the gentle swell of the valley, with a good exposure, backed by fine woodlands, was — a singular sight in that raw yet thriving settlement — a "concession" which seemed to have been struck by some spirit of ruin and decay. The house stood, but its roof was rotting; its windows remained unbroken, but one could see from the draggling paper blinds, which had once made them gay with colour, that there was no housewife within to mend or change things, and all over the eight or ten acres of land which had been cleared about the house, there grew as high as the unremoved stumps a wealth of weed, such as is only the crop of absolute desertion. By this place, on one side, my friend Wellbeloved, at whose house I had drawn up for a midday meal, tilled a thriving farm; the evidences were visible in the roll of ripening wheat, dotted with the discs of the blackened stumps, and in the cattle that loitered from the sun's heat under an arch of young maples he had left in a corner of one of his fields, where a spring welled up from among some boulders; and audible by the grunt of well-fed pigs which wandered down the road and

cooled their heated sides in the marshy bottom, where I had found the road like a floating stage of logs. Moreover, there was Mrs. Wellbeloved, a little weary-looking perhaps, for number nine in the cradle was “the most bothersome child, that it was, God bless it, she had ever knew,” and two or three fine strapping lads that came home to the noontide meal from some hoeing work at the back of the concession with an appetite for the pork and corn that made me envious.

Wellbeloved was a Londoner, and had been in Canada exactly six years. He was “just turned forty,” having married at twenty, and now possessed a graduated scale of voracious infantry which must in the metropolis have severely worn his energies and Mrs. Wellbeloved's patience, but which, out here, was his most promising source of wealth. The elder boy, nearly nineteen, had added a hundred acres to the original Government concession, and as the others grew up more would follow. Already Mr. Wellbeloved's house and barns began to take on an air, if not of wealth or even comfort, of sufficiency, which, as one looked into his bronzed face and clear eyes, and listened to his cheery voice, gave promise that the time might come when the patriarch should bless his sons and daughters, and his sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, looking out upon a scene of civilized beauty and fertility, and dividing among them no mean inheritance. Such scenes have been witnessed in earlier settlements; and such scenes will be repeated over and over again as the tide of population laps on and into the forest wild of Ontario.

“Well,” I said, “what is the story of that place? It seems odd that it should be deserted like this. Why don't you take it up?”

“Me, sir! No, thankee. I'd not own a rod o' that soil for its pavin' in gold. No, no! There's blood on that land, and let some stranger come an' wipe it hout.”

He wiped the beads from his forehead (the day was hot) and began: —

The man that took hup that concession was a gentleman; leastways, sir, you know, a gentleman by birth. 'Is father were a Lunnon lawyer; you've 'eard of 'im, old Bytheway, that used to 'ave the big cases at the Hold Bailey. The hold man, he made money an' spent it, an' this 'ere boy 'e made none, an' spent what 'is father made. 'E were sent to Heton, then to Hoxford, an' afterwards 'e went where 'e weren't sent — leastways, not by direction — to the devil. The young 'ooman that lived an' died in that 'ouse were acquainted with me. Lucy Barridge, that were her real name, though she were called “Lucinda Burrinda, the helegant dansews” — she were in the corpus de balley at the Varieties Theayter in the Strand, I dessay you know hit? ... Yes? Well, sir, I were scene-shifter in that theayter for seven years, an' five years afore that at Drury Lane. I could tell you some queer stories! If you want to know somethin' of life, you get up in the wings, night after night, and watch the stage, you'll see somethin' of the bad han' the good o' 'uman nature. Why, sir, I've seen

cruelty, an' wickedness, an' jealousy, an' revenge, an' kindness, an' forgiveness, an' charity, played far more real behind the canvas scenes I were a-shiftin' than it were on the stage or before it.

One night I see a young girl, which her name was Sairey Podge, from a dirty little street in the Borough she was, but a pretty one to look at, an' danced like a sylph, an' she 'ad a partikler rival, a 'alf Hitalian girl, as bad a little shrew for temper as hever you saw. Well, one night hin the Christmas pantomime — 'twere last Christmas ten year — this girl, La Rosa, she broke down, and the people hissed her. Well, I was hup in the wings an' I see it, an' she ran behind one of the scenes where Sairey was waitin' to jump out like a fairy, as she was, an' I says to my mate, "Look out for squalls there, Lorry — them two 'll fight," for I've seen girls fight behind the scenes before now. Well, sir, the Hitalian almost bounced into the other's arms. Sairey drew back a minute, an' looked straight hat 'er. The other was glowin' with passion an' spite, an' my fear was that Sairey's face was a-goin' to be spoiled, when I see Sairey 'old hout both 'er 'ands, and I 'eard 'er, distinct-like, cry hout, "Oh! Miss Rosa, I'm so sorry!" an', will you believe it, sir? the poor Hitalian laid her 'ead on the hother's shoulder, an' cried like a child! In a minute the stage-master called out sharp for "Miss Podge," an' she dried 'er tears an' went hout an' danced so beautifully, the pit nearly went mad with 'er. Oh yes, sir, there's 'uman natur' behind as well as before the scenes, an' the great Scene-shifter above, He watches it.

Well, sir, Miss Lucy — afterwards Missis Bytheway — wer' a clever dancer, an' likewise sometimes took a small part, for she were as pretty a girl as I hever see on the stage, an' I've seen hall the swells, you know. They're very partikler at the Varieties, you know; hit's only the royal family an' two or three wery speshul parties as gets the hentree there. I dunno 'ow that young Bytheway got in; but p'r'aps 'is father 'ad done the gov'nor a good turn some time. 'Owsomever, 'e were on the stage pretty hoften, an' took a wiolent fancy to Miss Lucy. Ah, sir, my 'art used to bleed sometimes for those poor girls — to see 'ow bold and brazen some on 'em were, an' 'ow gentle others was, an' 'ow many of 'em came to grief! No matter. Lucy, she took to young Bytheway, an' 'e tried on a hold game with 'er, but she were too good or too knowin' to be deceived. I believe she really liked the man. 'E were a terrible temper. No one 'ad never controlled it. 'E'd grown up just like that stalk of mullen you see there, as straight and long as he liked, an' breakin' out at every stage. ...

Now you want to know 'ow they come hout to this place? I can't tell you. All I know is, that hafter spoonin' about the girl a precious long time, and she playin' hoff an' hon with 'im, one day she didn't come to rehearsal, an' then it were rumoured among the young ladies she 'ad run away with Mr. Bytheway. The hold gent an' the young un 'ad 'ad a row, han' the young un said that "rather than kill the old fool, he'd leave him."

Well, a year after, I come across a hemigration hagent. 'E told me about Canada an' the free grants, an', lookin' round on all those 'ungry children, I said, "We'll try it; it's worth the venture." I'd saved a little money, an' when I got to Toronto I applied for land at the Government office, an' they gave me this concession free. We got 'ere about the first of June, an' lived in the wilds for some weeks; I tell you, the mosquitoes was hawful. But you'll fancy 'ow I started when the fust thing I see in the next lot, where that 'ouse 'ad lately been built, was young Bytheway in a torn shirt an' trousers, hoein' round the stumps just has if 'e'd been at it all 'is life. Then hout come Miss Lucy — then Mrs. Bytheway, for they'd got married before they left England — lookin' pale-like, has I've seen Mrs. Wellbeloved look oftener than I cared for. We was very good friends, an' the young gentleman, who was "smart," as they say 'ere, 'e put me hup to a good many things, an' showed me 'ow to build my 'ouse, an' all the naybours was kind an' 'elpful enough, has all the people are hout 'ere to strangers. Well, young Bytheway was kind enough to Lucy, an', for all I saw, she were fond enough of 'im; but once or twice I noticed he went off to Orillia an' stayed away some days, — it might be three or four — an' when he came back again he wasn't 'imself for a long time. I knew what it was; it was the hold enemy — drink — an' for the time it made 'im another man.

By-and-by the autumn came, an' we got in our root-crops an' a little corn an' wheat, an' Bytheway laid in a decent lot. Then came the frost, and the fallin' of the leaves, an' then the snow. Such snow! I've seen snow ten to fifteen feet deep down in that gully, an' all as crisp an' shiny as the finest sugar, an' the air as pure an' the sky as bright as I ever see painted in a Hitalian scene at the theayter. ... Healthy? I should think so! There ain't no doctor nearer than Gravenhurst, an' I never 'eard of 'im comin' up here, except to Joseph Jobson's grandmother; they say she's nigh upon eighty, an' took the rhumatiz so bad they thought she were dyin', an' sent for 'im to 'elp it on. Well, it was the second year, and then in the snow-time came Christmas, an' the new tavern-keeper down at Bracebridge, he gave out a turkey-shootin', an' Mr. Bytheway, on the day before Christmas Heve, left 'is wife in our charge — she were very near her confinement — and went to try 'is luck. She come over 'ere on Christmas Heve, an' though she never said nothin' she wer'n't in no spirits, we all noticed. My wife of course see the most of 'er, an' tried 'er best to coax 'er to be more lively-like. She would go 'ome that night, and next mornin' my wife went hup to 'er for a hour or so. She left 'er dressed an' comfortable, waitin' for Bytheway's return. She expected 'im to reach 'ome about three or four in the hafternoon. I went in after midday, an' there she were a-laying the cloth for a Christmas dinner. The room was always very clean, an' she'd stuck some green about an' ornamented the table, an' made it all look very nice — far better than we poor people can

do out here; for Bytheway kept some of 'is hold habits, an' she loved to make the 'ouse as swell-like as possible. I thought she looked very pretty though she was so pale, and she 'ad one of 'er old theayter flowers in 'er brown 'air — it were a pleasure to me to see 'er.

“Why, Mrs. Bytheway,” I says, “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas, Wellbeloved,” says she. An' then turnin' roun' sharp, she says, “How soon do you think Reynold can get home? He was to leave Bracebridge early this morning and walk out. I have a plum-pudding for him. He knows nothing about it. I wish he was home.”

She went an' looked out of the door; but the wind blew sharp from the north, an' she came in with a shiver. I stayed with 'er more than a hour, 'avin' nothin' pertikler to do, an' left 'er at very near three o'clock. I 'ad to come right down from the door, you see, to that gate, an' then along the road for half a mile to my own path. I'd got very close to the turnin' into my own land when I see Bytheway strugglin' up the road through the snow. I waited for 'im.

“Allo, Mr. Bytheway,” I says, “so 'ere you are at last. Any luck a-shootin'?”

I see in a moment he were hout o' sorts. 'Is face were swollen an' red, an' he scowled at me very angry like.

“Not a d — n thing,” says he.

Then 'e come on straight at me, an' seein' 'e were not safe to speak to, I got hout of the way an' went 'ome.

“Poor Lucy!” says I to my wife. “She ain't in for a merry Christmas, I'm afeard!”

I watched him staggerin' along, and cussin' and swearin' as he went, till he reached the door. Then I see 'er run out, as well as she could, poor thing, for 'twas very near, and I see him brush 'er hout of 'is way with 'is arm. 'E didn't knock 'er down.

“Poor Lucy!” says I. “She ain't in for a merry Christmas, I'm afeard.”

Just then we 'eard the report of a gun, an' both rushed to the door. There was nothin' to be seen at first; but presently Bytheway ran out with 'is 'and hover 'is face. 'E threw himself into the snow an' lay there a long time; then 'e got up an' ran down to the road, and so off beyond Stony Jaussen the Swede's there.

“Well,” says I to my wife, “you and I 'ad best go up an' see what's become of Lucy. This don't seem all right.”

The door was open when we got there, an' the first thing we saw was Lucy Bytheway, 'oldin' in her bosom, an' groanin', an' a great spot of blood over the white cloth she 'ad laid; an' there, down on the table, crashin' and breakin' the crockery an' the glass, was Mr. Bytheway's gun with its muzzle within two feet of her breast. I knew then she'd been shot. We laid 'er on the bed. She soon swooned away. Then we gave 'er brandy, an' then come a turn I needn't describe to you. I went away and

got such baby clothes as we 'ad, an' my poor wife she stayed there and 'elped that poor young creature to fight with death for the life she 'ad so long hoped for. It were no use. The mother never 'eard 'er own child's voice. When she knew it wasn't livin' she said:

“Well, I'm going too. Mrs. Wellbeloved, remember this. He didn't shoot me. He was vexed and angry that he missed every shot at Bracebridge. I asked him what made him so angry. He had pushed me in coming in, and took away my breath, you know, and I sat down on the chair on the other side of the table. When I asked him that question he looked at me, and, you know, it was very foolish and unkind of me to ask such a question. He looked all on fire, and then with a terrible oath he dashed the gun down on the table, and, you know, he never meant it, but it went off — and oh! Mrs. Wellbeloved, good-bye, good-bye, dear, say I forgive him!”

* * * * *

“That's the story of that 'ouse, sir. You see why it ain't a cheerful place for me to look at. ... What became of Bytheway? He was found, when the spring came, ten miles off in the woods, where he had frozen to death, an' if you go up there to our Orange 'all you'll see one tomb beside it, the only tomb about 'ere, an' there the three lies.

“Dinner's ready, sir.”

In a Thirsty Land.

C. Haddon Chambers

AWAY up in Queensland we were, a fellow named Braddock and I. Hot up there? Well, I should say it was rather! I hope I shall never be in a hotter climate than the Rockhampton district about December and January, especially if the season has been dry. At the time of which I am speaking the season had been dry, and so had the one before it. The rivers and creeks were mostly long beds of baked mud cut up by the hoofs of the cattle that, with lolling tongues, had been searching — and in vain, poor beasts, as the carcasses that rotted here and there in the sun testified — for water.

To an insignificant, “one horse” little township, situated in the heart of this parched country, Braddock and I had wandered on different errands. I think you will be interested to hear them both, and then you shall learn of our terrible troubles when fate had thrown us together.

Braddock was a young lawyer, who had gone out to Queensland to practise in his profession, which, like many other callings, is overstocked at home. Unfortunately he found that the colonies were, in proportion to their requirements, as well provided with lawyers as England. He failed to find an opening in Brisbane, and he could hear of none in the country. He had also made the common mistake of going to a new country without capital.

At last, when he was in sore straits, a colonial friend used his influence to get him an appointment. A school required starting at G — — , the out-of-the-way township I have mentioned. Braddock's soul revolted against such employment. He would rather have groomed horses than taught children grammar and arithmetic. But he had no choice. He was supplied with sufficient funds to convey him to G — — , and started off. By steamer he went to Rockhampton, where he bought a horse.

It takes a mighty clever man to buy a horse without being swindled, especially if his knowledge of horseflesh is limited, as Braddock's was. The particular quadruped he secured turned out, upon further acquaintance, to be a “moke” of the most inferior description, with a determined disinclination to proceed at a faster pace than a walk, and with a huge and contemptible capacity for taking punishment. One

hundred and twenty long weary miles, under a sweltering sun, and through a country he knew nothing of, had Braddock to cover on that miserable horse, and as, at the end of his journey, he was doomed to a respectable but monotonous engagement which he detested, it is no wonder that, as he afterwards confessed to me, he was several times on the way tempted to blow away his brains and his troubles together with the little revolver he carried. He did not doubt his ability to reach G — — , but he was seriously apprehensive that he would be unable to persuade or coerce the horse into either carrying or accompanying him the whole distance, in which case the money expended in his purchase would have to be reckoned a dead loss.

Eventually, however, G — — was reached by biped and quadruped after much hardship, and very much serious misunderstanding between them during the eight days which they had spent on the road together.

For my part, I went to G — — in search of clients for a newly started life assurance society. The promoters in Brisbane, in inducing me to scour the Rockhampton district in the society's interest, told me that, at a commission of £10 on every £1,000 I assured, I should soon make quite a small fortune. Their statement was fully justified; I did make "quite a small fortune," so small, in fact, that I was unable to discover it. There was no salary attached to the appointment, the commission was considered sufficient; and I was expected to provide my own conveyance. The society was, however, kind enough to supply me with a doctor to examine the persons whom I persuaded to insure their lives.

I have met numbers of unpleasant men in my wanderings, but for all-round, thorough-faced nastiness, meanness, greed, and general despicableness, Doctor Gregory McQuade, in my estimation, takes the prize. The sort of man, you know, who eats and drinks on the sly, and hits you below the belt and then runs. A man, in brief, capable of robbing a hospital of its voluntary subscription box, or a blind man of his dog. It was in such bad company that my tour through the Rockhampton district, in a vain search for business, at last led me to G — — , where I met Braddock, who had arrived a week before me.

I had then had quite enough of canvassing for life assurance. I had spent all my money, £35 of it for a buggy and horse, hadn't a cent left for expenses, and was utterly disgusted with the companionship of McQuade. I stayed three weeks in G — — , during which I wrote three times to my employers for pecuniary assistance to carry on the enterprise. My letters remained unanswered. I learned afterwards that the society had too many serious monetary embarrassments of its own to pay attention to mine.

"How do you like canvassing for life assurances?" Braddock asked me, in the course of our first conversation.

"I hate it, and am a dead failure at it," I replied. "And how do you like

starting a school in the bush?"

"My answer is exactly the same as yours, Mr. Nomad, only that my failure must be worse. For some days I have been expecting indignant parents to kick me out of the township. I simply haven't the power of teaching even the alphabet. To avoid the ignominy of a public expulsion, I don't mind telling you in confidence that I am going to make tracks. Tomorrow or the next day I start on foot for Rockhampton."

I seized his hand.

"I'll go with you, old man," I cried. "I made up my mind to the same course to-day, for I'm in as bad a fix as yourself. I know a man who will give me £12 for my turn-out, which will only just be sufficient to clear me in the town. We will start the day after to-morrow."

How delighted I was at the thought of the fix the precious doctor would be left in, for I had resolved not to say a word of my intention to him!

On the strict Q T I sold my buggy and mare, and with the proceeds paid my hotel bill and other debts in the town. Sufficient remained to purchase flour, tea, tobacco, and other necessaries of a "swagman." These I "planted" outside the town, Braddock pursuing a similar discreet course, and there we arranged to meet on the following evening before sundown.

"I am going to stroll along the Rockhampton Road," I remarked to McQuade, with a vast inward satisfaction, just before I started.

"I'd try and get some insurances, if I were you," he snarled, in reply.

"Ah, good idea," said I. "You wait here until I bring some. In the meantime, make yourself happy, if you can. Tea at six, isn't it? so long."

Being pretty fresh and full of spirits, Braddock and I covered about twelve miles of the way before midnight. It was much pleasanter walking at that part of the twenty-four hours than in the burning sun, and we resolved, as much as possible on the journey, to walk at night and rest during the day. During the first week we got on fairly well.

At two stations we passed we were able to secure fresh supplies, and, considering the severity of the reigning drought, we were lucky in being able to keep our canvas water-bottles well filled.

But one morning — shall I ever forget it? — we made an alarming discovery. We had lost the track. During the night, which had been unusually dark, we had wandered from it. We found ourselves on the borders of what appeared an endless plain, for the hazy mirage obscured the horizon from our view. Concealing our uneasiness from each other we immediately started to search for the track.

Backwards and forwards we wandered for many hours, always returning to the margin or that bare and arid plain. Our search was in vain, although we kept it up until sunset. Then we anxiously discussed the situation.

We had nothing to guide us but the sun, which had told us that to

pursue our course, which we knew lay due east, we must strike across the plain — the hard, dusty, grassless plain, that stretched we knew not whither; that grew no tree to shelter us from the cruel sun, and that bosomed no stream in which to replenish our water-bottles. And our supply was nearly exhausted. No, we feared and distrusted the plain. There could be no friendly habitation there. On the border there were trees, and so there must be some moisture; and, perhaps, not far away, a river or creek, or possibly a track or a fence, that would lead to some homestead or settler's hut. And so we determined to skirt the edge of the plain and push on as fast as possible.

By noon the next day we had not a drop of water left. The fierce heat had even absorbed the dampness from the canvas. Still we pushed on, talking little; but both of us, I believe, thinking of home, and wandering in the past. When night fell we stopped, fearful lest during the darkness we might pass something that would lead to water or habitation. We ate a little “damper,” and chewed tobacco instead of smoking; and then we lay down to rest — but not to sleep.

“Good-night, Braddock,” I said; “don't be down. What's that Swinburne says? —

“ ‘Sorrow may reign for a night,
But day shall bring back delight.’ ”

“Please Heaven it will, old man,” said he; and then we were both silent, pretending to sleep.

We rose with the daylight, and pursued our weary march. Hour after hour passed without there appearing any signs of relief. No fence, no track of wheels, no hill in the distance to suggest a stream at its foot; only a glaring sun, a blue burnished sky, a burnt-up plain, and trees without life. About two o'clock Braddock began to fail, and we had to stop frequently to rest. The thirst was on us both cruelly; but it affected him most. He sank on the ground at last, and looked up at me with a sickening, despairing smile.

“It's no good, old man,” he gasped; “I'm cooked. My limbs won't hold me. I was never made for this. Go on, leave me.” Then he sank into a sort of half-apathetic, half-fainting condition, his parched mouth open, and his breath coming pantingly. I was just about to sit down at his side when, looking up, I saw two horsemen, who appeared to be emerging from the plain some distance in front of us. They were not coming in our direction, but were crossing our route, and soon they would be lost in the trees. I seized Braddock by the arm.

“Look!” I cried; “we are saved. There are two fellows riding ahead. Come on!”

I helped him to his feet, and he turned his misty eyes in the direction

indicated.

“Only a mirage,” he muttered; but he started to run with me. After a few steps, however, he staggered and sank on the ground.

Then the agony of thirst, and the hope of saving my friend and myself, lent me wings, and I flew over the hard, dusty ground after the horsemen.

Nearer and nearer they approached the trees — too far off to hear my frenzied shouts — and faster and faster I ran, fearing at every moment that I should lose my strength as poor Braddock had. I was within two hundred yards of them, and they were almost under the shadow of the bush, and still they heard and saw me not. Then I felt the sickening faintness seize me, and the blindness rush to my eyes. I stumbled — recovered myself — staggered on a few paces more — stumbled again, and with a wild, despairing scream fell faceward in the dust.

That last, hopeless cry saved me — and saved Braddock too. In a few minutes I was raised gently and tenderly by strong, rough hands, water was held to my thirsty lips, and — but you can imagine. If you can't, go and ask Braddock. He hasn't forgotten any of it, I'll be bound. You will find him in the daytime with his parchments and his boxes at Gray's Inn, or in the evening with his wife and two pretty children at his villa at Fulham.

The Hand of God.

A Story of the Waitiri Gorge.

H. B. Marriott Watson

Author of "Marahuna".

Chapter I.

THERE were four of them, seated on their horses by the side of the Waitiri river. It was growing dark on a summer's evening, for in New Zealand there is little twilight, and in the uplands among the mountains night follows hard upon the heels of day. The surroundings of the party were sufficiently wild and grand, and had not yet been wholly obscured by the darkness. Mountains lay on all sides of them, snow-capped and covered at the base with thick bush; the only flat was that of the river bed stretching tortuously eastward. A New Zealand river is like none other in the world, and the Waitiri is a characteristic river. It takes its rise in the heart of the Southern Alps in a series of glaciers somewhere beneath the sheltering pinnacles of mountains ten and twelve thousand feet in height; then it rushes down on a headlong race towards the sea, a hundred miles away. It bursts through gorges, down cañons, by sweeping valleys, and through elevated plateaus for some sixty miles or more, and then grown fuller, less boisterous, but more deadly, catches breath, and rushing at a final gorge sweeps out upon the great plains that lead it to the Pacific. The impetuosity of this primeval river has left its marks upon nature; its fiery ardour rested not content with a single course, but has cut out courses innumerable. Once free of the overhanging mountains that give it birth, and for the first few miles confine it, it makes a bold plunge for liberty, and frets impatiently over the wide valley at its own sweet will. Each generation has it ventured some new channel, and each generation has tired of it; from side to side of the valley it has rushed foaming and frothing, dashing in a frenzy against mountain *arête* and tableland, as though to try its strength against even them. But even New Zealand rivers have their limitations, and the mountains stand unchanged; only the valley lies — a desolate picture of the terrible havoc Nature can work

upon herself. It is fully a mile across the valley, and that mile is simply an expanse of loose shingle and *débris*. The main stream itself is but fifty yards across, but its bed in the valley twenty times as much. To see it from a distance curling in a silver line downwards you would think it a trifle; but when you approach it, and standing on the loose boulders, with never a patch of vegetation in sight, gaze at the grey waters sweeping by like a whirlwind, you realize its strength and wickedness.

Crawford stood dubiously a moment or two longer, and then he leapt from his horse. "Come," he said, "off your horses, all of you, and gather firewood."

In the river bed there is always plenty of dry wood, which in time past has been torn from the overhanging "bush" and left high upon some ancient course of the fickle river. In a few minutes, therefore, sufficient fuel had been collected to build a huge fire. Crawford applied a match, and presently the sky was alive with flames. The glare cast curious shadows over the shingle, outlining into fantastic shapes the patient horses and the four watchers. The pack-horse was so overcome by the novelty that he desired to display his satisfaction by a good roll on the stones, and was only just preserved from his intention by Drummond, who caught him getting down on his knees. Meanwhile they all watched in silence, some one occasionally throwing another branch upon the roaring fire, which was leaping above their heads. The river foamed and fretted near them, and tossed the firelight back upon them in sullen indignation. The sky grew heavier and blacker. Orion faded beneath a swirl of clouds; Sirius and the Southern Cross were blown out by the wind, which came galloping down from the grey gorges with an icy savour in its breath.

After half an hour a little light just dimly visible across the river began to move, and seemed to split in two; one portion — the smaller — coming swiftly towards them.

"It's all right. They see us!" said Crawford. "Marion, you won't have your nerves tried tonight; and, Alice, you may save your dress."

The light grew larger, and soon halted on the other side of the river, and a man's voice hailed them.

"Hillo! What are you?"

"Bound for the Puritaka accommodation-house, but benighted here, and we are afraid to camp as there are some ladies with us."

"All right," said the voice; "follow up."

He rode off along the bed, his horse's hoofs ringing on the stones, and they followed parallel to him. About three hundred yards further he halted, and turning his horse to the river urged him in, and in a few minutes was on their side. Crawford noted that the current had carried him thirty yards down in the passage, and looked grave.

"Well," said the new-comer, pulling up his dripping horse; "I fancy

you're just about in time. It's lucky you didn't try to cross by yourselves, as the ford is a beast, and there are no end of quicksands."

"Are you Mr. Craven, may I ask?" inquired Crawford.

The man, who wore a rough bush hat, and had a dark beard, grinned.

"Not much; the boss is away. I say, how many are you? Four, two and two; then, by Josh, I think we can put you up, anyhow."

"Thanks, very much; we'll only trouble you for the night."

The man laughed, and said something as he rode into the water which they could not catch. He turned in his saddle. "Keep well up, and hold your right rein taut; there's a devil of a current here." He reached the middle and awaited them. When they came struggling abreast of him, he pointed forward. "Make for the stump. Look here, miss," he said to Marion. "Give me your bridle; you'll go afloat to-night if you ride like that. Push on! Push on!" he screamed against the wind to Drummond in front. "Keep your reins up, or by the Lord you'll have the nag go down on a boulder! And don't let him swim, or you'll strike New Jerusalem instanter!"

The party reached the other side in safety, though the river curled and hissed under the saddle-flaps, and almost lifted the horses off their legs. They proceeded thence slowly across the bed by a rough track, and soon got upon a slight rise covered with long tussock grass, over which the horses stumbled in the darkness. The girls were both tired, and had got somewhat wet in crossing; but their guide maintained the conversation by remarks addressed to the company at large, and responded to by Crawford and Drummond.

"I tell you, I was in a blue mood when I saw your blessed fire. I thought it was some of those darned 'swaggers,' and Jimmy won't stir for them, so I had to come myself. But you ain't 'swaggers,' anyhow."

"Where is Mr. Craven?" asked Drummond.

"Away at the out-hut; but he's coming back to-night. Jimmy turned crusty, and told him to be blowed, and go himself; so he did. Jimmy is surly because he can't get whisky."

"Oh, we'll set that right," said Drummond, gaily. "Jimmy shall have as much as he likes. I ordered a couple of bottles to be packed up, and the people put in a dozen by mistake."

"I don't know how the boss will like that," replied the man, soberly. "Well, here we are. By the way," he said, with another grin, "there's no womankind here; but I guess you can put up without them."

The house lay upon the tussock level immediately below the bush-covered slope of a mountain, and was T-shaped with a verandah in front. Their guide halloed to Jimmy, and very soon a gaunt individual with a carrotty beard came round from the back of the house and responded gruffly. He led off the horses, and they entered the house.

"Now, I reckon," once more said the man, with a knowing wink, "that

you want something to eat.”

“Oh, we won't trouble you,” said Marion, quickly. “We have plenty in the packs, if you will kindly send them in to us.”

“Cold — not much. We don't let our guests have cold ‘tucker,’ whatever we do. Jimmy!” And he walked off, banging the door, into the back of the house. They heard subsequently a stiff altercation going on, in which Jimmy's Scotch voice alternated with their friend's Colonial tones, and a good deal of hard swearing ensued. Finally, he appeared, and answered that Jimmy had “turned crusty” till he mentioned the whisky, when he had disappeared “instanter” into the kitchen, “and I never knew a chap who could dish up as quickly as Jimmy when he's inclined.”

They got their meal, — mutton and dumpling, — supported by cheese and dainties from their own stores, and settled down to talk over the day. Crawford was a surveyor in the North Island, and had undertaken this trip as a summer holiday, for the pleasure of his daughter and niece. At the last moment some friends had failed them, and their party had been reduced to four, the fourth being Drummond, a young squatter in Otago, who had lately returned from “home” and had succeeded to the management of the “run” on the death of his father. Marion Lister, the niece, was of a serious nature, and capable of an “intensity” unusual with Colonial girls; her cousin, on the other hand, was a regular Colonial, lively, free, audacious, fond of physical exercise, and careless as to the morrow.

Late in the evening their host arrived. An explanation was given by their guide, in the one narrow passage of the house, and overheard by them; and shortly afterwards Mr. Craven entered the room in which they were. Crawford started to his feet. “We must apologize for trespassing on your hospitality,” he began.

“On the contrary, it is I who am indebted to you,” their host interrupted, quickly. “I hope Deardon made you comfortable. I see you've had some sort of a meal.” He bent his dark eyes upon them each in turn, and acknowledged the introductions which followed.

Then he inquired about the excursion, and soon they were all busy talking. He had a very quiet manner, but to Marion he appeared to be highly nervous.

He was undeniably handsome.

When the girls had retired — for they were worn out — Craven said: “Now you will smoke, won't you? No true Colonial forgets his pipe.”

Pipes were drawn from their hiding-places, and a desultory conversation ensued. Then Craven looked absently about the room, and, frowning a little, said: “I am sorry that I can't ask you to take anything, as I have nothing in the house. I go so seldom to town.”

“Oh, we heard about that and Jimmy,” laughed Drummond; “but I

think we can put that right. I've got far too much in my pack."

Craven started a little, drew his lips together, and rapped with his pipe on the table; then he said, "As you like; Deardon will bring it to you."

The whisky was brought and passed round. Craven, who was gazing at the blinds in a fit of abstraction, interrupted himself to refuse.

"It's very good whisky," ventured Drummond; "none of your local-make stuff. I get it direct from Edinburgh. Try it."

Craven turned on him a pair of fierce eyes, and opened his lips to speak. "No," he said, after a pause; "I don't take it."

"Well," responded the other, "here's to our host." Craven bowed his head slightly, but kept his face away, and was apparently listening to the storm now raging outside. Then followed more talk about wool, and shepherds, and mustering, and other matters dear to run-holders. Finally the two guests rose to go to bed, and Craven rose with them.

"Good-night," he said, and hesitated. "Would you mind putting away that — whisky? I don't care to have it lying about the house. Please put it in some secure place."

"Jimmy again!" laughed Drummond, and they retired to bed.

Next day it was still raining heavily, and they could not proceed on their way. Indeed, their visit was likely to extend longer than they had had any idea of. "For," said Craven, "you may as well know at once that this rain will prevent you crossing the river, in all probability. How is the river, Jimmy?"

"She's up," returned that individual, laconically.

In the upland districts of New Zealand rivers are technically said to be "up" when they are in flood; on the plains towards the sea they are said to be "down" at such a time. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to become resigned to a possible stay of a week or more, until the floods subsided, and as yet this seemed quite a pleasant idea to the travellers. They were all interested in their host and his odd surroundings; and if the outer world were only brighter, they might find a great deal to explore in the mountains at the back. Craven himself accepted the idea of their prolonged visit with apparent indifference, though he politely informed them that his house was at their disposal. As the days went on, however, his reserve thawed. The weather did clear, and there ensued several of those brilliant days peculiar to New Zealand. He accompanied them on their excursions, and showed them the most romantic scenery. Every evening the men had their pipes and the visitors their whisky; but Craven could never be persuaded to take any, and invariably requested that they would lock up the whisky somewhere.

The days wore on with no change in their situation, and seemingly no prospect of a change. Craven had grown much more communicative and genial than he had been in the few days following their arrival. He took them to some fine cascades, found out the hiding-places of the kidney

fern, which Alice expressed her determination of attempting for the tenth time to rear in town; and on one very fine day he led them by a short route to the head of a tributary of the Waitiri, where they stood upon the glacier, and wondered at the curious phenomenon of red snow which turned the slopes to the hue of blood. She was pleased to remain in this strange place, provided there was, as had been the case hitherto, some novelty each day, and provided Drummond was her companion, which he was nothing loth to be. Marion, too, was content to stay, for Craven interested her greatly. She had never met with so much reserve, so much latent strength, so much of that sense of mystery which is ever fascinating to human, and especially feminine, nature. Moreover, her interest was reciprocated, and in their excursions she very frequently found Craven her companion. His moods were changeful. At one time he talked — for him — a great deal; and referred to episodes in his past, or dilated upon some more serious problem of life in which he found his sympathies were on the whole hers. At another time he grew even gay, and told anecdotes and laughed at them; yet again, he was silent, even morose, and walked by her side without more than an occasional response. She felt that he must have had some great trial in his life, perhaps a loss, to which his memory sometimes harked back, and which had led him thus to ostracize himself. So grew her interest, and his kept pace with it, till, ere she was aware, the unspoken sympathy reached a dangerous point. In a fortnight or so she looked at the river each morning in fear it should have gone down. In the evenings they talked, read, and played cards — as all true bushmen do. There were no musical instruments in the house save Deardon's concertina, strains of which came to them sometimes from the stables; but Marion was induced now and then to sing, and Craven listened with quiet attention, while Crawford read in one corner, and the other two chattered incessantly in another.

On one afternoon they set out to visit some caves about eight miles away across the run, in which there were the remains of moas, the greatest of all the bird creation extinct or extant. Deardon rode with them, for he knew the most convenient route, and Crawford chatted with him. Alice and Drummond were in advance, and Craven found himself bringing up the rear with Marion. A track had been roughly cut through the bush, and two could just ride abreast, though overhanging boughs had to be dodged, and innumerable stumps of trees unstubbed in the path gave the horses excuse for stumbling perpetually. They had approached within a mile of the caves, when Craven, who was in a very gay mood, stopped and said:

“I want you to see a small hot spring before we go on. We can't ride, I'm afraid; but if you don't mind walking we can tie the horses here, and go through the bush to it; it's not far.”

Marion was willing to do anything, and they forthwith alighted and plunged through the close-set black birch trees. The bush here was composed almost entirely of black birch, — a name which is considerably deceptive, — and there was but little undergrowth. Not a soul had passed here since the beginning of the world. The ground was coated to a height of quite three feet with the *débris* and fallen leaves of ten thousand years. The black birch does not lose its leaves in winter, and so some idea may be gained of the enormous time this *débris* must have taken to accumulate from the accidental droppings of the trees, decayed branches, and drift from ferns and moss. Through this loose deposit, covered with a superficies of club moss, their feet sank at every step, crashing through rotten branches and the unknown sediment of time, so that progress was necessarily slow. When they reached the verge of the bush, Marion noted a vapour smoke rising from beneath a steep rise in a spur of the mountain, round the base of which they had been riding; and on a nearer approach she perceived that the vapour rose from a bubbling stream of boiling water, which issued from a barren cliff in the hill, and trickled away into the bush. This was the hot spring.

Craven played the showman, but seemed little interested himself, and occasionally gazed away into the distance, and then back again at his companion, with a troubled look on his face. They turned to go.

“Thank you so much,” said Marion, looking up at him. She had noted his abstraction, and her heart leapt in pity for him. He stopped walking, and taking her hand, looked down upon her from deep-set eyes with an almost pathetic intensity.

“You were like my mother, then,” he said, gently. “God help me! I broke her heart,” he shuddered; tears crept into her eyes, and, scarce knowing what she did, she pressed the hand that held hers. For a moment he roused himself, and put out one arm towards her, as if to draw her to him. The answer to his movement was soft as her eyes, but with an effort he drew back.

“Not yet,” he murmured to himself. “My God, I dare not yet — not to-day!”

The girl stood tremulous, and he put his hand upon her head.

“Will you promise me,” he said, hoarsely, — “will you promise me that nothing shall change between us till to-morrow? Promise me,” he repeated, feverishly, “nothing shall change. Tell me I may resume this talk to-morrow, where I leave it to-day.”

“Yes,” she whispered, simply.

He bent and kissed her hand, and moved off quietly through the bush. They regained the track, and later joined the others at the caves.

Marion went to her room that night with a delicious tremor in her heart. She replied absently to Alice's chatter, all of which concerned Drummond, but smiled in vague sympathy at the imagined drift of her

remarks. When her cousin was safely asleep, she rose from the chair on which she had been sitting, and threw open the tiny window which looked upon the bush at the back. It would be full moon to-morrow, and the sky was cloudless; the icy wind flew down from the glaciers, and frosted the panes. It was midsummer; but in New Zealand uplands there are not infrequently frosty nights after burning days. Presently she sighed, softly, for very pleasure, and closed the window, undressed, and went to bed. Her coming awoke Alice, who turned to her sleepily and asked what was the matter, and in answer Marion put her arms about her and kissed her.

Craven, too, went to bed in an unusual state of mind; but it was not all pleasure with him. He could not sleep, but turned feverishly upon his bed. "I must think," he said to himself. "I must think. Dare I? Have I given it a sufficient trial? What are the chances? and is it no longer hopeless? Would I could believe so. Let me think." But he could not think nor sleep, and his ears caught every sound in the night. It must have been long past midnight when a noise attracted his attention, a faint bleating which the river could not drown; and then followed the barking of dogs. In a moment he leapt to his feet and opened the window. The noise gained in intensity.

"By Jove, they're in the river," he cried, and slipped on his clothes with lightning speed. Rushing out of the house, he aroused Deardon and Jimmy, and, bidding them follow him, made his way down to the river bed. The Waitiri flows in a large stream through the centre of its bed opposite the station-house, but there are several smaller channels as well, none of them very deep or wide, but sufficiently dangerous to an unfortunate sheep should he happen to fall into one of them. Immediately below the tussocky plateau upon which the house stood ran the nearest of these streams, and hither, directed by the barking, Craven made his way. As he had conjectured, a flock of sheep had come down from the uplands, had reached the edge of the plateau, and one of them taking the leap across, towards an apparently safe tuft, had fallen into the stream, and was being rapidly followed by its companions. Two of the sheep-dogs, who like their master had been aroused by the bleating, had rushed to the spot, and were trying to prevent the main body from following. But the sheep in their confusion tore this way and that, and leapt frantically in any direction towards any spot that caught their eyes, and the result was that destruction was going on at a quick rate. Giving the necessary orders to the dogs, and so preserving the remainder of the flock from suicide, Craven directed his attention to rescuing those in the water. The current was fairly strong, and was carrying them away as fast as they fell in, so without a moment's delay he rushed in and began hauling the fleecy bundles to the bank. Soon he was joined by Deardon and Jimmy, and between them they managed to save about half the sheep

that had fallen in; the others were swept along into the main stream half a mile away.

When it was all over they went back to the house. The night was bitterly cold, and the water like ice, and they were wet from head to foot. Benumbed and cheerless, Jimmy and Deardon went off to the stables, and consoled themselves with a glass of whisky, while Craven entered the house alone. His teeth were chattering, and he felt as miserable as a man can feel without the inward glow of life. He was going back to bed when he noticed the door of the room in which they had their meals was open, and he entered. The moonlight streamed through the window on to the table, and displayed tumblers and a bottle of whisky, which Crawford and Drummond had for the first time forgotten to put away. Shivering with the intense cold in his bones, he drew near and put out an arm.

“It will be the death of me if I don't,” he said; “and I sha'n't get a wink of sleep.”

Slowly his hand moved towards the bottle, then he half drew back, and finally with a harsh laugh seized it, and poured himself out a small glass. He went to the window, drew a chair to the table, and sat down and tossed off the contents of his glass.

Chapter II.

RICHARD CRAVEN at home had always been looked upon as a confirmed dipsomaniac. From his first days at college the craving for drink had overpowered him, and had ruined the brightest prospects of distinction. He was sent down as a hopeless case, and from that day forward his mother was never known to smile. In his regiment — for he had been a soldier — he was the hardest drinker the generation had seen, and he had left it to avoid being cashiered. Subsequently he grew worse, and after the death of his mother lost all hope of himself. He quarrelled with all his family, his father included; but, on the death of the latter, his elder brother took steps to at one stroke remove this blot upon the family honour, and give Dick another chance. He consented to go out to the colonies, and with his portion of the inheritance was sent off in a sailing vessel to New Zealand. During the three months' voyage he kept straight, and resolved to bring his own strong will to bear upon his madness; but on landing in the colony he disappeared from ken, and for three months was scarcely conscious of his own actions. He had the cunning to take an assumed name, and so escaped observation; he was merely one of those many unfortunates whose “friends” had sent them out to “give them another chance,” out of sight and mind in a country where there are few social restraints upon vice, and with a people who can have no knowledge of, and consequently no sympathy with, the one more stranger come to dig his own grave in their midst. But at the end of his

debauch Richard Craven pulled himself together. "I have a will," he cried, "and if will can conquer the insanity in my blood — by God, mine shall." He went back to his old name, invested his money in a run, carefully selected for its remoteness from temptation, and settled down quietly upon it with his shepherds. For three years he had lived here, breaking out at intervals when occasion afforded, but on the whole, from lack of opportunity, not so frequently as in England. Six months before this time, after a terrible bout of drinking, he had grown desperate, and gripping his teeth together hissed out between them his last resolution: "If I, who in all else am adamant, strong of will, and steadfast of purpose, cannot for good and all refrain from this hour to my death from taking the accursed stuff, then, by the God that made me, I'll use the same will of mine in another way, and rid the earth of a brute-beast."

For six months he had kept his vow. The arrival of temptation in the presence of his visitors with their whisky had at first alarmed him; but as days went on and he kept free from it, he grew more hopeful, and thinking the danger was passing away allowed himself to look more cheerfully upon life, even to the point of attracting this fair stranger's sympathy.

Marion turned over in her sweet morning sleep, and drowsily opened her eyes with the lingering remnant of last night's smile upon her lips. She was conscious dimly of some disturbing cause. Loud shouts and strange voices burst upon her awaking brain, and she started out of oblivion, and in alarm sat up. The noises continued, so she got up, and for the second time that night threw open the window. From somewhere at the back came a succession of gruff shouts, then a yell, and then a flood of imprecations. What on earth could it be? In the house itself sprang up a medley of sounds — the crash of falling furniture, and a noise as of the breaking of windows; more cries, yells, and imprecations ensued, and then the sounds came out into the yard. The moon had gone down upon the bush, and she could see nothing, but stood listening intently with a palpitating heart. Was it an attempt upon the house made by some swagmen or a raid of bushrangers? She was conscious of a yearning wish that Craven would come to her and protect her. The disturbance broke out again after a lull, and she thought she could distinguish voices in altercation. Jimmy's Scotch accents struck her ear, but the words she could not make out; then came a series of fierce yells, and a burst of wild laughter; and then the quick tramp of feet as of some one running in the direction of the bush. A voice, which she recognized as Deardon's, said:

"He's gone. Well, it's not good following."

Then all was silence. Marion crept back to the bed, shivering with cold, and in time fell asleep.

In the morning Craven did not appear at breakfast. Marion awoke with

no memory of the night's disturbance, but the breakfast-room recalled it to her. There were apparent traces of some struggle; one of the chairs was propped against the wall *minus* two of its legs, and pieces of broken glass littered the grate. She was up before the others, and found Deardon clearing away this *débris*, and asked him anxiously about the noises; but he seemed to her to have suddenly grown surly, and she could get no explanation. The others had not been disturbed in the night, and she did not enlarge upon her alarm.

Craven's non-appearance was explained by Deardon, who stated that he had gone for a day or two to the out-hut, and left his apologies. Marion was disappointed. Had he not said that to-day — — No, but she knew what he had meant, and — — He surely must be back before night. Yet Craven did not appear, and after the evening meal, while the others talked and laughed together, she took herself off with a sad little ache at her heart, and putting on her hat strolled into the fringe of the bush.

The night was clear of wandering clouds, and the moon, full-orbed, uprose from the cañons eastward, and streamed across the dark bush. It was one of those nights which are almost unknown outside of New Zealand — a brilliant, boisterous, chill, clear summer's night. Marion pushed through the outstanding loose scrub, from which the tall pines had been felled, and got upon a foot track leading through darkness to nowhere. Scarcely realizing her own actions, she walked pensively along it for some distance, and then awoke to consciousness with a start in the face of a vast tree trunk across the path. She looked round bewildered, for the minutes had fled unnoticed, and she knew not where she was. She hurried back upon what seemed the track she had followed, and ran on breathlessly for ten minutes, but at the end of that time she found that the bush was growing denser about her, and she was evidently tending upwards. Back she went in another direction, which proved equally bewildering; and now, thoroughly alarmed, she resolved to abandon all tracks, and strike out down the incline on what must be the homeward route. In a few minutes she was in the heart of the bush.

What a terribly lonely, desolate place is the New Zealand bush! On all sides towered gigantic rimus and kaikateas, the one with its upright, and the other with its downset coat of pine-needles. Stern black birches, gloomy matais, graceful pittospores loomed through the mist against the moon above and around; while at a lower elevation the large-leaved crackers, the koromikos, and the straight lance-wood were everywhere in view. But more in evidence to-night was the undergrowth. Deeper, though she knew it not, was every step plunging her into the abysmal recesses of the bush-smothered valleys beneath the mountains, The lawyer dug its sharp thorns into her and stayed her; the supplejack caught her by the neck and choked her back; the clematis clung around and beset her. Denser grew the underwood, and slower became her progress. The

wind got astir, and came flying down in a frenzy from the upper gorges; hissed through the pine-needles, and rattled the cracker leaves above her head, but through the undergrowth could not penetrate, and she heard the storm overhead with a sense of security. But the dew lay thick upon the ferns, which were piled in rank luxuriance on every side. Mosses and rich lichens, ferns of high and low degree, todea, hymenophyllum, pteris, overgrew the tree-holes and clambered across the undergrowth. On, on went Marion in the horror of the loneliness upon her: nothing in life moved; only the wail of a weka from the far-distant mountain-side reminded her this was not death.

Presently a dull, murmurous sound struck her ear with a dull monotony, and she was experienced enough to know its meaning — it was a bush-creek; but where? She walked more cautiously, and then of a sudden turned with a cry; a piece of rotten wood, broken by her footstep, fell with a faint “plop” into the stream, and peering down in the faint light she heard the gurgle, and discerned the black rank water of a sluggish flowing creek, half bridged across by the rank vegetation, underwood, and fern in which she had been standing. With a sigh of relief she turned back and began wearily to move — anywhere.

After half an hour or more, in which she lost all hope, she saw a faint glimmer of light below her, and presently emerged upon a clearing, in the centre of which was a small hut, from which proceeded the light. She stepped down into the clearing, and the wind swung round and caught her. It was a raging wind just let loose from the ranges, and would have blown out the moon if he could. Across the patch of open ground he hurled Marion after her hat, and pitched her roughly against the wooden cabin. She gathered breath, and had one foot upon the threshold of the door, which was ajar, when she hesitated and listened. Rude tones and laughter could be heard from within, even through the tempest, which now came tearing over the flat once more. It reached the hut, and was twisting her off into the night, when she summoned up courage and pushed open the door. Then she shrank back appalled. It was an ordinary shepherd's out-hut used in the mustering and lambing seasons, and beside a bed in one corner, consisting of bags stitched across a rude framework, there was a small table roughly put together in the middle of the room. Half reclining on this, with his feet on a broken chair, was Craven. Before him were three or four bottles, and in his hand he held an empty glass. He wore no coat and no collar, and his black eyes were fiery and bloodshot. When Marion entered he looked up and struggled to his feet.

“Ha! ha!” he shrieked. “You've come, have you? Found your way here, ch, to the out-hut on the Dead Dog's Flat? Welcome, my lady. Ha! ha! ha!” He shrieked aloud with laughter, and tossed off another glass. “Come in, come in, I say; what's to frighten you? Only the wind and the devils. Ha! ha! For I can call spirits from the vasty deep. See, here's to

the spirits!" He staggered to his feet and held out his glass again. "Won't you have some whisky? No, you're quite right; it brings devils. Away! away! Ha! ha! ha!"

Marion shuddered in horror, and crouched upon the floor near the door, covering her face with her hands; and once more he resumed his talk and laughter.

"Why have you come here?" he demanded suddenly, and he strode forward angrily. "What are you doing here?" he said fiercely; then his face changed and he laughed wildly. "Ah, you want to see me as I am. This is it, just as I am," and again he laughed. "Oh, you'll come to me after this, won't you? Ha! ha! ha!" His laughter screamed back at him from the roof, and died away, and he let his head fall upon the table with a maudlin sob. The gusts had blown open the door, and through it now stepped into the hut a weka, or woodhen, on the search for something to gobble. Undisturbed by the presence of human beings and the strange noises, it marched in cautious jerks across the room, and began rummaging in the ashes of the fireplace, turning occasionally an inquisitive eye upon Craven as his voice grew louder.

The storm tore over the clearing and banged the door with a crash, but still Marion crouched, incapable of motion from very stupor. Craven's voice vied with the roaring of the wind, but at last grew fainter beneath it. A terrible gust flew over the hut, which rocked and shivered. There was a rending of beams — a shock; and with a rattle and a moan the whole of the iron-plated roof slid off into the night. The weka wailed shrilly and the man gesticulated wildly, raising long arms to the moonlight now pouring across the roofless hut; but the shock aroused Marion, and with one low, panting cry she burst through the open doorway, and fled from that ruined hut with its strange unhuman tenants. A track used for sledges led from the clearing, and this she followed blindly. It was past midnight ere this took her home: she crept through the door, for doors are never locked up-country, and going into her room cast herself upon the bed in a violent fit of weeping.

It was three days later that Craven returned, and in the meantime Crawford had been getting extremely restless and anxious to be off. The river was still too full, and he was chafing against the inevitable delay, as indeed now was Marion. The other two were indifferent to locality. Craven returned late on an afternoon, and entered the room with a polite apology. His face was set white, and his eyes were bloodshot, but otherwise he was as he had always been. He turned his black fierce eyes in a steady gaze upon Marion, who trembled and quivered in her chair.

"I hear, Mr. Crawford," he said, "from Deardon, that you are anxious to be off. In which case I won't press you to stay, as you must have taken a large slice out of your time. We can't try the river, but we might manage the Gorge Pass if it's fine to-morrow. Deardon thinks it will be

all right." Crawford gladly assented, for this would shorten their journey to the West Coast, which was now desirable in view of their long detention.

"Evidently he's about tired of us," said Drummond to Alice; "and we may just as well go as stay."

Next morning they were up betimes, and all being in readiness a start was made. Craven rode with them to show them the way across the Pass, and their route lay along a rough bush-track round the base of the mountain above the Waitiri. A few miles above the station-house the river cuts its way through a range of mountains, of which the peak, on whose base they were, was one, and it was through the gorge they were to pass. Immediately above the gorge the Waitiri spreads away in sundry branches to its glacial sources. For a long time they rode all together, and conversation was brisk on every one's part but Craven's and Marion's; but the pack-horse which Drummond was driving proved obstreperous, and wandered into the bush, and some of the party went to regain it. Craven was in a fit of abstraction, and ere he was aware of it he was alone with Marion. He said something about the weather and the road, and then relapsed into silence. Presently his eyes grew stern, and he reined in at a cross track.

"I am going," he said, in harsh tones. "Goodbye, Miss Lister; excuse me, please, to the others. You will find the way easily now." He spurred his horse up the cross track. She looked after him with obscured senses. He pulled his bridle again and came back to her.

"Miss Lister," he said, quietly, "I forgot that I wanted your forgiveness. That is the one thing I desire to carry away with me. It will soften the path to hell."

He spoke calmly, and his very calmness added to her emotion. "No, no," she cried; "you must not, you shall not, I — —"

"You forgive me?" he asked, stroking his horse with white impassive face.

"I — yes, yes, but you must not — you are not — you will get stronger. You — —"

He laughed the unpleasant laugh of a man who has made up his mind, and said coolly:

"Yes, I have a strong will." Then he came closer, and a light burned in his eyes; he made a movement to take her hand, and abandoned it. "There is but one thing needful for a man like me, Miss Lister. I will not ask to touch your hand, but merely that I may have the flower you wear." It was a sprig of bush veronica.

She did not seem to hear, and in a moment he turned his horse away. "Yes; it is better that it should end here, perhaps."

"Oh," she cried, stretching her arms in agony, "I cannot bear it! It was not you, that terrible shadow. You must not — you cannot go to — this

loneliness, this life of — of horror.”

“I go to no life,” he said, hoarsely — “not to life.”

“Ah!” she shrieked, dropping from her horse. “My God, you cannot, you may not! See, see! you shall not be desolate; I will not suffer it!” She clasped his stirrups in her fear and anguish; he threw himself from his horse. “See, see!” she continued. “I cannot bear it; you shall not go into this darkness. I am brave and strong, and I will not suffer it. No, no! You shall not. We will fight it together,” and she clutched his hand gasping. The terror of the thought in his mind clung to her and dazed her, so that she knew not what she said.

He drew nearer and looked long into her eyes. “Do you know what you are saying?” he asked, slowly. “Do you know what it means? Do you know that I am a — the wretch you saw in me the other night; that there is a fiend in me incarnate and undying?”

“No, no; not undying,” she said.

“You know all?” he asked.

“I know all,” she returned, growing quiet too, but gasping; “and I know that you are not the thing you fancy you are, and that you shall fight it down.” Indeed, to her the out-hut and its terrors were but as a dream, which she failed properly to connect now with the stalwart man by her. He drew in his breath, and his face lit up with a sudden thought. He covered his face with his hands.

“My God! if it were so!” Then quickly, “Yes, yes; it shall be so. I wanted a motive — I wanted a motive, and now I shall have it. Yes, yes; we shall fight it down and kill it.” He looked at her strangely, and took her hands; she did not shrink, for all the background had vanished in the strong light of a present love, and she felt only that she loved him. There was silence for a space, as he held her hand, and then he laughed tremulously and kissed it.

“Come,” he said, softly, “let us wait for the others. Sit here and rest. This is the gorge.”

She sat in silence upon the rocky ledge on the side of the track overlooking the great gorge. They had been ascending since they left the station-house, and now the river lay some fifteen hundred feet below. The heights, separated by the gorge, rose almost sheer from the river in rocky buttresses and loose scrub-covered serrations. Standing at this height on one mountain, it seemed as if a stone might have been thrown across to the other. The river lay as a white streak between and below.

Craven regarded it in silence, but his under-lip quivered from time to time and his white face flushed. Presently he said: “See; that rata shall be yours. You shall find my senses are not yet gone.” He pointed with one hand to a ledge half-a-dozen feet below her, from which a small pine protruded outwards, and had been half eaten away by a twining rata with its gorgeous scarlet blossoms.

“No, don't!” she cried; but he took no notice, and in a second he was below her on the tree. He crept out upon the branch, and broke off some of the flower-heads, and tossed them up to her.

“Come back,” she said, anxiously. “Oh, come back!”

“See, see my nerves,” he said, with an almost piteous smile, and with one hand he shook the branch on which he sat. A crack resounded in the air; Marion gave a wild cry. He laughed in the delight of one who has proved his point.

“It is of no consequence,” he said; “I can reach another branch — see.”

Marion shudderingly looked down at him with shaded eyes. He put out a hand towards a large bough, and smiled as he appeared to exult in his strength. Suddenly, however, a change came over his features; the smile faded and the eyes grew fierce and set, the brow was drawn in a black frown, and he clenched his teeth together. His hands stayed in mid-air. Through his mind flitted a swift impulse such as comes sometimes in moments of insanity.

“The hand of God,” he muttered. “It is the hand of God.” He looked up, shivered — crack went the branch again, and bent over. “My arm is a little too short,” he said, quietly. “Will you go back for help, please?” But Marion started to her feet in horror, and shrieked loudly as she gazed at him.

“Go back, go back to them!” he cried, as the branch bent over. “Look away; shut your eyes. Great God!”

But she stood transfixed, and a slow rending of branches ensued; and then the pine branch with its living burden fell into the abyss, and dashed from ledge to ledge down the slope towards the river.

“Marion, Marion!” said Alice's voice, “what was that noise? What have you left the horses for?”

“She's admiring the gorge there,” said Crawford. “Good gracious! isn't that a dangerous place, my dear?”

“Marion, I say; here's some news,” said Drummond, as he got off his horse and moved towards her; and then said gaily, “She won't mind me calling her Marion now,” at which all three laughed.

“Marion, my dear, where's Mr. Craven?”

“Good heavens!” said Drummond suddenly; “why, I believe she's fainted.”

Traits of the Township.

An Up-Country Sketch.

Philip Mennell

THERE can be nothing more misleading than the sort of bird's-eye view which the casual traveller obtains of the "inner life" of colonial country townships, when, with some passing object of business or pleasure, he quits for a while his haunts in the city, and ensconces himself for a day or two in what, by a figure of speech, is called rural quietude. Little he recks, as from the door of his hotel he surveys the one street with its long range of low-built edifices, that here in an almost added degree are experienced the "fret and the fever," the competition and the contriving, which, from his superficial standpoint, he has been accustomed to regard as appertaining to large populated centres only. A reasonable degree of personal intimacy, or a fair course of business dealing with the fancied Arcadians amongst whom he for the first time finds himself, will, however, soon dissipate his pretty theories, and leave him, it is to be hoped, not a poorer, but at any rate a wiser and almost certainly a disappointed man. It is an admitted axiom in the domain of physics, that the more limited the space for expansion, the more deadly does the explosion become. It is so in life. Amidst the freer flow and wider sphere of cities the force of people's aims and passions becomes wholesomely distributed and diluted, whilst in narrower circles and more restricted centres the same forces, exerted within a less extended sphere, operate with an increased intensity, not always beneficial either to the individual or the community.

It would demand a combination of the descriptive humour of a Dickens with the satiric cynicism of a Thackeray, to accurately hit off the exceedingly fine lines of demarcation by which the social amenities of Australian bush "communities" are regulated; whilst, in regard to their business relations, the lucidity of a Gladstone would be lost in the task of reducing them to a system. I propose, however, to skim lightly over both topics, and shall hope to give a characteristic if not by any means complete view of each.

Dealing first with the incidence of trade in these interesting localities, it

may be remarked that what the inhabitants consider business really resolves itself into an all-round system of barter. Everything in the shape of consumable commodities is plentiful except cash. The miner and the selector negotiate their produce for goods, the storekeeper, on the other hand, getting gold, agricultural produce, land, stock — everything, in fact, except current coin of the realm — as a *quid pro quo* for his wares. Under this system, the bush shopkeeper is in the barest sense a mere intermediary for putting money into the pockets of the metropolitan merchant, whom he pays by disposing of the produce which comes into his hands. To the rural toiler there sometimes returns a small margin of profit; but the result of his labours is more generally represented by a debit entry in the books of the local trader. To secure the deficiency thus caused and certain microscopical advances of ready cash the bill of the producer is taken, and subsequently, when he has sufficiently improved it, his land follows suit. Bad seasons accrue, and an additional indebtedness is contracted. Then, after many renewals and re-mortgages, the storekeeper mops up the land, with the fee of which a paternal Government parts so lightly, and which he, in his turn, has probably to hand over to the bank, that great ocean into which the river of country trade perennially flows, and on which the storekeeper is generally dependent for carrying on his complicated but not always equally profitable operations. If the numerous properties which the storekeeper assimilates in the course of his trade go up in value, he may, as he somewhat dubiously phrases it, “come out right.” A rush, or a railway, may also enable him to sell out to advantage, and thus hand on his worry and his liabilities to a succession of victims as sanguine as himself; but, as a rule, a good living, accompanied by a heavy burden of daily financing, is about as much as the ordinary country storekeeper can reasonably look forward to. It would be a godsend to both selectors and storekeepers if a local sale in the open market and payment in cash could be more readily obtained by the farmer for the produce of his labours, as the present system really hampers the storekeeper whilst it confines the choice of the producer, who pays more for his necessaries, with, probably, in the end, less profit to the vendor. The existence of the inevitable “general store” accrues from the fact that the man to whom the selector elects to give his security must cater for all his requirements, as if the different businesses were divided and the selector pledged his lease to the draper, the grocer would naturally decline to give him credit, the *morale* of this worthy's reply being: “Get your goods where you give your security.”

Just as the literary failure develops into the literary critic, so does the countryman who cannot manage his own business hold himself out as the best medium for the transaction of other people's. This renders the agents who swarm on every bush township not only a great commercial fact, but

an interesting feature in colonial natural history. Of course there is a large proportion of sound and solvent men amongst them, but certainly in the first start of townships the origin of most of them is what I have described. It may be said in their extenuation that the majority of them bring to the aid of their clients the experiences of a chequered career, which, having been bought so dearly, certainly ought to be worth paying for at a proportionate rate. The bush agent is thus generally a buried genius, whose proficiency in the arts of finesse and financing would win him fortune and fame in a wider arena. There is no question in the casuistry of dummyism* for which he has not a complete and sufficient answer, and his knowledge of the Land Act is only equalled by the facility with which he helps all classes to evade its provisions. It comes, as a matter of course, from the financial straits in which the selector usually finds himself, that as he follows the plough his thoughts are, not of the beauties of nature or Burns's daisy, but of the exigencies of his credit and how his next bill is to be met. In the midst of his perturbation he turns to the agent, who readily sets to work to break this poor camel's back with the last straw of his commission. The agent, whether he is so or not, represents himself as an all-powerful intermediary between his "unfortunate client" and the local banker or capitalist, who is threatening to cut short his career of indebtedness. If such pretensions prove too hollow he talks mysteriously of the Melbourne Rothschild, who is prepared to honour his recommendation for advances of millions. If the latter assertion has any foundation at all, it exists in the fact that he is the local representative of one of the great money-lending, produce-buying corporations who are fast monopolizing the business of the colonies, and who make their main hauls in these outposts of civilization.

The bank manager — unless habits of dissipation or drinking, forced on him as a refuge from the narrow monotony of his limited location, have rendered him above or below mercenary considerations — very often swells his slender stipend by acting as a sort of jackal for some friendly agent. In addition to dividing commissions with the auctioneer who disposes of the properties of customers on whom the bank in the exercise of its tender mercies has foreclosed, he has a peculiarly ingenious *modus operandi* of bringing grist to the mutual mill. Let a selector come to the bank with a landed security in the hope of getting assistance at a more reasonable rate than he can obtain it of the local usurers, and the reply is, after the embarrassed man has stated his case: "Very sorry, Mr. Blank, but the bank would not look at it. They totally object to these chronic advances." Or sometimes a more delicate method is pursued, and a submission to the decision of the head office is suggested. This results, after stringing the poor victim on, in the prearranged negative which is to put money into the pocket of the manager. Just as the despairing debtor is leaving the sweating-room, with

the additional death sentence that he must make it convenient to pay off the little overdraft which has been so long standing in the course of a week or so, the manager insinuates: "So far as the *bank* is concerned, I can hold out no hope; but if you ask my advice, *as a friend*, there is Mr. So-and-so, who lends money on securities of the unsatisfactory nature of yours. I strongly advise you to try him; but no doubt you will have to pay high for the accommodation." The drowning man, of course, catches at the straw, and after a little well-feigned reluctance, worth an additional per cent. or so on the transaction, on the part of the agent, his bill, endorsed by the latter, and accompanied by the deposit of his deeds, is discounted by the very bank which just before refused his security, whilst the manager and the wily Mr. So-and-so rejoice over the division of a handsome bonus, and the prospect of a continuing income, consisting of the difference between the bank rate of discount and the interest, generally at least double, paid by the borrower for the accommodation extended him.

In addition to landmongering, the agent is generally the representative of an insurance company; but these companies are now become so numerous that most of the insurers have set up as agents themselves, so as to pocket the commission on their own lives. In this quarter, therefore, our bush Othellos find their occupation almost gone.

The hotel-keeper is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, force in bush life. Every bargain must be sealed by a nobbler, and from a sermon to a settling day, a burial to a birthday celebration, "all thoughts, all passions, all delights" that stir the frame of the bushman are made to minister to the publican's revenue. From the inveterate snobbishness of the "upper ten" in these confined localities, and the primitive style in which the agricultural classes live, there is very little interchange of what can be called private hospitality. The only outward and visible sign of amity which one man can display towards another is to "shout" for him. Thus everything that is good and everything that is ignoble in bush life gravitates towards the public-house. From the influence which mine host acquires over his customers, his good word goes for a great deal, and the result is that the professional residents of the township, who otherwise might not darken his doors, pay him the frequent tribute of their presence in order not to be shut out from Boniface's patronage, and, more important still, that of his connection. Besides the usual "draws" of races and raffles, the bush publican baits his hooks with all the ingenuity of a piscatorial connoisseur. He lays himself out to "get in with" the reigning clique, or to identify himself with the ruling interest, whether at the moment it be pastoral, mining, or political. With this view his talk is of bullocks, or he "babbles of green fields," or of the prospects of mining, or the downfall of the popular prime minister, just as suits the drift of the hour or the whim of the customer. To the horsey he is horsey, and, in

fact, altogether he is about the best imaginable exemplar of the apostolic maxim to be "all things to all men." By a system of cheap "board" he lures into his clutches the young lions of the civil service and banking aristocracy, who in turn invest him with the patronage of their respective coteries, or of the sporting associations of which they form the leading lights. The flowing bowl is really the one excitement of bush life, and most of these young sparks plunge wildly into the vortex. It is therefore the great aim of the publican to get the most popular man and best "swiper" of the fraternity located under his roof. When this is accomplished, so long as the young Crichton and his associates pay for their liquors, their board accounts are allowed to run on sometimes for years, the landlord consoling himself for his risk by the reflection that even if he loses the lot, the speculation on the whole has been a paying one. Besides, the publican is seldom "let in" in the long run, as there are generally soft-hearted friends on whom to work in case of the principal's inability to cash up, and the interest is well secured by mythical charges for unconsumed meals and non-existent horse-feed. If all fails, and the young Lothario is leaving, there is always the last resort of the parting testimonial, the publican heading the list and pocketing the proceeds. Woe betide the unfortunate Crichton who loses his billet and his popularity, and has to still linger on in the arena of his departed glory. The publican who fattened on his ruin is the first to call him a loafer, and to open for public inspection the page of his ledger on which is inscribed his former paragon's unpaid score.

I could multiply "experiences," but I think I have said enough to show that the bush township is but a miniature presentment of the life of large cities, whether in the colonies or elsewhere. The English village presents points which differentiate it altogether from the bustling atmosphere of the busy town even in the old land. In the former, the inhabitants display a clumsiness of body and a lethargy of mind, which has no counterpart amongst the go-ahead "up-country" denizens of Australia. The reasons of the distinction are not far to seek. The men who have the energy and *élan* to emigrate are naturally superior in "go" of body and push of mind to the, perhaps happier, stay-at-homes, who vegetate through a tranquil existence in the rustic hamlets of the old country. And even amongst the emigrants, the man who faces the bush with a view to winning sustenance from the fertilization of the wilds is, at least, as strong a character as the man whose *penchant* for city life induces him when he lands in Australia to settle down in the nearest capital to the seaboard. In fact, the pioneer of the outposts is likely to be the stronger and braver individuality of the two, as the supercilious citizen of Melbourne or Sydney too often finds to his cost when he enters into business relations with the untutored inhabitant of the bush. These frontier posts or back-block settlements (in whichever light the observer chooses to regard

them) are, in fact, but detachments of the great main army which in Melbourne, Sydney, or Brisbane is ever on the *qui vive* to make money, by hard work (if needs be), but preferably by speculative enterprize and the exercise of superior smartness. There is hardly a financial *coup* or fiscal expedient with which the Australian rustic is not quite equally *au fait* with his town-dwelling fellow-colonist; and indeed he goes about with the proud belief that he can teach the former "a trick or two." Nor is the boast in vain; and, perhaps, the wide-awake spirit of the bush townships may prove a compensatory makeweight to the tendency to aggregation in the capitals which is so marked a feature of Colonial life. The latter may absorb the mass of the population, but they do not monopolize the brain and initiative of the colonies. "When things get more settled down," to use a cant phrase, perhaps we may see realized in the bush townships, some of the traits of which I have tried to sketch, more of the repose without the vacuity of that English country life, which is fast becoming as much a thing of the past as the New Zealand moa or the New Guinea tailed man.

* A term used to describe the methods resorted to for evading the residence and other restrictive stipulations of the Government Land grants.

An Underground Tragedy.

C. Haddon Chambers

Chapter I.

IT was a chilly gusty night in the autumn of the year 188 — . Short, sharp showers of rain occurred at intervals, when the fitful wind lulled for a space, and allowed the heavy clouds to collect in a dark mass overhead. The streets of London were slushy, and the pavements cold and slippery with a coating of soft mud. The foot-passengers jostled each other, and were rude in their struggle for the inside walking, where they might be less exposed to the unceasing sprays of slush from the remorseless wheel traffic. London, in fact, was dirty and exceedingly disagreeable.

At 7.30 p.m. the diurnal rush from city to suburb had died its usual natural death. The bearish scramble for the omnibus was over for the day; so also was the flood tide of traffic on the Underground Railway. Of toilers in the city only those who had been detained by unusual causes or by stress of work were still abroad.

Among the stragglers who hurried into the Farringdon Street Station about the hour mentioned, a tall man with somewhat bowed shoulders might have been remarked. There was nothing particularly striking about his appearance save his beard, which was unusually thick and unkempt for these prim times. His clothes were of a cut and preservation such as to suggest the possession by their wearer of average means. He wore an ordinary felt hat, rather wide in the brim, and an overcoat of dark material, the collar of which was turned up; and in his gloveless hand he carried an umbrella dry and furled.

“Gower Street,” said the person I have described, on stooping to present his face at the window of the ticket office.

“What class?”

“First.”

Then, while the clerk was stamping the ticket, the bearded man, with some deliberation, laid his umbrella on the ledge of the window and drew some money from his pocket. Having paid for and received his ticket, he hurried away.

“Hi!” shouted the clerk, “you're leaving your umbrella.”

The man came back, took his umbrella, muttered “Thank you,” in his beard, and again hurried away.

“Funny customer that!” soliloquized the clerk. “Doesn't use his umbrella, and doesn't remember it. A good gamp wasted on an idiot — and in such weather as this too!”

Meanwhile the absent-minded stranger had had his ticket clipped, passed through the gates, and reached the platform. Here he stood motionless under the board “Wait here for first-class.” He had not long to wait. In a few moments a train drew up at the platform. It was fairly peopled in the third-class, and sparsely in the second, while the first-class compartments in the centre of the train were all unoccupied with the exception of one. That one contained a solitary man, and into that compartment the bearded traveller, after a hurried glance at the other carriages, entered. First-class passengers were not much abroad that night. No one else entered the carriage after the man whose movements we are following.

In a few moments the train moved on to King's Cross — a very short run from Farringdon: one of the shortest, in fact, on the line. The bearded man had taken the corner next the door he had entered, and fronting the engine. His face was turned towards his fellow-passenger; but its expression could not have been seen through his beard, and even his eyes were concealed by his hat, which he had pulled forward. The other occupant of the compartment sat at the far end, with his back towards the engine. He was middle-aged, very slight in figure, and well dressed. His face was thin, delicate, and extremely agreeable; the hair both of head and face was somewhat grey, short, and carefully trimmed. Altogether this passenger had an air of neatness and refinement about him. You would have said at once that he was a gentleman.

The train stopped at King's Cross, and then started on its longer run to Gower Street, and still these two men were alone. Perhaps the foul sulphurous atmosphere peculiar to the Underground Railway was more pronounced here, for as the train moved from the station the bearded man ejaculated “Bah!” and shifted from the window half-way along the seat. His fellow-passenger, who, with his hat pushed back from his high white forehead, was smiling over one of the comic papers, looked up for a moment, and returned to his diversion. A moment! An innocent, half-surprised glance at the man who sat with down-turned face almost exactly opposite him. That was all! No instinct of peril. No prompting to vigilance and defence!

For the bearded man's hand had crept to his pocket, and his eyes, blazing with greed for crime, had risen from the floor and fastened upon his neighbour's breast, from which the overcoat was drawn aside. And still there was no instinct of danger, no thought of ill, as the small man

read his last witticism and smiled his last smile, and so smiling received to its hilt in his breast the sharp, fierce-driven knife.

A short, strange, horrible gasp, the victim's last effort at respiration, and a moving of startled, death-filled eyes, which, staring for a moment with no recognition, but wondering horror at the murderer, asked, "What have I done to thee?" and then the stricken man's head fell upon his breast and his life went out.

One minute only had passed since the train left King's Cross, and time was still with the murderer. Many moments would pass before Gower Street was reached, precious moments! He had done the murder; he had still to save himself. He had stood while his victim died, bent forward and motionless — eyes hidden by the muscular contraction of forehead and cheeks, and glittering white teeth showing through the thick beard and moustache. He recovered himself by a spasmodic movement. His first care was to throw the comic paper out of the window. Then he seized the warm dead body, which had slipped down along the seat, and propped it sitting and upright in the corner, while the still limp fingers of the right hand he arranged round the handle of the knife. "Suicide!" he muttered, glancing quickly at the effect. "A clear case! Temporary insanity! Murder impossible on the Underground Railway!"

Then he stood at the door. As the train emerged from the darkness into the light of the Gower Street Station he noticed blood on his right hand. But he put the hand to his mouth, and when he withdrew it the stain was gone. Before the train stopped the murderer looked back once, without a shudder, at the still body of the murdered man, and then he jumped on to the platform, shutting the carriage-door upon his work, and the next moment was lost in the crowd.

And the people who elbowed their way to the gates were shoulder to shoulder with a murderer hot from his crime!

Chapter II.

THE train sped on through the strong, stifling atmosphere of its dark, subterranean way. Fit scene for what had been done, if scene could be fit for such a deed! Portland Road and Baker Street were passed, and still no one broke or looked in upon the solitude of the dead man. At Edgware Road, however, a lady entered the compartment. The next moment there was a scream, and a rush of officials to the spot. The lady, half-fainting, was helped on to the platform; station-master, inspectors, and police were called, and messages were despatched along the line to temporarily suspend the traffic. It was all done in a very few minutes. The body, after a rapid but keen survey of its position and surroundings, was carefully removed, and the news flew like wild-fire that what was evidently a ghastly suicide had been discovered on the Underground Railway. Then

the carriage door was locked, and the passengers were briefly interrogated, without, however, any light being thrown on the case. Their names and addresses were taken as a precautionary measure. Among them there was but one first-class traveller, a tall man, who, directly the excitement arose, emerged from a compartment three removed from that in which the tragedy had been enacted. Probably it was the fact of his being a passenger in the same class as the deceased that brought upon him a closer examination at the hands of a police-sergeant than the others had been subjected to.

Where had he entered the train?

At Baker Street; there was his ticket from that station to Notting Hill Gate clipped in the usual way.

Had he seen or heard anything unusual?

Nothing whatever.

Would he oblige with his name and address?

Certainly. There was his card: Mr. Jules Merlin, Chepstow Villas, W.

This on the sergeant's part was all for the sake of doing something. He was perfectly satisfied in his mind that the case in hand was one of determined suicide; still caution and diligence, even if aimless, looked well, and were regarded as praiseworthy even if profitless at headquarters. It was to the persistent application of very commonplace abilities that he owed his promotion from the ranks. On this occasion he even went so far as to take down a description of Mr. Merlin; thus — face narrow, good-looking, clean-shaven, and dark. Hair also dark. Age about forty. Figure, tall, thin, straight, and strong-looking. Clothes, check trousers, dark overcoat with velvet collar, brown kid gloves, silk neckerchief, low hard felt black hat, and umbrella very wet.

Mr. Merlin, having borne the sergeant's inquisition with patient amiability, looked again at the body and said, "Poor devil! he must have been out of his mind." Then he re-entered the train as it started again on its way.

The dead man's identity was very quickly established. Letters were found upon him addressed to David Cowen, Esq., with the names of a house and street at Kensington, and his card bore the same name and address. The discovery upon him of valuable jewellery and a fairly large sum of money went towards confirming the police in their theory that it was not a murder they were investigating. The body was conveyed to the morgue, where, within two hours, it was visited by a woman, tall and beautiful, but with wild terror-filled eyes, and face pale as the quiet dead.

Yes, it was her husband, the body they showed her. He was a well-known merchant of Melbourne, and they had but recently come over, to spend a year partly on business and partly on pleasure in the "old country." And this was the end of it.

* * * * *

“Suicide. A clear case. Temporary insanity. Murder impossible on the Underground Railway.”

So the murderer had said; so the police said; and so also said the public. This general verdict was gratifying to all three. But it was doomed to be disturbed, if not utterly shaken. At the coroner's inquest a clerk of the Farringdon Street Station came forward and spoke of the bearded man who, on the night in question, as nearly as possible at half-past seven, had taken a first-class ticket for Gower Street. He remembered the circumstance perfectly, because the gentleman had forgotten his umbrella, which was dry and furled, and which he, the witness, had called him back to receive. The ticket-collector at Gower Street did not remember a person of that description (how could he remember every one that passed through the gates?), but a first-class ticket from Farringdon had been collected at that time.

The evidence of the doctor who examined the body was still more disturbing to the popular theory. Dr. Ford was a man in the prime of life, and a widower. He possessed a considerable practice, was practical, hard-headed, and, like all practical men, somewhat obstinate, and he had the reputation of being keen and clever. When, therefore, he stood up in the witness-box and gave it as his positive conviction that the fatal wound in the dead man's breast could not possibly have been self-inflicted, he inspired some belief, at least in the minds of people who knew him well.

The coroner, sceptical but courteous, asked what grounds the witness had for his opinion.

“I compared the deceased's arm with the depth of the wound,” replied the doctor, “and found that his strength could not have been sufficient to drive the knife so far.”

It should be mentioned that the weapon was a common dagger, such as may be seen in the window of any cutler's shop.

It was here suggested that the knife was not driven in by one blow, but *pressed* in; but Dr. Ford very readily confuted that theory. He began by pointing out the depth of the wound; much deeper than was necessary to kill — the steel had cleft the heart in twain. Then as to character: it was perfectly even and direct; self-inflicted, it would in the highest probability have been irregular. But that was not all. The suspicions excited by the circumstances already stated had urged Dr. Ford to a closer examination than he might otherwise have made, with the result that he discovered on the skin around the incision a bruise, slight, but sufficiently palpable, which clearly demonstrated the force with which the heft of the knife had come in contact with the surface of the body. To have occasioned even a slight bruise through thick clothing that force

must have been very considerable, far too great, the doctor argued, to admit of the blow having been self-inflicted.

“A man, although weak, might be capable of inflicting such a blow upon another,” added the witness. “In that case he would have the advantage of distance, in which to give impetus to the thrust, which would be denied him in an attempt against himself.”

These interesting arguments, although listened to with patience and courtesy, failed to shake the opinion of the authorities. The inquest, however, was adjourned for a few days so that inquiries might be made concerning the bearded man described by the railway clerk.

When the proceedings were resumed nothing had been heard of the mysterious stranger. There was nothing unusual about that, said the police. A man of an extremely nervous and retiring disposition would instinctively avoid being mixed up in an affair of the kind, and, having no important testimony to offer, would probably keep out of the way.

As it was considered that further inquiry was unnecessary, the facts at the disposal of the police being sufficient, the inquest was brought to a conclusion. In summing up for the jury the coroner weighed the evidence for the theory of suicide against the medical opinion, very much in favour of the former. The strong points in that evidence were three, viz. (1) the attitude of the dead man; (2) the absence of any signs of a struggle; and (3) the fact that Mr. Cowen had, since his arrival in England, suffered severe financial losses through speculation in gold mines. On this last point several of the deceased's city friends gave testimony. Mr. Cowen, it appeared, had been induced to try his luck on the Stock Exchange. The results were unfortunate, and it was asserted that when he met his fate he was returning home after a very “bad day.”

This evidence was permitted to outweigh that of Dr. Ford, which was scientific and positive. Assuming the latter to be correct, it was argued Mr. Cowen was murdered. Was such a thing conceivable, possible? Could a man be stabbed to death in that big artery of human motion, the Underground Railway, and the murderer, red-handed, walk off undetected? Certainly not! The idea was too absurd to admit of argument!

So thought the police; so thought the coroner; so thought the majority of the public; and so thought the jury, who returned a verdict of suicide while temporarily insane.

But Dr. Ford was unshaken, and he had at least one sincere the murdered man's widow. Mrs. Cowen understood nothing of medical science; but she knew her husband, and her sublime faith in him was unshaken by his death. Her evidence would have touched any thirteen men less wooden than the coroner and his jury, and, supporting as it did the medical testimony, have convinced any less self-opinionated persons than the police authorities. She stated, with an air of simple conviction

that should have been irresistible, that her husband was the last man in the world to have attempted his own life. His disposition was too hopeful, too buoyant and sanguine, to admit of such an idea. His pecuniary losses did not appear to vex him in the slightest degree. They were heavy, but to a man of his fortune not absolutely serious. He was sunshine itself, she declared, and during the twelve years of their married life she had never known him to experience an hour's gloom. Finally, he was too fond of his home, of his two children, of his wife, of all that made life beautiful for him, to have taken that life himself.

Mr. Jules Merlin attended the inquest as a witness. His evidence was of a slight and negative character. He had heard no cry or noise of any unusual kind, and had seen no bearded man. The tragedy, however, had doubtless taken place before he entered the train. Mr. Merlin followed the proceedings with considerable interest, and after the verdict he sought an interview with Dr. Ford.

"Your arguments interested me profoundly, doctor," he said; "and under the circumstances I scarcely think the verdict was a proper one."

"It was a d — d improper one," declared the doctor, bluntly. "As surely as the coroner is an ass and the jury idiots, Mr. Cowen was murdered."

"But the motive?" asked the other.

"Excuse me, sir," replied the doctor; "but that question is more like that of an imbecile police inspector than of a man of sense. How am I to tell you the motive? I'm not the murderer. I don't know him, and I can't get inside his mind. There was no evidence of motive."

"That was the strong point against you," said Mr. Merlin, with a smile. "It was not robbery, for the man's jewellery and money were untouched. It was not revenge, for the man apparently had no enemies. It had nothing to do with secret societies, for he belonged to none."

"All very true, Mr. Merlin, and yet the man was murdered."

"You think so?"

"I'll swear it."

Mr. Merlin started.

"You scientists are very positive," he said.

"We are able to be, sir. Now evidence of motive is a very good thing for the police to work upon if they can get it. When they have it, I believe they generally hunt down their man. A murder, however, does not necessarily bear the motive upon its face. Yet, judging by this case, 'no apparent motive, no murder,' seems to be a police axiom."

"But the knife was found in the dead man's hand," urged Mr. Merlin.

"A hand powerless to inflict the death-blow. The murderer put it there."

"And there was no appearance of a struggle," added Mr. Merlin, after a thoughtful pause.

"You would not be able to struggle if a knife were suddenly plunged in

your heart," was the reply.

"True, true; but I'm still a doubter. I cannot conceive of such a thing being done under the circumstances, and the murderer getting off unperceived."

"Nor can the police," replied the doctor. "Nor could I, but that I examined the murdered man. Two things the murderer must have had — fearful, devilish craft, and wonderful luck."

"True again; wonderful luck!" assented Mr. Merlin. "And assuming your theory to be correct, the murderer has at any rate succeeded in proving the possibility of a thing which everybody doubted, and still doubts. As to motive," he added slowly, "I believe — yes, I really believe that I could assign a motive."

"You could? What is it?" asked the doctor, quickly.

But Mr. Merlin said "Good-day," and, politely raising his hat, disappeared.

Chapter III.

IT was the third anniversary of David Cowen's murder, and just such another evening — chill, wet, gusty, and gloomy. Doctor Ford sat alone over the bright fire in his study. A book lay on his lap; but he was not reading. He was gazing intently into the glowing fire — that unfailing inspirer of dreamy reflection — and thinking of a woman.

Dr. Ford had married early in life, and had soon become a widower. Solitary he had remained ever since — long lonely years he had gone through until middle age came and found him still lonely. He told people he was wedded to his profession, but some time before this night he had awakened to the fact of how cold and cheerless a wife she was. For a living, vital, absorbing love had grown into his life.

The seeds were sown when he first met Mrs. Cowen. Her beauty, her tragic sorrow, and her touching faith in the dead, all impressed him profoundly. A friendship grew up between them, which on his part developed into love. He asked Mrs. Cowen to be his wife, and her answer threw him into despair. The mystery of her husband's death stood between them. She declared that while that mystery remained unsolved her mind could know no peace, her thoughts must dwell ever in the past. That being so, to marry the doctor would have been to do him a grievous wrong.

Sharing, as he did, her conviction that David Cowen had been murdered, Dr. Ford had no arguments with which to shake this decision, the justice of which he could not but acknowledge. Feeling, too, the hopelessness of the mystery being cleared up, he despaired.

He was thinking mournfully of these things, when a servant entered and presented a card. It bore the name *Mr. Jules Merlin*.

“Merlin, Merlin?” muttered the doctor. “The name seems familiar enough. Show the gentleman up, please.”

When Dr. Ford saw Mr. Merlin he remembered him, for he was not a man to forget a face he had once seen, and Mr. Merlin's face was one not readily forgotten. Three years had wrought a change in it, however. It had grown thinner and more sallow. The features were startling in their distinctness; the eyes hollow and roving, and the lips painfully restless. Mr. Merlin looked ill, not passingly so, but organically. He looked as though some internal disease was slowly but surely consuming him. So the doctor thought, after a quick but comprehensive glance at his visitor.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Merlin?” he asked, after they had shaken hands.

“Nothing, thank you, doctor. My visit is not a professional one.”

“No! Pardon me, but as you are looking out of sorts, I thought — — ”

Mr. Merlin laughed strangely.

“You thought I had come for advice,” he interrupted. “No. My visit is simply a friendly one. To tell you the truth, I was never better in my life.”

“Then I pity you,” thought the doctor.

“We Merlins are queer folk,” continued the visitor, drawing his chair to the fire as if cold. “Our looks always pity us. We are thin to emaciation, and sallow to yellowness. But the thinner and yellower we are the better we feel. The worse we look, the better we are. Strange, isn't it?”

Mr. Merlin was evidently jesting, but the effect was not pleasant. His voice was high-pitched and somewhat grating, and there was no humour in the hard smile on his lips.

The doctor, having placed wine and cigars on the table, made a few remarks on topics of general interest. But his visitor made no reply; he had sunk into a restless silence. Presently he moved his chair from the fire, and sitting against the table drank a glass of wine.

“Try a cigar,” said the doctor. “These were sent me by a friend in Havana.”

“And you never proved the truth of your theory?” remarked Mr. Merlin, suddenly, and taking no notice of his host's invitation.

“What theory?”

“Concerning the death of that man on the Underground Railway.”

Dr. Ford was startled at this sudden broaching of a subject that lay so near his heart.

“I required no proof,” he replied, slowly. “A murder was undoubtedly done. I would willingly give some years of my life to be able to lay hand on the guilty man,” he added, half to himself.

Mr. Merlin rose and walked the room. “It was an interesting case,” he said. “It fastened upon me. It has never left me night or day. So profoundly mysterious; so extraordinary in every way! If Cowen did not

strike the blow, who did? I have asked myself ten thousand times. And, more interesting question still, how did the man escape? I have pictured the scene. I have been in the carriage with the two men. I have seen the blow struck. I have heard the dying gasp of the victim, and watched him as the death-look flooded his eyes. I hear the gasp now, and see the eyes!”

Merlin paused with his hands outstretched, and breathed heavily. His excitement was remarkable, and he had spoken as though he had no auditor. The doctor watched him with intense interest, and not without some uneasiness. He thought that the man's mind had been unhinged by dwelling upon that one terrible subject.

“You should not permit yourself to get so excited,” he said, gently.

“Then I have followed the murderer in his escape,” pursued Merlin. “Not a detail has been overlooked. I have forged and connected every link in the chain. It is complete. I know every point in the strange history. I am the only living man who does. It is all here in my brain — burning like molten iron. I must tell it, or it will kill me.”

“Tell me — quietly,” said the doctor. He himself, although outwardly calm, was now greatly excited. Mad though he appeared, there was a ring of terrible truth in Merlin's sharp voice. Despite the wildness of his words and manner, he impressed his listener with the conviction that he was about to hear truth, that light was about to be thrown on the dark mystery out of which had grown his despair. He trembled with the hope that that despair would be removed.

Mr. Merlin again sat against the table, on which he leaned heavily.

“Yes, I'll tell you,” he said, in a lower voice. “You deserve to be told. You recognized murder when the police babbled suicide. You and I shall share and keep the secret. Listen! closer! It was the bearded man.”

“Well!”

“His beard was false. Oh! he laid his plans well and warily. Don't you remember saying that he must have had devilish craft and wonderful luck? Ha, ha! So he had! What is the good of the best-laid plans in the world without a little luck to back them? Our friend reckoned on his luck, and it stood by him well.”

“Who is the man?” demanded the doctor, eagerly.

“I don't know him,” replied the other, drawing back and passing his hand across his eyes. “At least not — not in tangible form. I have him in my mind though, and there he is distinct. Shall I go on?”

“If you please,” said the doctor, with decreased interest. He was practical. He wanted to be told of a real murderer, not to be introduced to a creation of a disordered intelligence.

“We will go back,” resumed Mr. Merlin, folding his arms and staring at vacancy; “back in the history of the bearded man, say an hour before he was alone in the train with — with the man he killed. He is at Baker

Street. He buys a first-class ticket to Notting Hill Gate. He is not bearded then, mind you. He puts that ticket in his pocket, crosses the road, and takes a ticket to Aldersgate Street, which he uses. Alone in the train, he places the clipped over the unclipped ticket, and with his penknife makes them correspond in that respect. You see he has now his ticket from Baker Street to Notting Hill Gate duly clipped as though he had passed through the gates of the former station. He alights at Aldersgate and makes his way, above ground, to Farringdon Street. On the way he assumes the beard and widens out the brim of his hat — in fine, the clerk described him correctly — beard, coat-collar turned up, dry umbrella. So he entered the train — the carriage — the place where it was done.”

Here Mr. Merlin came to a full stop.

“Go on,” said the doctor, in a low voice. His interest, reawakened, was now doubly intense.

“He left the carriage at Gower Street,” continued the narrator after a long pause, “and mingling with the crowd that hurried to the gates slipped off his beard. He dropped his ticket from Farringdon Street almost at the feet of the ticket-collector, who, he was sure, would afterwards pick it up under the impression that he had dropped it himself. Then he stole out of the crowd and re-entered the train three compartments away from the one he had left. In a few moments he was a different man. He had burnt the hair of the beard, twisted up the wire and thrown it out of the window, turned up the brim of his hat, turned down the collar of his coat, and put on a silk muffler. Moreover, he had taken a bottle of water from his pocket, with which, leaning out of the window, he had saturated his umbrella. Oh! he was another man altogether, *and a passenger from Baker Street to Notting Hill Gate*. And three compartments from him was discovered a suicide, with bloody knife still in his hand.”

Dr. Ford stared at his visitor in amazement. He could not see his face, however, for the lamp was shaded and his hand was against his cheek. Was he mad? And a murderer, too? Or a victim to terrible but absurd fancies?

“And why did he do it?” asked the doctor, throwing a soothing scepticism into his voice.

Merlin's right hand slowly sank from his cheek to the table, and rested on an ivory paper-knife. At that moment his dark face was illumined by the glare from a fresh coal on the fire, which suddenly became ablaze. Seeing that face, the doctor shuddered. Its sharp lines were drawn and twisted into hideous shape by the demons within the man. Terror, hatred, and craft were all written there in intertwined contorted characters, and the hot, sullen eyes, shifting and reasonless, glowed like fire from within dark caverns.

“The motive?” said the madman, jerking the words out, and fidgeting

in his chair, while the doctor watched him, calmly but vigilantly. "A new motive! *Conceit* — sublime or damnable, which you will — but conceit. The papers, the public, and the police had said often that it could not be done; at least, not without detection. I — the bearded man, I mean — he proved that it could, and proved a great truth. Well!" he continued, after a moment's pause, his voice rising sharply and harshly, "is not that sufficient? Had you been in the carriage instead of Cowen, you would have died as he did. Why do you look at me like that? Isn't it enough that dead eyes follow me? *He* tries to speak — you don't. His lips move, but the blood floods his throat, and he can only gasp. Hark! can you hear it? Curses on you, sir! Speak, I say!"

Merlin rose to his feet. His thin sinewy right hand grasped the paper-knife. His eyes burned with revengeful murderous fury like those of a wild cat. The scalp and ears seemed to retreat, as might an infuriated monkey's, leaving the face more sharply prominent than before. It was almost incredible, it struck Dr. Ford — despite the critical character of the situation — that even the hell of madness could transform so handsome a man into such incarnate ugliness.

The doctor rose also, gazing firmly upon the face of his dangerous visitor.

"You have no occasion to be either annoyed or alarmed, Mr. Merlin," he said, quietly.

"The story's not quite finished," yelled the madman, whose eyes were fixed upon the other's breast. "You will have the rest! You shall! I struck Cowen thus!"

There was a blow struck like lightning; but the thin brittle ivory broke harmlessly against Dr. Ford's broad chest. The doctor's strength was proverbial among his male friends. He was set up and framed like a gladiator, and gifted with extraordinary muscular development. Merlin, on the contrary, was thin and wasted; but the imps which fed on his reason combined to strengthen the madman's sinews. The struggle, then, might have been long and severe, but that assistance quickly came and Merlin was secured.

Then, shrieking and foaming, he was carried away.

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However strange it may appear, it is nevertheless a fact that the police stoutly refused to accept as truth the confession made by Merlin to Dr. Ford. They maintained that it was purely a lively invention of the madman's, and, as no positive proof could be adduced to support the story, their sceptical position was really unassailable. Mrs. Cowen believed it, however, for some months later she became Mrs. Ford.

It is said that the doctor's reply to the unbelieving police was this: "*The*

motive for the murder, and your motive for refusing to accept the confession, are identical.”

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Of the truth of the whole story I can vouch. I had it from the maniac himself.

