

Triangles of Life

And Other Stories

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Triangles of Life and Other Stories

Triangles of Life

I. The Reason

ALL Australia. All of the best you have seen or read, or remember of it; of what has been written about it by its own sons and in Australia. And a timber-cutter's camp just within the blazing, blinding, humming, waving, shimmering and pulsating great dusty and gritty heart of it. Tents about, seeming only not to blaze off like so much paper, and bough cook's-shed at the junction of two lanes of piled cut scrub. A sky darkened and dusky and lowering with drought haze and a boiled sun steaming in the centre of it. A heat that blinds to darkness with perspiration and chills momentarily and frightens men.

“God Forgive Billy” was in a bad way. He had a touch of the “dry 'orrers,” as One-Eyed-Bogan said, who had had great experience with the “Horrors,” both with his own and his mates', and dry and otherwise. When the men came they found no dinner ready, and they found Billy sitting in the dust and ashes of his “floor,” his back propped against an upright of the shed, a bucket half full of potatoes between his legs, and a butcher's knife held loosely in his helpless nerveless hand, lying knuckles down in the dust, and rocking a little like a broken live thing—and his greasy kerosene tins round him. Great, shiny black crows were flopping round indignantly, interrupted in a premature grace; a great repulsive-looking goanna skurried and sidled off, turning his head evilly, and went up the baked, ashen bark of a tree; and a close inspection might have revealed the fact that the black ants had already suspended hostilities in their slow, sure and bloodthirsty and merciless war of extermination against a colony of red ants on the bank of the creek (with its one yellow dam or waterhole), and their lines were drawing back towards their base—the shed. He said the Devil had taken the boiling corned beef out of the pot, and so it was no use going on with the potatoes. He described the devil, and supposed it must have been a French one, because it “certingly wearn't a English one.” One-Eyed-Bogan took a stick and looked and poked in the kerosene tin hanging over the fire, and the meat was gone all right, or rather all wrong. He was a man who liked to see for himself, and he always looked twice at least—on account of his one eye, perhaps.

The meat had really been taken by the mangy, hairless, hide-covered skeleton of a starved Kangaroo dog, “belonging to King Billy,” that was known to be hanging about. There was “any God's quantity of rabbits,” but dogs starve on rabbits. Billy himself, the royal one, afterwards admitted the

fact, and Billy was a truthful potentate. He had seen his dog do it—take the meat out of the boiling water by a corner that stuck up, and from over the lee of the blazing fire, just as described as a lie once by one of the *Bulletin's* contributors, and just as I saw it done when a boy, and describe it here as a fact.

Billy said that the other Billy sat down along a prop when he saw the dog do that. Billy (the royal one) said he believed his dog belong-it the devil, and he bin borrow poison along-a rabbit poisoner's camp, and bin kill-it. He showed the scalp, for like all truthful men, black or white, he believed truth to be no good at all without undoubted material or written evidence behind it.

They carried Billy under the patchy “shade” of some gidgea, and laid him down and watered him till the grateful ground ceased to steam, and was much darker than the shade.

Billy sat up and told them that this was what they call the Four Lanes, and yonder straight ahead was Shepperton-on-Tems, and over there was Halliford and Sunbury-on-Tems, and that was a backwater of the Tems, with the willers an' watercress an' ole mill and rustic bridge, an', twisting himself round, “there was Shawlton (Charlton) jest round the corner, with Bob Howe's farm first, and the *Farmers' Arms*, and then the village, with Shawlton House opposite, where yer see them poplers over the hedge, and then Harry Leonard's farm, with Upper Sunbury further on, an' the London Road leadin' to Stains an' Windser Castle an' Hampton Court—an'—an' London and everywhere else for all he know'd.” Blue smoke crawled along the ground from the burning off, and he said “that was the ground mist comin' up, an' it was gettin' chilly,” and he proposed that they'd all go to the *Farmers' Arms*, where he'd fill up the pewter.

Little “God Forgive Billy,” the greenest of New Chum Jackeroos, had been sent up by the Government, or Labour Bureau—that is he was given a pass and some rations, and sent away almost from the ship into the disc of Australia, of which he knew absolutely nothing except the awful blaze and dust of it—the blasting reason-shaking contrast from the green lanes of England—which was driving him mad. He had learned potato-peeling and rough cooking aboard the ship, and was liked here because of his fresh innocence, mild and obliging disposition, his gentle nursing and attention to Bogan when he had a touch o' the sun, and his smile, which was dimples deepened and lengthened a bit, hardened and fixed. Besides, he could play both mouth-organ and tin whistle. And he had one surprising gift altogether out of keeping with his appearance and character or nature. A gift that astonished all who saw an exhibition of it for the first time—and startled some. He could act the drunken man. That is a certain type of him.

And the type was Australian, and not English. He was a perfect face-maker in this respect—for it was a silent part. He'd half turn away and damp his hair and moustache swiftly, by a quick pass or sleight of hand, and his hair would be dank, his moustache slobbered, and his hand would pass drunkenly over it to fling the surplus beers away, and his limbs would go, and his left eyelid keep dropping, like a lid, and—and he'd be Billy very drunk, who had never been drunk in his life.

Was it the Billy of previous incarnation come out again for the moment?

They never grew tired of seeing Billy do it, and “Come and see Bill the cook drunk” was a common invitation to strangers and new-comers. They intended to use him for practical jokes on the boss, etc., but it wasn't in Billy's nature to agree to anything like that.

One-Eyed Bogan was left in camp that afternoon to mutual satisfaction, to look after poor Little Billy and his dry horrors, because Bogan was the most casual, easy-going, and pipe-lighting, and water-bag-seeking worker in that hell's vineyard—as well as the strongest and least nervous man in camp. Besides, he said he had experience with lunatics, and (besides) he owed a debt of gratitude to Billy, and they reckoned he would be kinder to the little fellow on that account.

“And you never know how snake-quick an' cunning an' strong them little fellers is when they're drunk or ratty. But I'm cunnin' enough, I reckon, 'n' strong enough too for pore little Billy.”

One-Eyed Bogan had a naturally sinister expression, and had been otherwise damaged about the face in many gambling and drinking rows, and his green patch and glaring eye must have been very soothing indeed to a mild little new chum going mad through heat, trouble and loneliness in a strange and fearful land.

Bogan said at tea that he'd fixed Billy with his eye all right, which was very apparent, for Billy was much worse, and had to be kept sitting on the rough stool between two of them—who humoured and watched him as a little child—because he only wanted to go down that lane and have a dip in the Thames backwater now it was dusk, and no one was about.

Bogan reckoned he was safe enough for the night, with any one to watch him, turn about, and quite harmless. But he saw the thing in another light, later on, when Billy confessed tearfully to Jack Moonlight that he thought he was going mad, because he kept craving to peel Bogan's head with the chopper, like a big pumpkin, and quarter it. He said the Voices were urging him all the time to do it—he could hear them all the time he was speaking. And he wanted to be tied up.

Just before dark a solitary swagman, or “traveller,” came along—on his way from a shearing shed to the coach-road, he said—and seeing and

hearing how things stood, he volunteered to look after Billy first part of the night, as he'd only made a short stage, and rest over next day, if they liked, with an eye to Billy and the cooking. He said he'd had to do with such cases before, and understood. He was a likely looking chap for the job—tall, with saddish brown eyes—so they washed a tin plate, knife and fork, and pint pot for him, with an audible breath of relief. But afterwards One-Eyed Bogan carefully collected the chopper, knives and forks, and all edged tools about camp and lashed them together in a bundle with bagging, a spare tent fly, and bits of clothes-line and wire—for general safety, he said. He said, “Yer couldn't be too careful in these here cases.” He made his bed in the open, on some boughs, under the saplings, and laid the bundle beside it, and tied a cord to it and to his arm when he laid him down to rest. But he was seen, when they all were down, save Billy and his new warder, sitting up against the rising moon, and not like a “Queen of Night palm” either, and passing his hand nervously over his “pumpkin” and glancing, apprehensively, it seemed, from Billy and his new mate to the wood-heap—perhaps he was thinking of mashed raw pumpkin.

Bogan gets a fright here through Jack Moonlight stumbling over him.

Then he was seen no more, and in the morning, just as they were reckoning that he'd “gone off too,” and worse calamity of all! had taken the tools, he came out of the scrub from another direction with his bundle and blankets on his shoulder, and looking as if he'd passed a bad night. He said, “Yer could never be too careful in these here cases. They was so—cunnin', and allers turned agin them as was nearest an' dearest to 'em. That was a sure sign.” Which reminds me that I could never see why it should be considered a sure, or even extra, or even one sign of insanity that patients turn against friends and relatives first, and cleave to strangers. Look more like a sign of returning, or temporary, sanity, the more I think of it.

Next evening Billy was better, though he feared it coming on with the night. He had taken a great liking to the new man, whom he persisted in recognizing as a long-lost village school-mate. The swagman said he had been taken to England as a child, but remembered very little of it, and nothing of Billy. Billy showed no inclination to peel his potatoes, however, and during the evening, the It and the Voices not coming on, he told him all about it. How he had left home and run to London first, because it was gloomy at home, and there was always trouble. There was big trouble, not his, but he should 'a'stayed an' shared it. He had a right in it. He hoped, with a momentary loss of himself and a fluttering raising of uncertain fingers to his temples, that “Bob,” the new man, wouldn't mention a word of it in Shepparton or anywheres. He was sick an' weak, or he wouldn't

have talked on it. . . . “And his poor old mother!—Poor mother!” He shed tears and his voice broke into the whine that no man likes to hear. “He'd left trouble that he had as much right in as any o' them. Left poor mother dyin' broken-hearted on it, and Tom t' fight it out. Poor old Tom! Good old Tom as he was allers havin' ‘dry’ words with—an' all his own fault. . . .”

The stranger, who treated him as a perfectly rational being, listened with seeming interest, sympathized, soothed, and assured Billy over and over again, with astonishing patience, that it was all going to be mended and fixed up, and that Billy was going home almost directly the job was done.

About here there came what some writers call a “diversion.” It certainly diverted Bogan's dreams, if he dreamed. It diverted Jack Moonlight in his quiet way, and was probably a relief to the new-comer. He heard some one, or something, coming through the scrub, then a silence (he heard that too), as if the man or animal had stopped, or was moving quietly. Then he fancied a shadow was bending over Bogan, but before he was sure there was a yell, and sounds like the sudden getting up of a dray horse that has been stumbled over in his sleep by a blundering old working bullock, and badly frightened. The shadows blended and went down; then one rose, and then the other, and there was bad language, then presently one shadow settled down again, and the language grumbled out on the night breeze. Bob was just going across with Billy to see, when he met Jack Moonlight, who seemed to have a “hiccup,” or a catch, in his stomach.

“What's up?” asked Bob, with the adjectives necessary in new acquaintanceships.

“Oh, it's only Bogan,” said Moonlight; “I dunno what the hell he wanted to play up like that for. I was coming from the fires, and I only bent over him and rubbed his head with my pipe bowl, to see if he was awake, and I told him to keep an eye out for God Forgive Billy.”

Billy had a strong objection, connected with the earth's 'lectricity, to sleeping on his usual bed of boughs and blanket on the ground, and he had a horror of the tent. He said he'd got too much 'lectricity coming round the world, and that was what was the matter with him. He said he should never have come halfway round the world, which was correct, and having come so far he should have gone the other half and finished it—which was sane enough. So Bob made Bill's bed on the rough sapling bench or table, under the dead-bough shed, and persuaded him to lie down. The posts had been “puddled,” or clay rammed, down hard round them, and the cavities kept filled with water, to keep the ants off the table, so Billy was isolated from them, if not from the earth's electricity. His friend told him he was, that the water and clay acted as perfect world insulator, and he seemed satisfied.

Almost before Bob was aware, he had commenced that long, quiet, calm,

deceptive sleep, which so often cruelly raises hopes in the hearts of relatives and friends of such “cases” in the earliest stages, but which never deceives mental doctors or nurses. Bob sat on the sapling seat bench with his back against a corner upright, and commenced his watch of Billy—and of other things—

I. Childhood: Rows and scenes and scenes and rows, violent rows that frightened; father and mother separated; home a hell. Boy slavery and freedom,

II. Cheap boarding house, pretty, but hysterical, daughter; mother, step-father, and sisters; rows and scenes more violent than at home. Tale of ill-treatment. Last big row. Cab, box, and hurried, mad marriage at a “matrimonial bureau.” Seven years of it.

III. Police court. Desertion. “Judicial separation.” Maintenance order. Reconciliation—court—reconciliation—court. Summons for desertion, and maintenance. Summons, summons, summons, Darling-hurst. And the full knowledge of what sort of woman she was.

He shook it off, or lifted his mind from under it. He had gone through so much that he had this power: that he could do this at will almost. The moon rose over the scrub, and all things softened. It was cool, and even growing chilly, as drought nights do grow, and he drew the blanket up over Billy, who never stirred. Then he leaned back against the corner sapling, when he heard his voice called; the close, yet far away call, very distinct. “Robert!” His elbows jumped to his sides as he straightened, but he'd heard that voice before. Then, clear and distinct: “Read, Robert—read!”

At the first start he thrust out his hand towards Billy, and his hand touched Billy's hand, which lay, palm up, on the saplings; he was drawing back with a momentary sense of shame at his fear when Billy's fingers closed over his, as a sleeping child's might. Then he looked up, and across, and set his mind to read. Then gradually the “Four Lanes” took shape, and he saw the cool green, peaceful English scene, as Billy had. The ground mist was “coming up,” and dusk coming on—dusking the moonlight at first—and he saw two figures coming, or seeming more to float toward him from the direction of Shepperton-on-Thames—as in a picture from the dawn of memory. Then suddenly the figures were close to him and plain—save the faces. The girl wore a dark jacket, such as worn in England five or six years ago, and a dark hat with much forward brim, held down to hide the face, which always gives a girl a more hang-dog and guilty look than any slouch hat worn any way can give a man. And to Bob it seemed his wife, as he last saw her—under cross-examination. And who was the man? He seemed to have had both arms round the woman—or girl—in the first part of the vision, now he had only one, the left, and the right was risen as

though to hide his face, shut out of sight, or ward off a blow. The attitude chilled Bob with a strange fear. Who was the man? What was Bob to do? What would Bob do? He seemed to be lying against the outside of a ditch with eyes just above the grass. Should he attack the man as “all the world” would expect him to do, or slip down and along the bottom of the ditch quietly? There was no “world” to see, so he was just sinking down, with that strange, calm, easy “will power,” or whatever it is, which makes all the difference between hypnotic influence and “nightmare” when, with a sudden upheaval, as of a wave, he was beside the girl. He was the man with one arm round her and the other up to ward off. He was struggling and grappling with Billy, the little scrub cutter's lunatic cook, while watching whom he had fallen asleep, and—with the sudden, violent, half dislocating jerk of all the limbs and body that often accompanies an awakening from hypnotic trance, he was awake, and standing up, in his proper senses, cool and collected. It was as though nightmare, with its violent awakening, had come to the rescue from hypnotism. And Billy lay as he had fallen asleep, still sleeping peacefully. The awful hot, ghostly daylight was over the scrub, looking the same as drought nightfall.

Billy woke at his usual time, and in his usual manner, save for saying cheerily, “Oh! I'm all right now, mates!” Then with a fearful pause, he flung his wavering fingers up hopelessly to his head and said, “Oh—oh, them Voices, Bob!”

Next day, the last of the job, Billy was worse, and they had to run him down or round him up several times, but the drays came out and the men cleared up without loss of time, and went into the station for their cheques, taking Billy with them. And leaving the King Billy monarch of all he surveyed—just think of it, for hundreds of miles—and sixteen dogs and two gins. They took Billy with them—and a trusted, sober, station hand, sent by the super—to the coach road, where Poisonous Jimmy kept a pub-store and post office, and there was a “police camp” (a brick and iron one) handy. Billy had a pleasant ride—through English lanes — to Poisonous Jimmy's — though he rode and walked with devils most of the time. He pointed out all the features of the imaginary panorama—to propitiate them perhaps. Poisonous Jimmy's was like a deserted and dried-up slaughter yard, with the offal shed only left and cleaned up a bit, and set in big dust and sand patch in the blazing scrub desert. Here the stranger got a packet of dusty letters and a lot of copies of a Sydney paper. Then he began to act peculiar. He got the loan of the private parlour from the landlady, and, after much hunting, borrowed some scraps of brown paper. Then he got on the right side of the girl to make him some paste. Then he went through his bundle of papers and marked many paragraphs, some verse, and other

matter with the stump of a blue pencil. Then he cut out all the marked pieces carefully with his penknife, and pasted them on strips of brown paper; then he borrowed a carpenter's rule, measured the strips carefully, and entered the result in a pocket-book!

The girl noticed first, of course. Then she whispered to the landlady, who went and had an indifferent look, as also had Poisonous Jimmy. They'd seen too many drink and drought "looneys" to take much notice. Then One-Eyed Bogan went to see for himself, and glared in quite awhile with his one eye.

"——! Blowed if he ain't took it from Billy!" he said. "I told yer yer couldn't be too careful in them cases! Lunatic-doctors an' lunatic-nurses all get it more or less themselves if they stick to the game long enough. Who the blazes next, I wonder?"

Then the new lunatic wanted a piece of white paper, and the landlady humoured him—as she had done the others—to "save trouble and for the sake of peace and quietness." She found it at the bottom of a "band-box" (where did that term come from to Australia?). Then he wrapped the brown paper with the slips pasted on, folded it, tied it neatly with twine, addressed, stamped—and posted it to a newspaper!

"And I'll have to send it, because it's stamped," said Poisonous Jimmy. "Couldn't keep it back without a doctor's certificate. You chaps had better give the policeman a hint—what goes in the coach with your mate. T'other looney's goin' too."

But just a little rite had to be performed that belongs to the Bushman's Creed in another man's trouble—be he Bushman or—or Chinaman—and which is usually performed on the quiet, mysteriously, furtively, and looks more like a low class conspiracy, or better class robbery being planned than anything else. But in Billy's case it didn't matter. Bogan collected the men in the bar, and took off his old black slouch calico crowned straw hat. But Jack Moonlight objected jocularly that there were edges of straw inside under which coins might slip in a hat held by experienced hands (he was a noted gambler—and so was One-Eyed Bogan).

So One-Eyed Bogan borrowed Moonlight's hat, "chucked" "half-a-caser" in it for a send-off, and passed it round. In a shearing shed in full swing in a good season it would have been quids, half-quids, casers, and at the lowest half-casers permitted. But scrub-cutting is low down and "red hot" in a bad season. "Anyways," Bogan said, "there was enough to get a clean shirt and socks and a handkerchief and boot laces for Billy." When Bogan got his last shearing cheque he went to Sydney and ended up, or rather began a new life in the Darlinghurst Receiving House, with a pair of torn trousers, a shirt, the best part of a waistcoat, a new elastic side-boot, and

one sock. He sang "Home, Sweet Home!" all the first night in the padded cell—"an' that'll show how bad I was!" he said.

And at the last moment, Bogan told the policeman in charge of Billy, for his comfort on a thirty-mile dry stretch, that "he'd better keep his eye on the other fellow too!" And the driver was a noted eccentric, and there were no other passengers—but—well, all men are mad more or less—and more Out Back in drought time. So perhaps the inspector thought himself lucky to have no more than three looneys on hand—and one of them he knew. Better the lunatic you know than the one you don't.

Then they went their various ways through their common hells to their private ones, sober, drunken and domestic.

"But," said Bob to the policeman, casually, as they plunged into a fifty-mile bank of dust, "that's a hard case, that one-eyed chap they call the Bogan. What lark was he up to when he took your lug?"

Which satisfied the constable at once that it was only another little practical joke attempted on the police, whereas Bob might have talked to him till Sydney, and never convinced him that his new and previous mates had been in earnest, but mistaken.

Bob now became Billy's brother Tom, and was told all about it again—about Billy's troubles in Australia—and so on through all the freaks of a disordered brain to Redfern Terminus.

Billy was taken to the Receiving House, where Bob went to see him, and they saved him from Callan Park.

Some weeks later a boat of the Bright Star Line wanted a fourth or fifth cook (and as many shillings a month firemen as they could get), and Billy went as cook, and the other lunatic saw him off with a supply of tobacco and a parcel of clean things.

And there was one little man with a smile in England who never talked of Australia.

In 1901 Robert Cleaves went to London with great hopes—and deep fears—as a writer, and struck a period of "mental dismay," as I heard it called by another who went to London with great hopes as a young poet, and came back grey. But it was more than "mental dismay" with Bob, it was mental horror—or horrors—most of the time, for he had heavy private trouble on him, and no funds, relatives or friends. In the lowest depth of the dismay, and on the verge of rags and starvation, he thought of "Shawlton" and "God Forgive Billy."

II. Chawlton

TAKE the steamer from Circular Quay or Woolloo-mooloo Bay, or

Dalgety's Wharf, or from any other port you may in Australia—the White Star Line—all one class—or the Orient, or any other line that suits your condition, circumstances or convenience (or is it Fate?), and you'll cross the Pacific, Canada, or the everlasting eternal States and the Atlantic—or go round by the other side of Africa and see the peak (of Teneriffe), if it isn't too cloudy. Or by Colombo and the Red Sea and up Suez Lane, and by Italy—Genoa—(and the Street of Stars, you know)—where there'll be more to see—and you'll come eventually to Plymouth or Prince Alfred's Docks—anyway to London.

I arrived on Saturday, and started out exploring on Monday morning from No. 4 Windsor Terrace, City Road—where Micawber lived—and struck across country, and got bushed, of course. London has more sameness and monotony, for its size, than the Bush. Somewhere in the wilds between St. Pancras (a rather dirty, dusty and immoral Saint) and High Holborn, I inquired of a tall man leaning comfortably against a post outside a tavern—a beerhouse—for the way to Waterloo Station. He thought, rubbed well behind his ear with the ball of his palm, and asked, as an afterthought, or last chance—

“Does it matter much?”

“Beg pardon,” I said.

“Is it particular?” he said.

“Well,” I said, “the last train leaves before midnight, I believe, and I want to be there before then.”

“O—o—oh!” he said. “Why that's—let's see—that's—that's—why, you've got eight or ten hours yet.” Then, confidently, “Tell you what to do! They sell good ale here: an' a comfortable parlour. You might drop in for awhile an' have a rest, and by that time me or some one might be able to direct yer. No, I don't want any. I'll jest watch here in case a likely director comes along. Or, wait a minute, I could direct where you'll find a policeman! There's one on point just round the corner.”

I looked at him hard, but could make nothing of him. He was a Bushman in disguise, I think.

However, I found High Holborn. Or, rather, it found me, and swung me in, and there I bumped against a buck youth with a vacantly inquiring expression, prominent pale eyes, and very large and prominent buck teeth. Otherwise he was just the kind of new chum we set grubbing about the Homestead until we can trust him alone beyond the first fence. He was examining and picking his teeth with great attention in a grotesque mirror on one side of a shop window—a fat woman with a shawl was fixing her hair and hat in the other, which was concave—hairpins and hatpins between her teeth. I passed behind them, and before the reflections several

times, but not the ghost of a ghost of a sign of a smile on either of their screamingly distorted features—their sweet counterfeits. So I concluded there was no frivolity here (though I wondered if these were of the people for whom my agent advised me to write humorous stuff), and I tapped the youth and inquired the way to the Strand.

“The Strained? Oh, yes—the Strained. Take the first turn round that there half-corner, where you see them green buses going round. That Chawnchery Lane. Foller them green buses—they'll take yer right into the Strained. Don't take no notice of them there courts.”

I thanked him and went on, but felt that he had hesitated. Then he was at my shoulders again, rather vaguely in the rush and rattle, but with the air of a man who had, on second thought, decided to tell me of something, of no particular importance, but which might be worth my while to know, which had happened, or occurred to him, since we last met.

“That's right. Go on as I tell yer. Foller them green buses, and don't take no notice of them bloody courts.”

As if there was a deadly feud of long standing between his tribe and the courts. It must have been deadly, and of considerable previousness, for they don't, as a rule, hint of private or family quarrels to outsiders in England. They say that such and such is “no class” in North London—and that's about all. And, by the way, it was the “Strained” at that time—before the widening; and I may remark that Pall Mall is “Paul Mawl,” “Pell Mell,” or “Pal Mal,” to those who know it best. Also there were many tram and bus routes, and different colours to each one, and different shades for each section and branch, and they were covered with advertisements with “grounds” of all colour, so the wanderer might just as well be colour blind.

Cross Waterloo Bridge and take train from a big grimy station there on the right-hand side—up the river by train to Shepperton-on-“Tems.” You might stroll round—they are pleasant lanes between deep ditches and blackberry hedges on autumn afternoons. You might stroll round by pleasant brooks, within sound of the river; and by some brickfields, that cannot spoil the scene, and come into the story towards the end, and little unsuspected “hamlets”—that's the word—lying in wait, half-hidden in side pockets, nooks and corners of the hedges—like shy children who want to give you a pleasant surprise—and you'll come to either Halliford, Sunbury, Upper Sunbury, or Sunbury-on-Thames. But I want to get you to Charlton, and you'll be lost in English lanes. But you'll be directed. You'll meet a fresh, peachy-bloomed-faced, clear-eyed youth, with the bulk limbs and plod of an English farm labourer, a detached and shelving underlip, which might do if it were trimmed and shored or braced up—were it not for a vague chin, which is hopeless—and a general expression like a blank note

of interrogation—if such a thing could be. But he'll direct you according to the best of his lights.

“Chawilton, sir? Oh, yes, sir! Chawilton. You take that lane wot yer see there, sir, and foller it till yer come to a bridge goin' across the water, sir. No, sir, that's not the “Tems,” sir—that's only a backwater runnin' inter the Tems, sir. Git through the fence to the right jest before yer come to the bridge, sir; don't cross the bridge. Don't cross the bridge, sir. Git through a panel jist at the foot of the bridge where yer see a path worn, sir. (Don't take no notice of that lane on the other side, sir.) When yer git through yer'll see medder in front of yer, sir—yer'll be in the medder, in fact, sir. Go right across the medder till yer comes to a gate with a turnstile and another stile on either side, sir. Yer can take whichever yer like, sir.” (I looked at him for a sign of a bucolic humour, but none was there.) “Go through there an' yer in Harry Leonard's farm, sir. Go right through by the house, and it'll bring yer right inter the road agenst Chawilton, sir. (Mind and don't take no notice of that there lane I told yer of, sir.)”

The farmhouse stands, or rather squats, low, in dark, damp-looking greenery, just inside the orchard—this is on low-lying Tems gravel flats—with a heavy roof of red tiles—stained like iron rust, and some of them glass—that comes down so low behind that you could scratch your shoulders against the eaves. But there are rooms in the roof that hid the mysteries of the births of great, great grandfathers. The old farmhouse, as is the case of many others, looks as if it were taller at one time—higher and lighter at one time, but had settled down, like a big rusty old hen, over ceaseless generations of chickens. Stable, barn, and one big outhouse of wide—12-inch—weather-boards, tarred. Big trees along the lane to the road—“hellums,” or beeches, or something—it doesn't matter—and “hashes” at the hend of it, “agenst the road.” Also big, mossy logs that were never cut up for firewood. The short lane runs from the back of the house into the road, and from the road to the kitchen door, or, to be precise, to the outer kitchen, or slush-house, door. As seems the case with most farmhouses round here. The front approach and front door is either a mystery or a legend—a vague bucolic superstition. Maybe there was a front entrance, and visitors, and light—in other days.

Farmer's wife dead—the village people never talk of her to newcomers—perhaps not amongst themselves. Leonard took another woman, with a baby girl—his or some one else's—as housekeeper. Baby grown to fresh, pretty little English village beauty—“fresh” as a half-broken filly—“Miss Leonard.” Her girl friend, adopted sister, or something, as companion.

Leonard, who has a little to do with the story, stands smoking—hand to

pipe, casually—in the front back-side, or whatever it is, gateway, leading into the road. He is a stoutish man, calm, contented in the gloaming, with a calmness and content that he has made for himself, or rather has made his farm hands make for him (for he owns them body and soul)—with a smile that is watch-dog like, and not altogether bland at any time. Something suggestive of the mastiff with nothing on his mind and stroked by passers-by—or a dog of lesser degree succeeding in being, or seeming, unconscious under certain circumstances. Something saturnine. Two youths in their Sunday clothes, crouched behind a heap of metal a bit along to the right, and whom the blackberry overgrowth had prevented from diving into the ditch in time. They have been coming to see the girls, up at the house, under the impression that Mr. Leonard was gone to Shepperton on club business. Another young fellow, who was up at the house, slips down and out desperately—out past Leonard, bending obsequiously, and an apologetic and propitiatory hat held vertically, parallel to his ear—as if Leonard were a stationary funeral and the boy were forced by haste, and much against his will, to disobey the last injunction of the deceased, and pass the corpse.

A little man, who has been busy about the stable, passes out. A little man in corduroys, and that heavily seamed, double-fronted, calico-lined, monkey-jacket sort of coat they wear. A little man with pale blue eyes and a smile—a fixed smile. I've seen big men with it. It is as though there were deep merry dimples once, and they extended into the care and age lines, down the cheeks and into a fixed smile. I've wondered how such men manage at a funeral. But sudden and deep sorrow affects such expressions painfully; more so than in ordinary or seldom smiling men. You've seen the ghastly attempt at a smile of the smileless. But the reverse—well, in ordinary circumstances, liken it to a big good-natured dog, sitting smiling his twelve-inch smile, and his master putting on a severe or mocking expression and persisting in catching his eye.

Mr. Leonard said, “Well, Billy!—as the sayin' is.”

And Billy said, “Good evenin', Mr. Leonard.”

And Mr. Leonard says, “Good evenin', Billy (as the sayin' is),” and something about the morning's work, perhaps. “Don't forget them there, etc., in the morning, Billy.” And Billy says, “Alright, sir,” and turns towards the village.

And Billy's corduroys flicker away in the dusk.

He passes and is passed by a tall, oldish man (oldish is the word) with a bend—or—stay—by an elderly man—an elderly labouring man, who would be tall but for the bend. An elderly labouring man with a squarish face—oblong, but features square, rather. Gladstonian face without the

politics, and a dirty-looking grey frill beard, like the hair of a white Scotch terrier that's been in the ashes and wants washing. We don't notice that they nod or speak to each other in passing, but something makes us feel that it's just the same as if they did. The old man is bent from the hips up, and carries his arms with his hands clasped behind—on a lower rear gable as it were—or the end of the rain slope. He wears no coat, of course, but generally a calico-backed waistcoat hanging open in front, and a red speckled handkerchief round his neck, knotted under his frill. One fancies that his running (on some improbable village occasion) would be a question of his legs keeping up, perforce, indignantly, and with breathless difficulty, with the forward top-heavy weight of his body. He is the farm and village handy man, “Jack-of-all-trades,” but wait a minute—“Jack” doesn't fit him—say Old-George-of-all-trades. And his name is George, too. Old George Higgins; and he is, or, rather was, father-in-law to the little man with a smile.

Mr. Leonard says, “Well, George (as the sayin' is), ain't yer fixed them pipes at the Bow Winders yet?”

And old George says, “Not yet, sir. I'm jist going up for somethin' fer a bit more ‘roddin’.” And he plods up the lane. “Roddin” is a sewer pipe-cleaning arrangement of his, composed of stout wire, old clothes-line, pliable poles, sticks, etc.—and more of the Bow Winders later.

Charlton is a name on a big grained and varnished gate in a high brick wall, much higher in one place, where there is a tennis ground or something behind it. Glimpses through the gate, when it opens to the carriage—opens reluctantly and shuts quickly—jealously and indignantly behind it—reveal an oblong two-storied house, partly end on, very fresh and clean, painted in light colour with French grey about the windows, and splashed and sprayed with ivy.

“Chawlton” is the farm labourers' village opposite, on the frontage of the farm. Six square, two storied cottages, or rather hutches, of dirty, smoky-looking brown brick, with dirty, smoky-looking tiles, but why I don't know, for this is far from London's smoke and grit. Perhaps it was soiled or inferior material from the kilns. Gable roofs all running the same way, and the houses in a straight row and exactly alike. Two or three-foot hawthorn hedge in front, and no division whatever, save an old batten here and there—and the footpaths running up to the back fence—between the vegetable gardens behind. The cottages are double, yet square; four pigeon-hole rooms aside; kitchen-dining-and-general-living-room, with the narrowest and steepest of little stairs running up through it—sort of dirty little ladder with the rungs boxed in. Inevitable dark little parlour in front, with the pitiful little useless toy “suite” on time payment, which is never

used. They draw the blind and open the front door sometimes, like the dusty lid of a chest on end, to let some one see the suite, who hasn't seen it before. Two bedrooms upstairs. I haven't seen them, so I don't know what they're like. There must be a spare room for Granny, or Aunt Emma, when she comes for her annual holiday. Some of the family, if there is one, sleep on made-up beds downstairs on such occasions.

But opposite the gate with "Charlton" on it is a double cottage of a much better class, with bow or bay windows—"fitted up like London." This is the Bow Winders that Leonard speaks of. Five rooms; one extended above the wash-house, coal-house and convenience. Sewage runs into a mysterious hole somewhere at the bottom of the orchard. The sewage of the labourers' cottages is buried at the back of the gardens, mostly by moonlight or lantern light. The people of Charlton paid the farmer the difference in the expense of building a better class cottage opposite their gate, so that a square brick hutch wouldn't blink in, with its little sore eyes, as it were, when the carriage came out. Hence the Bow Winders.

English village owners and builders seem to have a fixed idea that English families—each of its own class—are born in couples, or twos, or twins, to live together as twins, and grow up, and down, together as twins, for in modern villages round London the hutches or houses are twins, with, even in the better class, or week-end village, seldom a dividing hedge or fence more than breast high. Perhaps this was to save extra walls and space. Maybe it is conducive to morality, and mitigates curiosity, speculation, gossiping and mischief making, where people see pretty well what's going on and what the next door people are doing, all the time. But it helps build up those awful things called "respectability" and "keeping up appearances," and the awful better-class English Silence. The 3s. per week hutch-twins are kept apart, of course, and the £25, £30, £45 and £50 to £100, and so on—pounds a year twin villas clan together in clannish silence, so class distinctions cannot clash. And the common people pull their forelock harder and squirm lower the higher the rent a man pays per quarter for his house. This twin-villaed, paling-fenceless style does very well in conservative, cast-iron-customed, own-business-minding and necessarily polite, trades-entranced English better class villages, as also in twin-hutched, spiritless, farm slave villages, where all the women have to go out and take their chance at the butcher's cart; but it would never do in wide, free, democratic Australia, where your neighbour, if so built and constituted, is free to loom up over the shrubbery and curse and criticize, and tradespeople and carters to fling things on the front verandah and smoke in their fellow-countrymen's or women's faces—whether they smoke or not, as many union barbers do now in Sydney, where Mrs.

Liberty-Freedom is free to forget, as painfully, frequently, and freely as she dares, that she is a lady—or ought to be one.

I had my fences raised three or four feet in Harpenden, a day-end village, but that was nothing. We were Australians, and therefore unconventional. Also we were used to living alone and privately in the Bush. I only had one suit at a time, but that was nothing. I was an Australian, and therefore had money. I fled to London for the first winter, where there were lights, privacy and humanity.

Fate sent a friend and an Australian to me in a high flat in Clovelly Mansions in Gray's Inn Road (where an “old maid” once “lived a life of woe”), in London. And, in order to escape from London and high rent for the second summer I sent my friend scouting. Fate sent him, in a circle almost, to Chawton, at a time when one of the “Winders” was vacant. And I took it and got some blinds and things from Stains, and we were accepted at once as writin' gents or something from London, who wanted to have a lark or somethin', and do as they liked. Had we gone in bags and barefoot it would have been the same. We didn't work and therefore we were gents.

Leonard had “some things” on the beams in the tarred shed. A double bedstead, washstand, etc., and some chairs, also a mattress, palliasse, quilt and pillows, almost new, and tied up in a light, but good, reddish carpet, like a gigantic man-o'-warsman's bundle. The things were good, much better than was generally found in the cottages, and I took them, and started to get the Winder ready for the family. Higgins was told off to carry the things down and fix them up for me, for “being gents” we were supposed to be incapable. Higgins carried them all down on his head, and, looking at it now in an Australian Bush, and not from an English farm-labouring-village light, I think it was one of the cruellest loads that a man ever was called upon to carry.

There was, next the Bow Winders, on the outside, an old house of brick set in criss-cross beams, with rooms in the steep tiled roof, of course, and let to a painter, which house was older than the oldest inhabitant knew, and had been occupied by the Higginses in other and far better days. Before the Higginses were labourers to the Leonards. Days that have long gone out of England for ever.

Along towards Shepperton, some hundred yards or so from the end hutch of the village, was the village beerhouse—“beer-shop” they call it in London (they call things by their names)—with a low door that you stumbled in through, on to sanded floors, and under a low dark old ceiling, with the inevitable great beam, anywhere but in the centre. I stood outside that door late one night, after returning from London, and rapped at family bedroom window above—in the roof—and scared them all, and shook

hands with the landlord afterwards—when he put his head out—to soothe him, and said I only wanted to borrow some matches. But that was nothing, for was not I a gent?

I still see the Gypsies dropping in, calling to each other on fine days, and calling for their ale, the hags demanding the funnel-shaped warmer from over the bar, pouring their half-pint into it, and sticking it down amongst the coals. And then hurrying out and on after the caravans.

And old Higgins in the cold sunlight standing outside the door, his bend rather more pronounced than usual, and hands held half hanging, well out and forward—in the attitude of an exhausted pelican, and asking for arf-a-pint to be brought out to him. “Hiff you please, missus.” For he's bin fixin' them thundrin' drain pipes at they “Winders” agen, and ain't fit to come in.

And also, on Sunday morning, the brightest time, between church and dinner, a memory glimpse of a bright fair-haired little maid in charge of her jolly, good-natured and rather irresponsible young dad, and her extremely neat and clean but rather “fresh” and equally irresponsible old grandfather.

“Now then, grandfather, if—you—don't—come—home—to—dinner—at—once—I'll tell mother you've been drinking more beer agen—so there! There's two bottles at home.” Then that quick, inimitable, unexpected, startling little-woman comment, “You're old enough to have more sense if father ain't.”

Chorus: “That's a good 'un.”

The parlour with a long table piano at one end and a small-paned window at the other—like one of our narrower ones laid on its side to fit the inn. A model of a ship over the mantel and above it a portrait of the landlord's own ship. For he was a youngish man-o'-warsman, retired on rheumatism, and his wife a youngish woman with reddish hair, the last and only surviving child of a long line of village publicans. They were childless, and during his rheumatic attacks she referred to him to gentlemen customers as “her baby.” There was a hole into the bar, opposite the piano, through which the landlord might serve drinks—and keep an eye on his wife. Clients, for whom the landlord refused to “slate it” further until settled with, made grumbling and nasty comments about babies.

The long side parlour, sacred to Leonard and his equals and one or two of the elders, and doubly sacred on Club or meeting nights when births, deaths, accidents and widows and orphans were provided against, or arranged for, or disposed of. Then the solemn conclave would relax.

Leonard, who always said “As the sayin' is,” and would be indicated, particularized and disposed of right off and at once and for ever in the Bush by some variation of his habitual expression. “The Sayin' Ass,” for

instance.

He would like to say a few words, as the sayin' is. He had heard, as the sayin' is, all as had been said, as the sayin' is, here this afternoon, as the sayin' is. Now, gentlemen, as the sayin'—He started to tell me a yarn once (as the sayin' is), and after about half an hour, introductory, mostly “as the sayin' is,” an' so to make it short, as the sayin' is, he went to Australia, as the sayin' is, and kept an hotel, as the sayin' is, but, anyhow, as the sayin' is—Another as the sayin' is—or whatever you call them places, as the sayin' is—I was never up in geography, as the sayin' is, but, anyhow, as the sayin' is—Another tall good-natured sawney arose occasionally to say he “ad a happy thought.” Who would he be in the Bush but “Happy Thought”? or some pleasant variation of it, say Happy Squeak, Happy Yell, Happy Shriek, Happy Streak, Happy Smell—or Happy Stink.

This was in the House of Lords—with a gentleman or two—walking tourists or cyclists, occasionally at the lower side table by the window, when the lords of the village would edge further along the table and lower their voices in respect to strangers who were or might be gents. Or a motor would break down, and the folk come in out of the rain. Then the lords of the village would sidle out and home with all expedition, despite a polite protest from one of the gents, and a footman or two would drop in for a glass in the bar, amongst the British commons, who'd make room, but were never so impressed as the lords.

The British commons sat round on narrowest of stools, and by narrowest of tables, boxed in with narrowest of settees, with the window, by the fireplace, in the little, low, saw-dusted bar-room: one generally in front of the fire in a position favourable for holding forth on opportunities, or leaning against the mantel, hooked on to it with one elbow, the other arm hanging loosely, and hanging himself, rather forward seemingly—either somewhat exhausted with the last effort, or in half unconscious acknowledgment of applause or approbation, imaginary on his part or otherwise. They passed the big pewter on Saturday nights, and the old homely, good-humoured greeting jokes about, or at the old changeless, good-humoured butts, and the sly three-cornered, homely digs at each other. And discussed interesting and important little trivial events of their work day. And joked about the ever convenient scandal about Bob So-and-so and Mrs.—, or Lizzie—, etc., etc. Men talk good-humoredly and leniently about these things—and bigger scandals, be they social or political, because they recognize that they are sinners themselves—which women never do—and are mute, inglorious and inactive swindlers, by necessity or the dead hopeless weight of circumstances.

And they'd talk of old yarns, and men who told them—“Bill Stubbins,

wot used to tell that there yarn about, etc., etc.,” or “Tom Scroggin’—he could tell that yarn. I’ve never heard no one as could tell it like him, poor Bill”; or “That chap as come to work in the brickfields one year; I never could remember that man’s name—as used t’ sing that song about, etc., etc.” But this is more like the Bush.

And they’d talk of men who left their village and went to London or “abroad”—which is everywhere else—and more of men who went abroad and wrote back, and still more of men who came back, and, which was equally frequent in such cases, went abroad again. And of men of whose deaths, fortunes, entrance into high society, or the gaol, or accessions to fame—or the gallows—they had heard rumours of. In undoubted cases (the fireplace ornament):—

“———An’ he wos a stannin’ here on this very spot where I’m a stannin’ now, a-talking to you——” In a loud impressive, not to say aggressive tone, and with a forward sling of the arm and forefinger, that sounded and looked, from the other side of the road, and through the door or window, like one-half of a domestic row.

But old Higgins was a refreshing change—for the first time at least—when they could get him past a certain point in drinking, which happy circumstance had to be brought about very delicately, with much guile, great circumspection and carefully veiled diplomacy. If there happened to be a strange, unobtrusive face or two present, it was so much the easier. They feigned to be careless of his presence, and greatly and warmly interested in a conversation or argument amongst themselves, which was full of carefully “blinded” little traps for Higgins. Long association and practice, and many tacitly understood mental rehearsals had made them perfect. They’d pass the pewter to him, out of his turn, and leave it longer in his hand, in an absent-minded way. Then, presently, he’d begin to get uneasy, and edge and shuffle on his seat, and move his bend towards the fireplace—and one would nudge me respectfully.

Higgins had possessed and studied from boyhood an old elementary book of Euclid—the only thing he ever read, except an occasional newspaper, which he studied for the same reason that “free thinkers” study the Bible.

“Life,” he’d say, after some preliminary shuffles, coughs and grunts, “is wot I call made up of triangles—ekal hatteral triangles. Circles is made up of triangles, and made with triangles, if you consider the legs of the compass the sides, and the lines between the points the bases. Squares is double triangles when you run a line to opposite corners. Oblongs, the same way, is hobtuse or hay-cute angles—an’ both. An’ a right hangle is a right hangle, no matter which side you might lay it on. It’s a right angle if you lay it flat, but all sorts of angles if you run lines from the corners to the

bases—which yer can't in wot I call the equell try hangles of life.

“Now this is my case” (this was before the trouble with his daughter), “there's that there Lizzie o' mine at the happix, and me and the missus at the hextremities of the base. We can't come no nearer for a right hangle try-hangle is rigid. We might change corners, but that would make no difference between me and the missus, but one of us, if we could agree about it, or to take turn 'en turn about, might change corners with Lizzie—which might do her some good—but we'd be just as far from each other as ever. And if we laid the triangle flat we'd be just as far off as ever, and it would do none of us any good. An' if we was to put hinges on it it wouldn't make no difference.

“Now, if I was to go out and another man—say, a younger an' more experienced one—was t' take my place I—I—well, I don't know who'd be at the happix pretty soon, but one on 'em would.”

(A Voice: “Mrs. Higgins is jest out the door listnin' all the time!”)

“She's gone to Shepperd's for starch—an' an eye out for a likely second, maybe. My ole woman is fore-seein'.”

“But what about Billy here?”

“Well, if I died, an' Billy an' Lizzie gets married. I know where Billy would be—where I left—for a while at least. And anyways, supposin' I didn't die. I know who'd be at the happix, especially if it was a girl. An' so on with the triangles of life; children, and more children, allus crowdin' the happexes, an' the old people bustin' themselves to death shorin' up the legs or bases of the ekel try hangles of life, till they give out of old age, and then summon comes down as often as not.”

“Life is a triangle,” once said Brennan, the silent semi-foreman (a *Reynold's Newspaper* reader), to the surprise of all, who had dropped in, in the absence of his wife and her mother from the village, to get his bottle filled. “Life is a tryangle. You're right there, Higgins, and you and me and the rest of us in hundreds of English villages are shoring up the props. And they're comin' down, Higgins!” and he went out.

They stared at one another, and “Wot's come over Brennan to-night,” they grumbled. “He must be gettin' speerits from somewhere.”

Poor old Higgins! Pausing for wind in the dusty field in a sweltering mid-afternoon, with a hoe, or other handy implement—or a piece of “roddin' ” of suitable length, at the Winders—one end planted between his hob-nailed boots, and his hands resting on or grasping the other end—and his frilled chin on the uppermost hand—he formed an eloquent triangle of life, that only needed the last life blow to knock sideways, backways, frontways, or anyways, and have it over.

Who would *he* be but “Old Tryangles” in the Bush?

The village had its stale mysteries—two of them. When the old cottage had been some time empty, on account of the Higginses being unable to pay the rent charged for the home of their ancestors, there came an unknown but respectable looking woman in black to Leonard, who said she was an invalid with an only daughter, and needed country air, and she persuaded Leonard to let her have the place at the ordinary rental. By and by a man came round, a short stout man, like a cross between an old Maori chief and an English labourer. Leonard spoke to her about it, and she said he was her husband. He became the village and roundabouts house-painter. They had lots of books, bound volumes of old magazines, London journals, etc., that looked as if they had belonged to a library. I talked to the girl, who seemed peculiar, and was a bit deaf, and we exchanged books. They were from Hindia, she said. She told me some of her history, and wrote the rest. It seemed she was entitled to estates in Scotland from a dead uncle, but there had been a lot of trouble, and she had lost them but there was a big law-suit coming on between her lawyers and the others. The painter and his wife were faithful old servants of her uncle's estates, who had thrown in their lot with her, and were sticking to her. Her poor faithful servants! she hoped to reward them in the near future. She was hengaged to a hofficer in Hindia, but had given him up when she came home and found she'd been robbed of her fortune. He wrote frantic letters, but she had made up her mind for his sake, and he would never find her, not until she came into her hown. If never, then never.

She was a curious lunatic, but hardly to be wondered at, being the only girl in that village, alone and apart, with some common mystery or disgrace over her, and some tons of London Journal literature. He might have been a librarian, book-worm, book-dealer, thief, receiver of stolen property, fugitive from India—or anything.

She went to Shepperton three nights a week with an old fiddle case (which she called her violin), and—and came back again; as thousands of sane girls do from other towns. She said she was taking lessons—as thousands of other girls do.

The other mystery was a Scotchman, who lived alone in a barred and barricaded house, that looked as if it had been built for a bakery (I don't know why I thought so), along about the middle of the big cabbage field, and kept about twenty extremely optimistic and friendly dogs. Some said he had to keep them or lose a legacy. Others said that he had a big fortune and estates in the north, and preferred to live alone, but was bound by the will to keep up five carriages, and so many pairs of horses, and so many coachmen, butlers, stewards, footmen, maid servants, gardeners, etc., etc., etc., which he did. With a man with a likely eye to look after them, too, I

should think. 'Twas also said that his wife came in a carriage to see him “every once in two years,” but never went inside, or even left the carriage. No one had been inside. He was a pleasant man; had been a gentleman; was certainly educated and intelligent, and seemed well read, and he never washed so far as I could see—save perhaps when he sweated and used his handkerchief. But he was never seen to sweat, and no one had ever “seed no handkercher.” I made inquiries. He used to run round and across fields with his dogs, early mornings. He paid cash, and publican and tradespeople were scandalized when I called him “Scotty.” They called him Mr. Morton, and all treated him with respect. He might have been a lunatic, a coiner, or forger, a ruined author—or publisher—or an ordinary dirty eccentric refugee from society. So the Scotch hermits seem to be settling in England, as well as Scotch doctors, publishers and general imposters. It was a sad day for the English when England was annexed by Scotland. The English people have been against the alleged union from the very first, I believe.

Have you noticed that our hatters, or hermits, are, as a rule, scrupulously clean about their persons, tents and caves? as well as clean mouthed? Perhaps they are hermits to be clean and fresh, while the others are to be dirty.

I never saw the parson at or near the village, though he had a bike, and was a well knit, active man, quite young—an athlete, in fact, and a keen sportsman. He had a tombstone in the churchyard, sacred to the memory of his third wife—or was it his fourth?—and they said that “parson was keep'n company again.” He wore tourist jacket, cap, knickerbockers, and a bike—the last mostly between his legs—whenever I saw him. He seemed an improvement on “The Private Secretary.” But I can't think exactly in which way. He might have been more useful out here in an English eleven.

The Shepperton doctor was Scottish—and a friend of mine. So I won't write about him.

There was that something of the “sullen, silent” atmosphere—without the “half-devil and half-child” business about the village which had struck me forcibly while school teaching a pah of low-class Maories at the other side of the world a year or two before. Men and women worked in the fields for, the men from fifteen shillings to a pound a week, and the women seven to eleven shillings. I used to hear them calling each other in the dark, on bitter cold mornings. Those who had children, and no old granny capable of looking after them, used to club together and pay one of their number to look after the children while they were in the fields. Some had to pay to have old granny looked after, too. The children who were old enough to do so worked in the fields. The woman with the hoe was there, plenty of her—not twenty miles from London—bag aprons and the hoes. There was an old

solitary couple I noticed often in the big cabbage field. They lived in one hole in the end of an old hovel, but were clean on Sundays. I've often seen them plod home, bent, in the rain, with sacks tied on and their hoes on their shoulders—bags heavy with wet, and hobnailed boots—they both wore them—heavy with clay. End of a “good” week they'd come into the beerhouse for their pints, or half-pints. Their philosophy was grim—practical—they talked—or drivelled, or doted, or cackled, about “them as 'as it,” sometimes: not resentfully, discontentedly, enviously, or covetously, but from habit, as other old couples had done before them for generations. She treated him as a rather useless overgrown child with whom she “had no patience,” and he defended himself, or rather took it all with grumbling humour or sarcasm—as other old couples have done for generations. It seemed as though they had been only children of old couples right back to the beginning of 'em, and it had ended, or was ending, without a child. In bad weeks they sometimes “wished as they 'ad it”—but you couldn't conceive them as being in earnest about it. If they had “it” suddenly and survived the shock, there would probably be no old couple on earth—or young couple either—who would know less what to do with it. The fear of “they lawyers,” and “they banks,” and “they thieves” would probably drive them to bury it, and sleep on it, and fight about it, and shift it to a new place every night, and sleep on it there, and end by not sleeping at all, because of watching each other all night. And it might end by one poisoning—or hoeing—the other. Or they'd turn misers and die in dirt and starvation.

There were no village beauties, nor dancing on the village green in that village. (I wonder if there ever had been in England.) Because there was no green, and an utter absence of girls. They had to go to service before they were old enough. Or to a factory. Girls prefer the factory in England, both in this and “better-class” villages. Because, after factory hours, long as they be, the girl's time is her own. And because English middle class mistresses are seldom human beings where “maids” are concerned, and “keeping up appearances” is a fetish, a religion—very life to them.

The farm hands on Saturday nights sometimes went home three or four arm-in-arm, singing “Comrades—comrades—since the days where we were boys—sharin'—each other's—sorrers—sharin'—each other's joys.” Never anything else. They shared their joys on a bank outside the Winders one night, and I complained on the grounds of the sleeping children. I never heard them share each other's joys after that, and have always been remorseful and sorry about it.

The men—as I mentioned before—got from fifteen shillings to twenty shillings per week, and the women from seven shillings to eleven shillings

in the season. They paid three shillings for their hutches—deducted from their wages—twopence a pint for their ale, and anything from threepence to one shilling per week on the suites that were never used. Besides club fees for births, illness and burials (which seemed the only things that ever happened there). I don't pretend to know how they did it, but they grew their own vegetables, and got seed potatoes, etc., free, I think. Some worked at the brickfields and other places when not wanted on the farm. They were slaves, and treated as slaves, and seemed invulnerable in their position as willing slaves. I'd often fill the pewter, and be just getting comfortable with them and getting copy when one would spoil it with, "We 'ope we ain't intrudin', sir? We 'ope we ain't makin' too free, sir?" They'd carry a "gent" home beastly drunk and call him "sir" all the time. "Excuse us, sir, but you're bein' sick, sir! Hadn't we better stand yer up agen the wall, sir? Till yer right, sir? Once I said, "For Heaven's sake don't call me sir," which only embarrassed and struck them dumb! It was no use trying to treat them as equals. "He's a gent, and Gol darn it! Why don't he let us treat him like a gent?" And the servants, or "maids," well, if I treated one as I'd treat an Australian girl, she'd reckon I was "no class," and she'd lose cast by being in my service. It's easier to get up amongst the upper class in England. But don't be proud. It's coming in Australia every day.

One Brennan, who lives in the nearest hutch to the Winders, was sort of upper hand on the farm. Sort of super, whose position was not recognized in any way by the farmer, but who was made to feel his responsibility all the same, and who, therefore, seemed sullenly apart from his fellows. He was the trusted man to go to London with the wagon or wagons of fruit and produce in season. Started at four in the morning, got back at any time at night—or next morning in the fog—was probably allowed eighteenpence for travelling expenses, and was secretly known by the whole village to get twenty-two shillings a week, instead of a pound, which was secretly held by his wife and the whole village to be a secret between him and her and the boss. She set out the bread and cheese on the table and the black bottle of ale, late in foggy "Lunnon night," and went out to the front with something over her head, now and then, to look for her chap.

She had a holiday once every two years to a married sister's at Margate, but told me she was going to have on' this ye'. "We ain't going to do this work all me life for nothin'. My chap give it to me this year."

She used to sit outside in the sun and sew calico—well, combinations—with an offhandedness that set even me at my ease, and I was a shy man.

One day I heard him ask her to wash his trousers, and he added "only wash the linin'." Which gave me a poor opinion of his intelligence. But I've thought since that the linin' was probably put in so that it could be undone

and drawn out at the bottom of the pants. (I've a vague impression of seeing some so.) For on Sunday morning he sat at the back and read *Reynold's Newspaper*. He lent it to his wife's father afterwards, who lived with granny next door in the other half of the dog-kennel; but I don't know who he lent it to.

This is no democratic touch, because I'm supposed to be a democrat in a democratic country. It is no literary trick. This was five years ago, and a sign on the face of it of the great change that was coming and is coming to English politics. That the white world never dreamed would come to England. Was it only one sign of the silent, sullen seeming undercurrent of thought, that was going on in that and hundreds of other English villages.

And to such a village had come, some three or four years ago, little Billy with his smile.

And while Billy is getting used to conditions which are strangely new to him after exile to London and a nightmare "abroad," and while men and women are getting used to Billy, who has never changed, I'll tell you of something else.

I have neither stage-room nor time to describe the villages, fairs and gipsies connected with them, though I've seen fairs, from one at Little Hilliford (where Sykes and Oliver Twist passed that morning) to Islington Fair, which is a surprisingly small and cramped affair for its name and fame—as indeed are most other famous things in London, from St. Paul's, which seems a dirty old toy at first Australian sight, to the *Angel* at Islington, or *The Cheshire Cheese*, in Wine Court Alley, Strand, where, in the little cramped, sawdusted dining-room The Immortal British Bore sat in a corner (where a marble plate on the wall now records the fact) before he got up and made that most original and world-famous proposal of his.

The memories of old Paddy's Market and Paddy's Market Square of twenty years ago will give old Sydneyites a very good idea of the real thing.

Some gipsy caravans are models in woodwork, with polished brasswork inside, and fitted like a ship's cabin. But most of the travelling ones are rough and dirty enough. I shall always remember the gipsies as hurrying on, camping at a fire left by a caravan ahead, probably, for a few minutes it seemed, and hurrying on. Caravan hurrying on after caravan, and gipsies on foot hurrying on after gipsies on foot, talking their own "outlandish," and calling to each other. Running in and out of line to the beerhouse (generally in a pocket of the hedges out of sight of the road till you see it), and hurrying out and on again. But they camped, sometimes by Charlton, where, as in most other places, they were outcast and unappreciated, and were hurried on as soon as possible. Between Charlton and its Four Lanes

was a triangular piece of ground, hedged in and known as the “Three Corner Medder,” or “Three Corner Loosen,” or something, and this the Gipsies sometimes hired from Leonard as a camp for themselves and horses. It was a perfect triangle, and the side lanes, both went to church and the post office, or rather to a stile and a path that ran across a sort of waste or common to the church or the post office, which latter seemed a pretty vine-covered, flower-fronted English village-drama cottage and nothing else. Across the open space ran a big, old avenue from nowhere to where a court, castle, keep, or stately home of England formerly stood.

The gipsy tents are very low, and rounded—exactly like the round tilts on spring carts and drays, that went out with my childhood, only brown. Exactly as staged in “Romany Rye.”

I well remember one day passing two lone caravans camped in one of the lanes, and two sullen, resentful-looking men grazing their horses, with ropes attached, along the roadside. And as we passed I saw the old crone hurrying up and down the steps of one of the caravans. When we returned, an hour or so later, she was poking round the fire like a witch in daylight—and the daylight didn't make any difference—she said—

“Come on, my pretty young gents, and see what you shall see,” beckoning me in particular, and she climbed the steps, shutting the lower half of the door.

“Come on, my pretty young gent,” she said, “and see the Gipsy child!”

I stood on the lower step and looked in. It was very neat and clean, with a bunk like a ship's bunk in front end of it, and in it lay a young woman with the clearest, freshest olive complexion I ever saw, with the red through it like a blush—it may have been a blush—and great brown eyes, half wild, half laughing, if I might put it so—turned to us, and from her side the crone lifted a fine brown baby, naked, as far as I could see in the flash, and she held it up over the door for a moment for my friend to see too. She spoke of broth or something, and I gave her a shilling, and later on sent down some broth, or, to be exact, not liking to ask any of the villagers to carry broth to a common gipsy, I carried it down myself, Australian fashion, and gave it to one of the sullen men, who rubbed off his hat in a surprised manner. Perhaps he thought it was beer. I didn't look back to see. Just round the corner of the hedge I came on Leonard talking to the other man with very little as the sayin' is about it.

“I was jest shiftin' of 'em on, as the sayin' is,” he said to me. “They're worse than no class, as the sayin' is, and I can't trust my turnips, as the sayin' is.”

“But, Mr. Leonard,” I said, “one of the young women's just had a child, and she surely could never stand the jolting on in that caravan. It would kill

her, man!”

“Don't you be afraid of that, as the sayin' is,” he said; “they're only animals, as the sayin' is—an'——” And so on.

But I persisted, and he said, “Ah, well, as the sayin' is, since you wish it, as the sayin' is, I'll give them another night, as the sayin' is.” And he stepped back to the man to tell him that as the gent, as the sayin' is, and, etc. And if they behaved themselves as the sayin' is, etc.

I passed the Three Corner Medder at nightfall next evening, curious to see if the gipsies were gone yet, and the old crone by the fire called to me.

“Come, my pretty young gent, and I'll tell you your fortune true.”

I thought it rather mercenary, but, having spent an hour or so at the *Farmers' Arms*, I went and sat on my heel in front of her, since she didn't rise. She took my wrist in her bony hand, which seemed startlingly white, like a skeleton one, but it may have been a play of moonlight or daylight through a hole in the hedge. Her hair was grey under the hood, a dirty grey, her face was hollow, but the lower half squarish, in thin lines, like her mouth. But her eyes! I hadn't noticed them so much in daylight—perhaps they had contracted like a cat's—but now they seemed the blackest and most piercing I had ever seen. Piercing, but like a shining black wall when you tried to look into them. And they were fastened on mine. I thought of cheap mesmerism or hypnotism, and all the old tricks and patter, as she repeated in a harsh, cracking voice—

My pretty young gent, you may laugh your last,
And laugh till your laugh is through,
But I'll tell you the tale of your dead, dead past,
And I'll tell you all too true.

“Oh, I've heard that before,” I said; “tell me something new, granny?”

“The old before the new,” she said; “the old before the new.” Then, after a pause that seemed no pause, and with a distant humming in my ears and a sudden feeling of helplessness and heaviness, came a voice, or voices—they didn't seem hers—as of a hundred imps singing round in a great mile wide circle—

Wrap me up in my stockwhip and blanket,
And bury me deep down below,
Where the dingoes and crows won't molest me,
In the land where the coolibars grow.

I had fingers and toe to the dust to start up, but she held me as a vice, and

I felt a great heaviness and a weight on my shoulders, as if Sampson's hands were there, and I went down again. Heaviness and weight vanished. But I had laughed my last, as far as she was concerned. I had had my laugh through, and was done with—had no further use for it for the time being. The last time I had heard those lines sung it was by a young woman, a girl of eighteen, in a fourth rate pub in Sydney, and she was recklessly drunk—and she had been a schoolmate of mine. It brought as much of the tale of the dead, dead past back to me as I wanted just then, and I let the old gipsy know that without speaking.

“Ah!” she said. “You have brown eyes, and your people may have been of our people once. But you fear the black eyes! You fear the black eyes!”

That was a fact anyway.

Then she, she was sitting on a black box of some kind, folded her skeleton hands on her lap, and turned a little to face the full moon that was just looking over the hedge, and which can look with more expression over an English hedge than over any sea, mountain, plain, bush or scrub in Australia.

Then, taking my hand again, and holding it on her bony knee, she began to sing—and in another voice, but low and sweet, as of an old woman who could sing once, before her voice went (tragically, and before a crowded audience, maybe), patting my hand with her bony one the time—as far as I can remember or reconstruct—

You have come, by bush and town,
From where blue-eyed men are brown,
Drought and rain and sun and shade—
Gipsies born and gipsies made,
Follow still the gipsy trade.
Children pray in Sunday school
For princes who shall never rule.
Folk do many foolish things
For the kings who are not kings;
Men and women bow and crawl
Where no tyrant reigns at all.
And the worst of all things be,
In the light of Liberty.

You have come in strife and pain,
You shall go but come again.
One that's sane shall drive you mad,
One that's mad shall drive you sane.
He whose wealth you helped to make,
Make you rich for your own sake.

You shall sink but rise again,
With the strength of ten times ten,
And shall be a king of men.
Those whose names you write and call
Make you famous over all.
One who's deaf shall make you hear,
One who's blind shall make you see.
Absent ones be ever near,
Nearer still in pain and fear;
One who never dreamed a dream
Shall reveal the mystery—
Raise your eyes and you shall see.
 [I saw hypnotic visions and illusions here.]
Yesternight in Land o' Scorn,
Was a gipsy baby born.

In the Country of the Blind
Was a sighted stranger kind.
Go you calm, or go you wild,
You have helped a gipsy child;
He shall grow with courage grim,
Strength of sight and strength of limb—
All you lack shall be in him.
Go you far or go you near.
Take no guards, and take no fear.
Where you walk, there he shall run,
In the snow or in the sun.
Shield your daughter and your son.
Lined your face and grey your hair,
Under home or strangest skies,
Sunk in seeming dark despair,
Death or madness everywhere,
Be your friends however fair,
Let your enemies beware
Of dark eyes and of dark hair.

And she hitched round and fixed her own on me, with a jerk, so to speak. I got up in a hurry while I could, and, as she still continued to regard me with that intent night-cat look of hers, I got out half a crown, awkwardly enough, and, as she never moved a finger, I laid it down on the edge of the ashes. She never looked at it, but at me, so I shuffled off, and round the corner I made good time to the *Farmers' Arms*.

But a strange thing was to happen. I worked all that night, and went out at daybreak with my pipe, and seemed to be swung round in my eccentric strolling past the Three Corners. I thought I'd see how the gipsy camp

looked asleep, but it was gone. It was, save for a circular patch of white ashes, as if it had never been. The grass was clean. Even the signs of horses had vanished. I walked over to the place where the fire had been, and there, on the very rim of the circle of white wood ash, lay my new half-crown. It flashed in my mind then that she had been in a kind of trance when I laid it down and had seen nothing. But when I picked it up I saw that it was marked. Marked deeply round the rim, as I have seen others marked, and with lines and tiny little partly sunk drill holes in many places. Whenever I look at it now I seem to see new marks and combinations. I have never found anybody who could, or would, read it for me.

Some day I may.

III. The Little Man with the Smile

BILLY was a child of, and not with a gloomy family, with dimples as a boy, very grey eyes, and a roguish smile, which changed as he grew to a good-humoured one, and finally to the fixed smile of acquiescence. A tolerant smile he wore, even when his fiendish little elder sister tore at him and struck him. There was nothing but gloom at home, gloom and quarrels, shot occasionally with lurid rows. It must have taken a lot to drive a lad of Billy's nature from home, but driven he was—after his father had been driven to drink, and drank himself away from sordidly, hopeless earthly things. Billy took refuge with an aunt in London, and when she died his smile had found him friends with an old Crimean warman's family—a plasterer, who had a friend or patron, who had friends, who had a friend who helped Billy to a passage to Australia. He and his box got separated at Fenchurch station, and came together unexpectedly at Gibraltar, and that was as far as Billy ever went in confidence, or took his chosen friends on his voyage to Australia. Something was supposed to have happened to him out there, for he returned within six months. Many came and come here who got frightened and “run” before they get their second wind. During the awful heat wave of '96 hundreds came no further than the harbour. In fact, all who could do it, went back by the same boat, or never left it, and went to other places. But Billy came further than that, I believe.

I would never dream of trying to make a “character” of Lizzie Higgins. Had she been a character, nothing in particular might have happened—certainly nothing in particular would have been known to have happened. “Nothing in particular.” That was her character, and facial expression, if she had one at all; that was the complexion of every case she was connected with—except the last. And that is nothing in particular now, either to her or the village. Except, perhaps, to poor old Higgins with his

bend.

Lizzie was “above medium height,” which is commonplace in itself; had the characterless English apple bloom, which dulls and reddens and withers and cracks, but never dies out, and the ingratiating smile, not for men, but for any woman, a rung above her in life—a little classier.

When anything was to be “got up” in a hurry for Charlton it was slipped through the gate after dusk, per servant, to Mrs. Higgins' cottage, with impressive low-voiced instructions—like a mystic rite connected with a better class birth or funeral. Mrs. Higgins' front room—the suite had gone—I'll tell about that later on—was an atmosphere of warmth on cold nights, or rather a punctuation in an atmosphere of fog, sleet, mist, rain or hail. A full stop, as it were, with a ring or halo round it, as some writers put round a period to make it plain for the printer. An atmosphere of warmth and clean fat arms, and the unreproducible smell of clean linen, honestly washed, and clear starching and hot ironing that comes to or from no laundry with its cheating, its flagrantly, brazen dishonesty, and its dirt-hiding, shirt and collar ruining gloss composition. There was the smell of a drop of gin hot there sometimes, they said, but I never noticed it. It couldn't have done otherwise than do Mrs. Higgins and the clothes good. She had all the atmosphere of a model widow washer-woman, though Higgins was a hard-working, steady live man. He never changed. He was never seen in the ironing room. He always came in and went out in a disconnected or detached way through “the back door at the side,” whether there were clients' servants or not in the ironing room. His bend came in there too in the other sense, for the door was low, though wide, but it came in at a rather more acute angle, just for all the world (he having his arms behind him) as if he were carrying in a sheet of bark with him on his back (to make an extra bunk with).

Mothers stick to daughters in those villages, and help them in “their trouble,” and keep it from the old man till the last moment. Longer if they can. Send her to Aunt Martha, or some one at a distance, for a holiday, or on some pretext. It would hinder the old man's work to know. He must “take his meat, and have his sleep”—or they all might starve— and that wouldn't mend matters. And—well. “She ain't the first and she won't be the last.” And sometimes, if the old man proves unreasonably obstinate and for an unreasonable length of time they add again, more decidedly, and somewhat impatiently, “She ain't the first and she won't be the last,” and, maybe, “And, well, if it comes to that, *he* ought to know, or ought to remember, when *he* was young, or when he was courtin', is meant, I suppose. They say that old Higgins was as straight as any of 'em in his time, though I cannot believe it to look at him now. And that there was a

Lizzie at *his* wedding. And she was Mrs. Higgins.”

Lizzie went early to service, in Shepperton, and was trained under a trained servant or maid. They call them all maids. Book-keeping is included in the training, and that, with the mistress, tends to make them what they are. Their very tears seem stony, whether of vexation, sorrow, or love. And Lizzie was less sentimental than the average village girl of her class, to begin with. You've seen the girl who would sit bolt upright, hands down, while the tears of chagrin or disappointment start from eyes set in a face of stone? They are as hopeless as the dark-skinned “white” men, whose faces go grey in anger.

Lizzie kept company with a young man in Shepperton, who was “on the line, on a trine” (as Barry Pain puts it)—or “on the railway,” as we'd say, and there was some talk. 'Twas said also that Lizzie's mother helped her. But Lizzie didn't mind “talk.” She rather liked it. She went to London afterwards, with the same family. Mistress died, and master went to London with Lizzie to look after the children—or mistress died there, and Lizzie was kept or stayed on. . . . There's such a thing (unwritten yet) as “masters'” rights in England. Certainly in the case of young housekeepers to middle-aged widowers—or husbands whose wives are not wives. “It's only natural,” and no one need be any the wiser if master acts all right, in event of “trouble.” . . . But anyway, the young railwayman went to London, by the “trine” I presume, one holiday to see Lizzie, and he never went again. Perhaps he got a practical, common sensible dismissal. Or may be he heard “talk.” Lizzie never “talked” herself—whether of past mistresses (or masters) to present ones, or about present ones, outside. This seems a good point in the training. Pity mistresses weren't trained in return.

Lizzie's situation was in a flat in Clovelly Mansions in Grey's Inn Road, where no one knoweth the people next door across the landing (say, seven or eight stories up), and masters and mistresses needn't be married unless they like. Here she made the acquaintance of a young man—a mere boy—in a milk-walk, who served many flats—and had a few of them in his walk of life. His brother had an interest in the firm he worked for, so he was above the ordinary run of milk-walkers—he was some class. And Lizzie kept company, or walked out with him, though I don't know how she did it, unless he never slept, or took her on the milk-walk before daylight. He got the sack for lateness and missing clients. He lingered too long at the servant's entrance of Lizzie's flat, planning for the future—a room and a bit for furniture. They have no time to talk of love and such nonsense.

But before that Lizzie took him, one holiday, to Chawilton to see her folks. Which was right, and good, and natural, and is a pleasing feature of young English pre-marital life. But Lizzie's mistress was young and

something human, and had a sense of humour, unusual for young mistresses in flats, where they needn't be married to their husbands unless they like. And Lizzie confided to her, in all seriousness, but in her nothing-in-particular tone, that she was taking Mr. Jenkins (that was young Jenkins, the milk-walker) home, in order to see whether it would "make some talk in Shepperton," where Lizzie had some friends amongst maids and others. Now, as Shepperton was a better-class village, this would seem to give some idea of Lizzie's intelligence and the height of her social ambition, but it doesn't, unless you know that, even in upper-class villages, mistresses drive round and make calls solely to talk about their servants, old or new. I knew one lady, who ordered her carriage and drove a distance to tell her friend that she believed her maid was, etc., etc., etc., etc.

But Lizzie and her young man from London certainly did make some talk in Chawilton, where a little talk goes a long way—with additions and repetitions, reiteration, correction, and denial—and lasts a long time. For a generation sometimes.

But Mr. Jenkins got the vulgar Australian sack, and Lizzie gave him her savings to buy cans, get cards printed, and start in business on his own, independent of his brother, whom she disliked, and to rent a room—or a couple—which shows the practical constancy of many English maids and servants. God help some of them! 'Twas even said she left her situation in the flat and lived in the rooms—or one of them—to assist him with her business ability. I know enough of the character of British servant-galism to believe that she might have done so, and yet have married him in the end, a "bride" in every way.

Anyway, it would have been nothing in particular, and Chawilton would have been none the wiser, save for a rumour. Lizzie mightn't have minded much if it had. It would have given it something to talk about.

But "Jenkins & Co., Milk Vendors, Pure Country Milk," speaking by the card, went as vulgarly bung as any bank, but without hurting any one in particular, and with no hope of reconstruction, and young Jenkins returned to the home of his brother, or rather his sister-in-law, and Lizzie went home to Chawilton for a rest (which made a little talk), and the two speculators never met again in this world, that I know of. Which was nothing in particular in English maid-serving and milk-walking circles. They say that Lizzie made up for awhile, first, to an old married, exservant she knew, whose son was a clerk and "some class," but we don't want him.

Little Billy and his smile were liked in the village, and popular with the children. He had left home early in life, and had been in various places in and around London. In the north and east, I fancied sometimes, and had worked at many things, and no doubt had often been trusted as caretaker or

odd hand because of his smile alone. He worked at the brickyards now, and lived with his married brother Tom, over at Little-Sumpthin-on-the-Mud— (a little up the river from Chawilton, on this side). He was the only young man left who was after Lizzie's time at Chawilton, and was therefore new to her, as she pervaded him at the village, and walked home with him from Shepperton one night. His smile was acquiescent. Perhaps she only wanted to see if it would make some talk. It did, and female necks craned over the little quickset front hedge (common to the whole village) to wait for them at dusk—and after it.

Then it appeared to Lizzie that Billy, who was a first-class brick hand, had put together a few pounds, and was thinking of a decent furnished little place of his own, and some 'un to take care of it. He wasn't comfortable with his sister-in-law at Little-Sumpthin-on-the-Mud. He wasn't “warm” there, she had too many “dry words” for Tom and the children, and some on 'em was meant for him. So Lizzie began to pervade him in a practical manner, and it made a good deal of talk.

It made more at Little Sumpthin, which was about half the size of Chawilton, for Tom was obstinately opposed to Elizabeth Higgins. And in this his wife agreed with him—she agreed with him in nothing else—not even the weather. But Billy set it all down to her.

The announcement of the engagement made casually, in a nothing-in-particular tone, by Lizzie, made but little talk in the village, either amongst the women—who knew very well what it was worth (the extra nothing-in-particularness in the tone might have warned any one with intelligence, who understood Lizzie), or amongst the men, who bucoliced good-humoredly about it. But the announcement of the date of the wedding (made in a cheerful nothing-in-particular tone by Lizzie) did make a lot of talk. However, the village agreed that “they had time to think better on it,” as old Adams and his young cracked and twisted wooden-judy-doll-wife—the most recent couple there—three years married—put it. But “why”? the village didn't say. Probably because they didn't know.

You see there was nothing else to talk or speculate about at Chawilton at the time. Mrs. Adams hadn't had her proposed twins yet. Young Bob Wheeler hadn't even come to board with the Adamses at that time.

Little Billy rented one of the half-hutches, the one next the Bow Winders, and got the furniture from Staines, partly for cash and partly on time payment, to give himself plenty of time, and provide for unforeseen expenses. He would have taken one of the Winders, which was also vacant, and risked it, but popular opinion overbore him. Besides, Leonard was cautious and far-seeing for both their sakes. Lizzie had aimed at the Winder, but took its loss as nothing in particular.

Now the Higginses had a little old-fashioned suite (I'd describe it if I had time, though it wasn't called a "suite," but a "set of cheers an' sofy," or something, when they got it) that had been sewn up in covers and stowed away in the spare room—to make room for the ironing—and regularly unsewn, dusted, and cleaned every spring for ten years or more, and sewn up and stowed again, and was little the worse for its twenty years or so of want of air and human society. It was bought before Lizzie was born. Now Lizzie had told Billy not to buy a suite just yet, so one night, while Billy was away, and with the connivance of one or two neighbour cronies, the new old furniture was carried down, and set out in the freshly-cleaned front parlour of Billy's cottage, where it was discovered by Billy early in the morning, greatly to his surprise, and to his eternal gratitude thereafter, in spite of what came later. But to Lizzie it was nothing in particular, for she had known it all along.

"They be just like startin' as Higgins an' me started, an' meant to keep on," old Mrs. Higgins was heard to say, with a momentary evanishment of the twinkle, I should think. I wonder if she and the old man talked it over that night, and by a dying fire, and by their lonely old selves. I wonder. Yes, I wonder. As they started, and meant to keep on.

They went across the fields to the little grey old composite church—whose repairs looked older than itself, with their filled-in and mended and shored-up cracks—and got married. Or, Lizzie married Billy. "In the spring-time, Joe the ostler and sweet Annie Smith were wed." Old Higgins went round apart and by a way of his own. It was a way of his own, and they knew him, "let 'un bide." They do so in England. I wish they'd do so more in Australia. His figure was seen at times over the hedges, or gaps in them, in his Sunday best, which made small difference in his appearance, and none in his gait or manner; and he steered his bend through the narrow hedges and round unexpected corners like a man with the nose-ring of fate in his nose and his hands tied behind. And so another triangle of life was set up.

And his wife and friends. Well, see the average English melodrama with a village wedding and breakfast—say "Hoodman Blind." It ain't so very far out. And we all rehearse, whether before a wedding or a funeral, though not one speak a word nor make a sign to each other at the rehearsal. And most of us know it.

They gave a breakfast at the beerhouse (I'm beginning to feel brutal), mostly as a tribute to little Billy's goodness and his smile. His brother Tom was not there, and they never spoke again till the end of his world came to Billy.

Leonard dropped in, which was affable of Mr. Leonard, and spoke a few

words, which nearly all consisted of “as the sayin' is”—his habitual expression in times of peace, sociality, or festivity.

“He had great pleasure, as the sayin' is, in gettin' up, as the sayin' is, to say a few words, as the sayin' is. I have known the Higginses, as the sayin' is, since ever they was Higginses, as the sayin' is. And I've known Lizzie Higgins, as the sayin' is, since the first day she was an Iggins, as the sayin' is.” (Great applause at this unexpected “point,” most unexpected by Leonard himself.) “I've—I've nursed her on me knee, as the sayin' is. An' as for Billy there, as the sayin' is—as the sayin' is—*has* the sayin' is. Here, Snike, as the sayin' is, help the missus an' the girl to clear out all them pewters to the bar, as the sayin' is, an' tell Coxgrave (the landlord) to fill 'em all up, as the sayin' is—and—and— All the pewters in the house, as the sayin' is. I'm winded.” He must have stage-fright himself to “shout” like that.

I don't know how the couple put in the time after breakfast, but suppose Lizzie took Billy for a practical stroll, and the others went to work, as the sayin' is.

Lizzie was a model housekeeper.

There came to Chawlton an old chum of Billy's. He couldn't have been a very old chum, but Billy said he was. Anyway, a chap as Billy knowed in London turned up, hard up, but that was between him and Billy.

Bob Cleaves was tall, slight, and quiet, with a good face, brown eyes, and no smile. He is the Man Without a Smile of the story. There's a legend or superstition in the nations that all brown eyes are, or once were, true and kind. Perhaps they were, before they were taught, in love, war, ambition, and commerce, by the hazel, grey, green, and all the evil shades of blue. Bob Cleaves was put up in the spare room for the night after Billy had exhausted the evening and a couple of neighbour cronies telling them all how he and Bob at first met in London, and the times, up and down, and the larks they had had together. One of the cronies listened in silence for an hour or so, and then clinched it—the silence—by saying, “Oh, well, what about havin' a half-pint afore bed?” Bob had been a school child with some of them, but none remembered him favourably, if at all. At the beerhouse Bob was introduced all round; and Billy had a quiet talk with him on the way back, and under the hedge, during which Bob kept saying, “Don't you bother, Billy,” “I can put up anywheres,” “You always were bothering about me,” “I tell you I'll be alright,” etc., etc.

That night there was a whispered consultation between Billy and Lizzie in bed. “A lot o' whisperin' goin' on,” as guests say under similar and other circumstances. “A hell of a lot er whisperin' goin' on,” as our Bill or Jim might say. And next morning Billy had another quiet talk with Bob, and

Bob stayed on till Billy got him a job at the brickfields. And Bob stayed on as a boarder. It was a practical proposal, and Lizzie agreed to it; it was as easy to do for two as one, she said. Perhaps it occurred to her vaguely that the thing might make a little talk. It did. Paying boarders didn't come to the hutches every season. The women were indifferent to Bob, but viciously envious—keen on the subject. The men were not interested. And the men were always very conservative with regard to things which were likely to make talk in the village. They got too much of it at meal times and in bed. It was talk that drove one of them to drink and the dogs after twenty years of sober married life. He was the hopeless village sot. But they were a steady class, and not easily driven, as a rule—except in the case of two husbands who were last heard of in Tasmania and New Zealand. The survivors were adverse to others being driven abroad, because, although it eased the labour market, it made more talk. They preferred extra hardship to extra talk.

Bob didn't talk at all, but was none the more popular for that; you see he “wasn't a woman”—jest a labourer like themselves, and “no better than none of 'em.” Bob had been “parculiar” from the little that they remembered of him at school. He was supposed to “have notions.” He was supposed to be a come-by-chance, “found under a gooseberry bush”—his father unknown, and his “mother” or “aunt” doubtful in both cases. He was supposed to be the son of—some one. He was supposed to be related to— —. He was supposed to be somebody-of-importance's brother, nephew, or something. But, as far as I could hear, he was never supposed to be a shy, sensitive, self- and village-tortured child, of higher inherited intelligence than the rest.

Anyway, he was sent or taken to London by his mother, or whatever she was, and forgotten.

Poor little Billy was bursting with secrets, several big, astounding ones, which comforted and held him up, no doubt, at periods when Bob seemed slighted or extra unpopular. Big secrets about Bob takin' him into a London newspaper buildin', and showing him round the basement. Astounding secret about Bob slipping him in behind the scenes of a theayter one morning. Bob had been probably lumper or messenger, or one of a legion of imps and devils, in one place, and super, or possibly call boy, in another. The secret that Bob had been married was a secret that Billy didn't want, and had no use for. All he knew was that the marriage had been a mess, a bad job all round, and that was sufficient for Billy. Bob had his big, honest sympathy, and it would have been the same had the wife been an angel and Bob a fiend in married life, and Billy had known it. Billy didn't know anything about married life, and never offered an opinion concerning it

either one way or the other.

He was bound to keep the other's secrets, because, once out, they would have led to many questions and speculations, and may have made one or two friendships. And Bob didn't want either talk or appreciation. Billy's was too much, but Bob bore with him, when he couldn't get away from it. Billy was "too good to be hurt or put down."

His leisure life seemed almost a clause of appreciation and attendance round Bob Cleaves, and the others forebore unkind or sarcastic comments for Billy's sake. Besides, they went in fear of Bob's grammar and pronunciation.

Lizzie admitted to Billy, in a nothing-of-consequence tone, that she didn't like Bob at first—couldn't stand him, in fact. But she didn't mind him now. When Billy, puzzled, asked why, she said, "Oh, nothing in particular." Bob had done nothing to her. Billy confided to Bob, seizing a favourable moment, "It's alright, Bob, she's beginning t' like yer now."

The talk went on amongst the women, lowering and resentful, also impatient, because "nothing seemed to come of it."

There was a woman, in as near the centre of the row of brick dog kennels as possible, who had a hunchbacked daughter, which daughter seemed physically and mentally more a birth of her mother's warped, twisted and evil mind than of her body, which was straight and healthy enough. But she had given her her face. These two were the guardians of the village morality, or immorality, when there was a sign of it, and they kept watch and ward by turns day and night. It was seldom, after dark, but one or the other evil neck was craned over the front hedge, with the pinched and twisted face turning this way and that, to the discomfiture of chance passersby strolling along pipe in mouth in the dusk, and unaware of the existence of such sinister creatures hereabouts.

A newly-made widow in the other half of their hutch, whose sweet went out of her life with her husband, started a lolly and tobacco shop in the front parlour. And the evil ones never rested nor let their man rest until they started their evil window in opposition. But they couldn't get a boarder like Lizzie. "Just fancy the likes o' her 'avin' a boarder—an' Billy not seein' what that was for."

The husband and father was an elderly labouring man, solid and heavy, such as often drive tip-drays, in moleskins, Crimean shirt, with belts and "bowyang," out here on waterworks, with pipe and handkerchief stuck in belt behind, like a small pistol, to shoot out a boil in his mouth, and a rag to wipe his mouth afterwards. (Any labouring face will do him, so long as the mouth is a nasty one.)

A month or so went by, or some say weeks, and then one beautiful

moonlight evening Brennan, the silent man, with *Reynolds' Newspaper*, after listening to Billy and Bob for some minutes, steadied his pipe with his hand and said—

“Look here, Billy, if I was you I wouldn't have Bob stayin' with yer.”

“W-why?” gasped Billy, taken too suddenly to gain time by asking, “What's that?”

“Never mind, Billy, it ain't right. I know more'n you do. Take my advice.”

“But, man alive, what 'arm 'as Bob——”

“It ain't the 'arm as is done, but the 'arm made on it, and,” he added, half mumbling his pipe, “the 'arm as might come of it.”

“What?” said Billy, promptly and sharply for him, but perhaps unconsciously so.

“Now, look here, Billy. I know more of the world 'n you do. You've been knocking around London for years, and been abroad, if the truth is known”—(Billy blushed and started) “an' me ain't more'n once or twist a week for an hour or so in ther fruit 'n crop season. But I know more'n you do about men an' women. If you took an' knocked about the world for a lifetime, an' me rooted here, I'd know more about the world an' you do, Billy. Take my advice, an' talk to Bob quietly, an' tell him there's talk. There's other places where he'll do—where he'd be comfortable, I mean.” And Brennan jerked impatiently and stood up at the same time. Billy began—

“Why, who the——has been—a——?”

“It's no use, Billy,” said the silent man, with the clamp still on. “It's for your own good—an' some one else's. Now I've said it all.”

“Do you mean——?”

“I don't mean—to say—one—more—word, Billy, You know me, Billy. I'm your friend in this.”

Billy left, rubbing his head, bothered and worried on Bob's account, without yet understanding, and he concluded by wondering what on earth had come over Arthur Brennan. But Brennan was always a rum card.

But, strange to relate, that very week, and within such short times of each other that it fairly twirled poor little Billy's head, three of the other men gave or hinted or blurted out the same advice, according to their different “ways.”

And on top of it all, and, of all men, Leonard, standing as described at his side-back-front gate (there was another leading out towards Halliford), called the passing Billy back, and, after an unwonted pause, said, with a preface, almost the same things, in the same words, and in the same manner—save for the watch-dog smile and the “sayin' is”—and with the

same pipe play, as had Brennan.

“Look here, Billy, as the sayin' is, I don't want to interfere with the village, as the sayin' is—nor anybody's private affairs, as the sayin' is—but I know more about the world 'n you do, Billy, as the sayin' is, though you have knocked about London, as the sayin' is, an' been abroad, as the sayin' is—as the sayin' is. But I'd advise you to get rid of that there Bob, as the sayin' is. No!—now I've got nothing against him, as the sayin' is, but there's talk, as the sayin' is, and I don't like smash-ups in the village, as the sayin' is. It—it will interfere with the rents, as the sayin' is, and leads to intruptions with farm work at an awkward time, as the sayin' is. And I can't build and keep up village for nothing, as the sayin' is. Besides, you're a good tenant, and so is the Higgins, as the sayin' is. Take my advice, as the sayin' is, an' let Bob go and get married, an' settle down like the rest of 'em, as the sayin' is. There'll be boys wanted for the farm yet, as the sayin' is, and girls too. A—a kick's as good as a wink to a blind horse, as the sayin' is.”

Even then poor little Billy felt a “catch” of triumph for his friend in the knowledge that Bob had been married, and drew a breath of relief before he knew it, “as the sayin' is.”

Then, when little Billy pulled himself together, he set to work at once to get to the root of the matter; and did, after several whispered and determined interviews, that very night.

“So it's that——old bitch an' her henchbeck daughter. I might a-knownn it wi'out askin'. God forgive Billy! but I've heerd Bob hissself say, ‘Never trust a dwarf, or a hunchback, or a cripple.’” Then he went in to Lizzie.

He started to broach the subject delicately, and found great difficulty, but presently he got at it, without knowing it. He was somewhat surprised to find that she had known about the talk all along, but had considered it less than nothing in particular, and didn't want to be bothered listening about it. But Billy forgot his surprise in his anger on Bob's account, and he warmed up to the thing.

“God forgive Billy! but I'll show'm I ain't agoin' to have that——old woman an' her henchback daughter acomin' atween Bob an' you an' me. Bob was my chum arter I broke wi' Tom an' all on 'em first time. We was chums and pals in London. Bob came arter I broke wi' Tom last time—or—at—least arter that——sister-in-law o' mine broke it for us.” Then with more loss of control. “We was warm, we was—me an' Tom. We never had a dry word afore that——sister-in-law o' mine came atween us. She'd a come atween meanyou. She tried hard. She set Tom agin you, Lizzie. An' she visits that——old slut with the henchbeck daughter. God forgive Billy! An' now they'd set me agin Bob. An' meanBob never had a

dry word yet. God forgive Billy! But I'll show'm." Then with a change of the weather and a return to calmness. "Don't you take no notice, Lizzie, me girl. It was all because you walked home from Shepperton wi' Bob that night. Now, I'll show'm. (Impressively.) You walk home from Shepperton with Bob as often as he's goin' that way, when I'm not at home to walk to Shepperton wi' yer. You take a walk out with Bob if yer want a walk an' he's willin', an' I'm at ther bricks an' not able to take a stroll with yer. Jest to show'm, Lizzie. Bob's talk won't do yer no 'arm, Lizzie. There's gipsies and tramps, an'—I was obliged to Bob that night, Lizzie, I was. Jest to show'm. I've never been mixed with no talk in my life before like this, an' I won't. But we'll show'm, Lizzie, an' look here, Lizzie, me lass, you can let 'em know I told yer, if yer like, just to let 'em know what I think on it."

Lizzie said she wouldn't be bothered. "But we must be bothered about things like this, Lizzie. But don't you forgit. We'll show'm. Don't you worry. You jest do as I tell yer."

Lizzie said she wouldn't worry.

"God forgive Billy," he said, rendered desperate by her utter indifference towards the man he really worshipped, "God forgive Billy! but Bob—Bob saved my life with the feaver in—in Australia, as I never talk about—an' pulled me through, an'—an' help me home—an'—an' God forgive Billy! Bob's married, an' had trouble, an'—an'—Lizzie—has got a kid—a little girl—with some people in Australia, as he's slavin' for, an'—breakin' his heart for. Who'd think any harm o' Bob. But we'll show'm, Lizzie."

It was a mistake. There were no signs of a little baby with a smile yet.

"Well, why did he come away for?" asked Lizzie.

"She left him," said Billy.

"Well, wasn't he rid of her?"

"No," said Billy, "she took him to court for desertin' her, and made him pay to keep 'er, an' when 'e couldn't pay she put him in gaol. An' if he goes back without all the money he didn't send 'er, she'll put 'im in gaol again."

"But how could she do that if she ran away from him?" asked Lizzie. "Y' talkin' nonsense."

"God forgive Billy! It's the way the law is out there," said Billy. "Now, don't you understand?"

But Lizzie said she didn't understand it at all.

"His talk won't do you no harm," said little Billy with resentful pride in his friend. The tall man without the smile, who didn't talk, could speak earnestly on occasion. Maybe he had once been earnest. He could speak sincerely and sympathetically and kindly of the troubles of others—no doubt he had been sincere, sympathetic and practically kind. Such a man could talk love and seem true, even to a self-loving and vanity-blinded

woman. Perhaps he had once been true. He could speak quietly, strongly and very decisively in a misunderstanding, no matter on whose side, and be very impressive. Maybe he had once been a dangerous man in anger. He could make it appear, without saying so, that he had been through more trouble than most men, and in this he was a great relief to the man or woman who cannot be content to be met halfway by the trouble of others, so to speak, but charge, and dodge, and try every way which a rapid tongue can do to break through, outflank and take in the rear the others' defences—and for what good? But anyway, he was a dangerous man with any woman (perhaps unconsciously or half consciously dangerous), the more so because he was incapable, no matter how hard he tried, of constancy. But he may once, and for years, have been domesticated, affectionate, a kind husband and father, and a gentleman in every sense of the word. He may once have believed in himself. Mrs. Coxgrave, the woman with the red hair rheumatic husband, and no child, was on several occasions interrupted, and once by the maternal snake, too, talking earnestly to him in the bar when her husband was laid up above stairs. And it made no talk—“They was only talkin' about rheumatism.” I wonder now if——

The evil neck and faces craned over the little quick-set hedges, looking both ways in vain, till one bright afternoon Bob, who avoided the house during Billy's absence, came out of the *Farmers' Arms* from a silent half-pint, just as Lizzie was passing on her way to Shepperton for a piece of silk for a belt that a new blouse was “waitin' on,” and Bob being going there too, as Defoe would put it, for a pair of working boots, and being already turned in that direction, and the eyes of both hags being on them, there was nothing for it but to walk to Shepperton together. Then one evil neck and head was seen over hedges and through gaps going in the direction of Sumpthin-on-Mud, like a swimming snake's head showing out of green water at times, and the other was left on watch. Later on, at dusk, both necks and heads were over the fence, turning, turtle-like, and seeming also curiously turtle-like, as if the creatures were in torture.

But it was Billy who returned with Her Nothing-in-particularness, having joined her where the Four Lanes met, on his happy strolling way home from the bricks. And his smile came too.

The necks and heads retired to their back hole to confer. She (Lizzie) was carryin' it off well—they'd say that much for her. Or it had all come out, and Bob was gone, and they was hidin' it. Or Billy was actin', though no one would have dreamed it of Billy, of all men in the world. “But,” said the elder and more experienced snake, “you could never tell them sort of men. There was that there little Wells when his missus was carrying on with,

etc., etc. Anyway, if Billy warn't actin' it was a cryin' shame; some of the chaps ought to——She'd do it herself in a minit if they thought Billy'd bleave a word agenst——But there, there was no thanks or credit in being mixed up with sich dirty affairs.”

So a couple of months went by, or say some weeks, and Billy coming home very tired one evening found no tea ready, for the first time; but Lizzie came in shortly afterwards, having walked home with Bob, who dropped into the *Farmers' Arms*—which were never stretched out for him, by the way—for his silent half-pint. There seemed something savagely defiant in his manner that evening.

A week or so later the same thing occurred again, and it occurred to Billy that Lizzie was “carrying the thing on.”

Then one evening Billy went to the kilns to watch the fires all night, and a lump of shale fell on his foot, hurting it badly, and he came limping home with a mate an hour or so later. The house was in darkness, and Lizzie was not upstairs with one of her occasional nothing-in-particular headaches. The men and women conferred, and he was told that she had gone to Shepperton.

“Well, where's Bob, then?” said Billy.

After hesitating, shuffling, a little bluffing, and a hustling of Billy into bed by the women, it was admitted that Bob had gone too.

But the news of Billy's accident went clod-hopping to Shepperton shortly afterwards, with the farm hand that went for the doctor, and got to Lizzie's ears, and she came hurrying home. And Billy, being in pain, they had dry words after the doctor had gone, and, as poor Mrs. Higgins put it afterwards, they “said things to each other as they couldn't forget,” which, summed up, with the sad warning added thereto, will go further, I hope, than poor Mrs. Higgins ever dreamed of it going.

But to Billy the worst result of the dry words was that Bob overheard—or was told—probably by one of the necks and heads over the fence, the only seeming signs of human being in sight when he came home, rather hurriedly, and of whom he inquired the particulars of Billy's accident. Bob went to Halliford that night, and arranged to board and lodge with a silent old couple of whom he'd heard—or, rather, not heard, so to speak. Billy did his best when he recovered, but Bob was never the same to him, and Billy's sorrow for it was deep and sincere.

“They was warm, they was. They never had a dry word until d——d cacklin', kack-kak-kakin' ole hags came atween 'em.”

And they'd come atween him and Lizzie too, it seemed. She was more careful of the home and Billy than ever—in that damnedly pointed way that open-hearted little Billy couldn't understand. And his heart began to

break with sorrow and anxiety. He was no match for her. Her manner led from “Now, Lizzie, me lass” to dry words; so in the end she wouldn't even tell him that there wasn't nothing in particular the matter with her, and it frightened him as much as when she had told him so, and obstinately refused to enter into details, saying she couldn't be bothered.

Then things began to be hinted to him about Bob's character, and at last plainly, things that he “oughter been told,” about Bob and Coxgrave's wife having been seen together in an out-of-the-way place and an out-of-the-way time. And his heart began to change towards Bob. But, God forgive Billy! never a doubt of Lizzie.

Lizzie had never been able to get on with her mother, so there was no hope for poor Billy in that quarter. They'd have to fight it out between themselves, as she and Higgins had to do, arter they'd started and meant to go on in the same way.

Then the drifting hopelessly apart, as it seems to the husband, of a couple that had ever been hopelessly apart. The sickening suspicion (how long and cruelly it takes to become a settled, serviceable, useful, fruit-bearing certainty) that his wife doesn't love him any longer, the wife who never loved him at all; that she doesn't want him, she who never did, and only married him on impulse, or for vanity, or caprice, or to be her own mistress in a home of her own, or because of rows at home, or because somebody else wanted him or her, or didn't want her, or through disappointment, chagrin, or spite. What fools men are! Or because, only, of his looks, money, position, name, or fame. The soul-sickening suspicion and fright of the good, kind, generous, or “soft” husband, that his wife wants to get rid of him—the wife who had an eye to that contingency from the first, and had started wanting to get rid of him early. The blindness, the pitiful, unmanly pleading of the husband whose wife is not, and never was, fit to blacken his boots, who never had a sincerely kind thought or considerate moment for him. When the only cure is separation to a distance, a year or two to recover, and a stern and life-long adherence to the creed or philosophy of unforgiveness.

Then the paltry, useless, wasting quarrels. “I didn't want to marry you” . . . “Better men than you,” and so on, and wearily so on, to the exasperating, maddening and sickening and ruining unending of it all.

Billy was a little man who used to run out of the house, and through a gap in the back hedge, and round through brooks, over stiles and gates, across lanes, and so in a circle home, when very much upset. Lizzie's persistent silence used to make him do this. Some men have wives who nag eternally; others will wait on them for days in obstinate, idiotic silence.

Lizzie considered in a practical, nothing-in-particular way that she might

have to see a doctor about Billy's head if he went on like that, and that the doctor might have to put him in the mad-house if he got too bad. They call a spade a spade amongst Lizzie's class in England.

Some wives “never quarrel,” but can drive any husband mad, all the same; so one day Billy suddenly felt his arm stiffen and hand clench! . . . He wrenched himself out of the kitchen in time, and from the verge of “It,” and half ran all the way to Shepperton, having stumbled into the *Farmers' Arms* to borrow a cap, which the *Farmers' Arms* hastened to lend him without question, and with a rough show of understanding. But neither the *Farmers' Arms* nor Billy understood yet, though the *Arms* thought it did. Billy was soon to understand. He caught the train for London with a wild idea of going to some people he'd been “warm” with—but never so warm as he'd been with Bob.

Then the reaction came, and Billy began to think, wildly at first, but he began to think, and the elastic reins of Fate to draw him back, and the more he thought, the stronger they drew, and the more the home he was warm in seemed to ward him off and repel him. He had never yet carried his troubles outside his own home—his father's, brother's, or his own—and his head and limbs gave an impatient jerk of shame at the sharp, sudden thought of having contemplated doing so now.

Then “Lizzie.” Then “poor Lizzie!” Then the swift review of his married life, which had been happy compared with past homes and life. Then the horror of “It” (the stiffened arm and clenched fist) struck him with full force in all its sickening, stomach chilling hideousness. The horror that It might happen; but he would see to that.

He got out of the train at Waterloo, but would not go back the same way. He hurried across to the Staines line platform, and caught a train there. That would give him time to think, and calm down. Glimpse of slanting lights on sinister dark water somewhere. He had been a lunatic, a brute, etc. He could see it all now. Lizzie was the best little wife in the world. All her good points were remembered, or imagined, and his bad qualities loomed and ran before him on the same line. . . . Then the thought that perhaps he'd lost her affections for good and all. But—God forgive Billy!—he'd win her back. . . . Then the thought—the black, tormenting, devilish one. . . . The thought of the Thing sent him sick to the stomach.

And it was only natural—“A woman must have summon.” He took hurried, insane comfort in finding all excuses for Something he feared might happen. Perhaps he had been driving her to summon else's arms all the time in his cursed blindness and obstinacy. If he only had Bob to talk to! But then he had driven Bob away from him too. . . . It was only natural; a woman would go to summon sooner or later. But he——He got up and

leaned out of the window, and looked ahead with wild nervousness. Then he sat down determinedly, and glanced round quietly, ashamed of his foolishness. The carriage was full, but it was not that; Billy was alone. You can be more alone in an English railway carriage than in any other place in the world. He filled his pipe and lit it as stolidly as the rest, but it was not "acting." Then It all came over again. And the wheels: "Too late—too—late—too late—God forgive Billy! God forgive Billy! God forgive Billy!" Bricks and bricks, and lights and streets, and "circuses" swinging. Suburbs and bridges and houses and gardens, and "grounds" and a village, and the London road, and avenues, hedges and fields and lights and river. He took his hand from his pipe, clamping it decisively.

Flashes of reason and comfort—"Too late—too late—too late—God forgive Billy—God forgive Billy, God forgive Billy."

* * * * *

The long walk from Staines in the moonlight seemed as nothing, though he walked for all in the world. It was a dream till he neared Sunbury, where he started and went cold and sick again with a new unexpected sensation or apprehension. He was in that state when a man sees his wife everywhere, in the impossible places and times, with the impossible other man, and whose first instinct is to hide and get away, and next, when it is too late, to follow. I wonder how many mistakes have been made through these states of minds. Just as he reached "Chawilton" the strain snapped, leaving him oh so gratefully tired! It was all over now. He'd go in and go to bed like a sensible man, and——.

The house was shut up and dark, and Lizzie not upstairs, but the signs of having changed her dress hurriedly were in the room. Its very cleanliness rebuked him. This was the first time he'd run out so long, and she'd got anxious and gone to Shepperton to look for him, of course. Her mother's home was shut up, so she wasn't there. But Lizzie was not the one to go to her mother with her troubles, and Billy felt a pang of shame that he had with his. She'd hear in Shepperton that he'd gone in the London train, of course, and was waiting there for him, at a friend's place no doubt. He walked sanely on towards Shepperton. Just before he reached the Four Lanes he saw some one ahead, coming towards him, and in a sudden wave of shame he slipped into the ditch—he had often done that as a lad, but when in mischief. The couple came close, and a feeling of curiosity and mischief came to Billy. It was a happy relief. He drew himself up and laid against the grassy bank of the six-foot ditch. The blurred couple came nearer. "Danged if it ain't that skangtimonious painter's daughter with her fiddle lesson," thought Billy. "I'd 'a took her for Lizzie in a minute. An'

who's him? An' who'd 'a thought it? I wonder what the henchbeck and her daughter's bin doin' with their time?"

They came closer, hip to hip, the girl walking haltingly and awkwardly, as girls do when held tightly in such a position. They paused nearly opposite Billy's eyes in the grass, and the man seemed trying to draw the girl aside to the shadow of the opposite hedge, where there was a gate—and some words were spoken. Then Billy was out and at him, and Lizzie, in her new hat, walking rapidly towards "Chawlton." She had dropped the cardboard box as if it were nothing in particular—a holly spray, perhaps.

There was another man in the ditch who crept and ran along the bottom of it. The taller of the two went down, of course, in the unexpectedness of the attack. He got up, threw out his hands blindly and went down again; he was slow this time and started to get up "gropin' like," the watcher said. "when the little 'un laid 'olt on 'im, tryin' to lift 'im an' workin' an' bustin' hisself like a loon-antic."

No doubt Bob was stricken and handicapped with the swift consciousness of his own guiltiness, and it flashed through his mind, at the first blow, that it was vengeance and not footpads that had him.

"God forgive Billy? Get up, you ——? Get up, you——? God forgive ——. Are you hurt, you —— ——? Are you hurt, you —— ——? Say it—or—I'll—I'll——" Bob said "No." A "naw" was sorter jerked out in 'im, the watcher said. Billy slipped round behind him, got his hands under his armpits and strove to lift him.

Then suddenly, Billy let him down on his back and started to run. "He run like a lunatic, towards 'Sumpthin-on-the-Mud.'" "An' it was well he did," said the watcher. "There were a stake layin' alongst 'andy 'an I saw the little 'un glare at it sideways as if it was a snake—or a peeler's helmet over the hedge——" (he was a poacher) " 'n then the 'orrors seemed to come on him an' he runned. I never seed a man run like 'im. He runned tords Sumpthin-on-Mud."

Bob got up, groped for his hat, turned to all Four Lanes, hesitated a moment, and then started to walk swiftly towards "Chawlton."

Little Billy, panting, stumbled into the gutter of Sumpthin-on-Mud, scrambled up, and knocked at his brother's door. There was a light in the "top front winder."

"Who's there?"

"Billy!"

Tom came down and let Billy in without a word, and closed the door behind him.

" 'Old me, Tom! 'old me!—All this night!"

Tom struck another match, keeping one hand on Billy's shoulder. Then

he lit the lamp—and, the old-sideboard, the old armchair, the old prints, and all the old things that were the old folks' started out in the darkness in the close little room.

Rose came down in an old chintz wrapper, uncovered the fire, put some kindling wood and the kettle on, set out bread and cheese, and, at a jerk of Tom's head, went upstairs again.

Then Billy got up restlessly.

I—I must go out 'n walk up an' down in the yard a bit, Tom," he said.

"All right, Billy—I'll go out with you."

"I ain't going away, Tom."

"It's all right, Billy, I'll go out with yer. I'll take me pipe an' have a smoke in the open."

Tom sat down on the old stump outside, and Billy walked to and fro rapidly.

He raved, maudlingly, at first. "I tries to be a good husband t'her, Tom!—I did try——" Then incoherently and insanely. Strange to say he never mentioned Bob's name. It was as though Bob were a detail—a forgotten accident, or the unknown man or men in Billy's great life trouble. Tom smoked in silence until the first likely interval.

Billy, where's your pipe?" he said, smoking his.

"I—I can't smoke, Tom!—Tom—I did try——"

You can smoke while you're walkin' up an' down. Gimme your pipe." Tom filled the pipe.

Now light up."

Presently Billy sat down on the wash-stool and said: "You go into bed now, Tom, you've got to go to work in the morning. I'm all right. I'll be in presently."

"And what about you?" said Tom. "You've let your pipe go out—here, catch the matches."

"I'll go in now, Tom, I'm only keeping you up."

Billy sat down in the armchair. Tom on another, smoking and thinking. Presently Billy lifted his head, and his eyes went wide and wild, like a grief-stricken woman's, round the room, and his hands rested loosely on the arms of the chair.

"To think I'm sittin' here in mother's chair like this t'night, Tom!—like this t'night——"

Tom puffed once or twice.

"Poor mother," he muttered, "she didn't last long arter you went, Billy—she didn't lay long, she warn't one of that sort. An' we didn't keep her long, not more'n two days. Work slack, wages low, an' Rose down with little Tommy. Poor mother! all her thoughts were o' you, Billy."

Billy's hopeless eyes went round the room again. Sideboard, china shepherd and shepherdess, crochet-work, shells, coral, model of Dover under glass (very like the real Dover, with toy houses and white and vivid green), chairs with antimacassars, and holland covers, and father on the wall to the left of fireplace, and mother on the wall to right. Billy as a baby, Billy as a boy. Tom as a boy, Billy and Tom together as boys. Jane as a baby, Jane as a girl, Jane and Willie and Tom as children. Aunt Caroline, Uncle Will, and the rest about. Billy's head went slowly down. Tom stood by the chair, laid his hand on his head and ruffled it, as he'd done in his best moods when a boy. The head went right down on the hollow of the arm, as it had done in grief when a boy—the hand stuck up in mute appeal. Tom laid his pipe on the table, hurriedly for him, and took that hand in his own great hard one.

Billy was quiet in the morning. Tom stood over him at breakfast and made him eat—much the same as he'd made him do most things when they were boys. Then he said, “Now fill your pipe and get your hat, Billy, an' come along.”

Tom had been out early, or had got what we call a bush telegraphy or mulga wire, for when they reached the Four Lanes he said—

“Now, Billy, she's gone, and taken her things. You go and make the best you can with Leonard about the rent and the furniture, and come back to my place to-night. Rose will take care of yer. And look here, Billy, if you want to go away, I'll help you, and one or two others. To Australia again, if you like. Say the word.”

“No,” says Billy, “I run away once in a family mess, an' left it all to you an' mother—to the other end of the world. An' God forgive Billy! I'll see it out this time, Tom.”

“Gi' me y'hand, Billy,” said Tom. “That's the way to talk. I ain't felt so proud of you since you stood up to young Scroggins at school. Now I must git to work.” And he turned Billy towards Chawilton, and started him off with a slap on the back.

Leonard took the furniture from Billy, in return for the loss of rent and a tenant.

“Well, Billy, as the sayin' is, all I've got to say, as the sayin' is, is that I told you so, as the sayin' is. I knew it all along, as the sayin' is, and saw it comin', as the sayin' is. But you wouldn't take my advice, as the sayin' is, and—and you've only got yourself to blame, as the sayin' is. But I'll say no more about it, as the sayin' is, an' as the fruit season's on, as the sayin' is, I'll take yer on with Brennan and the horses and the wagons, as the sayin' is, and—and you can sleep in the house if you like till I get a tenant, as the sayin' is.”

Think of the last favour!

There are unwritten laws amongst men in English lanes as well as in the Bush. Bob had a woman to keep now, and Billy none, so there was no reason why he should leave his job or be displaced in favour of Billy, even if Billy had wished it. It was all otherwise.

But the brick-makers, becoming used to Bob's grammar and punctuation, chaffed him about Lizzie until the heavy labouring man, who made nasty remarks, tried them on Bob once. Bob knocked him down without a word, glance, or gesture of warning.

“Lie there, you ——!” he said through his teeth. “You—— ! If it had not have been for your wife and daughter, I'd not have been living with another man's wife to-day!”

When Lizzie left Bob, which she did as if it was nothing in particular to do, she went to housekeep for a widower in Staines, where, I believe, she was some class, and respected by tradespeople, and looked up to by upper maids.

I heard some more of the story in Nineteen Three, coming along down by Italy, which looks like our own coast, on board the N.D.L. *Gera*. Billy was aboard—no matter how. I had had chats with him, and a little talk with Tom. Tom and I understood each other without asking questions. Bob, I knew, by one of the merest accidents that always happen in London (or on the road past Suez), was aboard the *Karlsruhe*, a fortnight ahead. There was another man aboard the *Gera*—the old suspected Chawilton poacher, George Bowels. Yes, there were poachers at Chawilton. I know, because I have been accessory both before and after the fact, and only lack of experience prevented me from aiding and abetting. However, I've been sort of volunteer, or unauthorised scout, once or twice, sort of non-commissioned spy. The silent language of wrong-doing is learnt and understood like lightning. Wonderful, isn't it? They reckoned I was a gent, and would never give them away: the first time I felt proud of being a gent in England.

George, or Jarge, Bowels was going to Australia as William Southern, an *alias* that prepossessed me in his favour. Billy and he were shipmates comfortably enough, and neither spoke of the Chawilton in the other's presence, that I could hear. But I got Bowels in a confidential mood one beautiful evening on the fo'c'le head, while Billy was playing cards.

Jarge came to the subject promptly and cheerfully.

“Yes, I was in the ditch, an' see it all. Yes, we as 'as to 'ide in ditches at nights sees many things. We often sees what bigger folk 'ud lose. That Lizzie wasn't no good, she wasn't, and 'ad a child in Lunnan afore ever she seed ‘Smilin' Billy.’ I knowed it all, though I was never class enough for

any on 'em. Me own sisternlaw took care on the child in Lunnen; it died er the measles. Summon Billy's wadges wenter pay, I guess. But Lizzie hadden' done nawthin' with Bob Cleaves that night—not yit. I seed 'em meet at the Four Lanes—'e comin' from the bricks an' she from Shepperton. He gin 'er a start, an' then when he stooped t' speak she up an' kissed 'im like it warn't nothing in particular. Then he grabbed 'er an' seemed to lose 'is 'ed. But they 'addin' done nawthin' yit; I heered all the talk. Then she seemed a bit scared o' 'im, but kep' 'er 'ed. She allers kep' it. An' she pulled in towards Chawlton, an' pulled 'im on with 'er, tellin' 'im to be sensible like a good feller. Oh, but 'e was warm, 'e was. Nattrel; bin away from women a long time, I believe. An' then Billy outs o' his ditch an' at 'em. . . . But wot d'ye want to bother about either on 'em for. 'E was a 'ot 'un, an' she no good, an' Billy a fool—as bigger fool as Coxgrave. Why, I seed 'er—Mrs. Coxgrave an' Bob Cleaves—but I could 'a talked, I could. We as 'as to 'ide in ditches sees rum things sometimes. But wot d'ye wanter bother about the like 'er them? I could give yer boggins t' write on, ony day in the week, if that's wot yer want. We as 'ide in ditches— Why, I could tell y'r——”

Some one got up from the other side of the stanchion, and went down on deck. It was Billy, who had come up from cards feeling squeamish, and sat there.

At Suez we heard that the *Karlshruhe* had lost a blade on a sandbank, and we'd probably catch up to her on the voyage. And Bob aboard. What would it be—fight or silent handshake?

Letters to Jack Cornstalk

I From an Australian in London

LONDON

LONDON, *September*, 1900.

DEAR JACK,—You know I always had a great idea of the value of first impressions—an exaggerated idea, you used to say. I have it stronger than ever—indeed, I sometimes fear that the eagerness to seize first impressions, and write them down before they become blurred and lost, is becoming a mania with me. If I had to write up a big city I'd rather be there a month than a year. We Australians seem to adapt ourselves so quickly to strange places and upside-down conditions. Already London walls seem less dark and dirty to me—London streets less narrow, crowded and sordid, the whole city less like a big squalid village. The houses are growing every day, and I suppose as I go on the lives of the bulk of London humanity, and of two classes of London society especially—that of fashionable West End and that of Spitalfields, for instance—will seem less and less hopelessly useless and unnecessary to the existence of the world. As I make friends, and find halfway houses, so to speak, to drop into in my wanderings about the city, the awful monotony of London ceases to oppress me. For the first few days I thought it more dreadful than the monotony of the Bush, and more utterly hopeless, seeing that the Bush becomes settled and humanized, while London can only change with the changes of the centuries.

I suppose I'll make some blunders, in detail, with my first impressions, but they will be the blunders of hundreds, maybe thousands, who come to London, get the same impressions, and take 'em away and never lose 'em. So my writings will still hold true as of first impressions. I want to drive all this into your thick head, because I intend to write to you pretty regularly, and I know that you will regard some parts of my letters as cheap copy for that old democratic rag of yours, the *Come-by-Chance Boomerang*. I don't mind—it will save me writing at length to all the boys, as I promised.

I am writing under a disadvantage, for which I never bargained when I left Australia. I have heard Australians say that you cannot get round the real size of the difference between Sydney or Melbourne and London until you return to Australia, and I feel now that that is true. A returned Australian once said to me: “When you go to London you don't think much of it, but when you come back to Sydney the houses seem about a foot

high.” This was before they began to build sky-scrapers in Australia. My present impression is that in Sydney city the houses in general are higher than in London—but that is probably because of the few really tall buildings in Sydney. You see, they don't allow high buildings in London.

You do not so quickly realize the contrast between a big thing and a small thing of the same kind, seen previously, as between a greater thing, seen some time ago, and a lesser thing seen now. See? Well, look here! St. Pancras Railway Station covers, under the unbroken arch of roof (260 feet at the base), five long, comfortable platforms, a wide carriage-way, and ten lines of rail; Redfern Station, Sydney—the largest we have—has only two little platforms and a double line of rail under the main roof. But the general idea is the same, and to me—with three months and some fifteen thousand miles of ocean between the two stations—St. Pancras is only Redfern blown out, or magnified, but enlarged to an extent which I shall not be able to realize until I strike Redfern again. St. Pancras is about—how many times bigger than Redfern? but this doesn't strike you until you begin to study it out; and I suppose few Australians who visit London would take that trouble. This is scarcely a first impression, but let it pass. I have an idea that when I go back, Sydney—where I spent the greatest part of my life—will surprise me a deal more than London did at first. Then for some first impressions of Sydney. And (this might sound like a ridiculous paradox) I have an impression that Australians, who come to London and stay awhile, never realize the size of their disappointment—they keep on expecting to be surprised presently, and having a vague idea that the street they're in must lead toward the city proper—that London begins to grow on them and surprise 'em gradually.

There are many things I want to tell you about. We expect to find English people cold, reserved and inhospitable, and are not disappointed; but we seldom study the reasons. No need to come to England for that. They are reserved and inhospitable, because they have to be—they are so hopelessly bound by the same customs (or superstitions) and cast-iron conditions, which are surely, and not too slowly, gaining ground in Australian cities, and which papers like the old *Boomerang* have been slogging at for years. The English do not seem, to Australian city people, more cold-blooded than the people of Australian cities themselves appear from a bushman's point of view.

I think, after all, the best thing I can do is to write straight on and describe the things which I have up to date seen and experienced, and the impressions I got from them; and I hope the reason for the real (or apparent) inhospitality of English people, for the vague, irritating feeling of disappointment we have on first visiting London, and for many other

things, will appear plain to you as I write.

By the way, they call wheat “corn” in England, so in speaking of you to English friends I've had to explain that you were nicknamed after the stalk of the Indian corn (maize), else they'd think you were a very slender reed indeed to lean on or run against, instead of the tough old stalk you are; but I suppose you are pretty slender after the shearing season Out- Back— unless you've managed to hang on to the editorial chair of the *Boomerang*. I think of old Come-by-Chance sometimes; I suppose things are just as dull as ever in that dead-and-alive township.

I'll tell you all about the voyage some other time. We had fog, thick, heavy and wet as one of old “Curry-and-Rice's” dampers, from Spain, past Plymouth, and nearly to Dover. Syren going the whole time, and other syrens all round through the night. All the officers on the bridge and the lookout men for'ard. “Light on the port bow, sir!” “Light on the starboard bow, sir!” “Vessel on the port bow, sir!” all the time. Somewhere coming out of the Bay of Biscay we just shaved a big four-masted sailing ship that suddenly developed out of a smudge in the fog. That's nothing in these waters. The ship's people kept winding up mud and seaweed from the bottom to see where we were—prospecting the bottom of the Channel. It wasn't what we'd call “payable dirt” on the goldfields; this submarine prospecting delayed us considerably, but it probably saved our lives. We saw Dover on a fine, bright morning. You remember a picture in a glass case at home, half picture, half modelled, with a cliff like a piece of scraped chalk painted a bright green on top, and little Noah's ark houses with dabs of colour for windows and doors, and trees—like those in a cheap box of toys—stuck about the top of the cliff. Cliff too white, we thought, and trees and grass altogether too green for anything of the kind on earth— outside a picture. Well, Dover from the distance looked just like that—like a bright little doll-house picture. And Margate from a distance reminded me of one of New Zealand's miniature cities in wood—the open sea-front of Napier, for instance.

The Thames is the Melbourne Yarra on a larger scale, and without the smell.

From the time the fog lifted there was no escape from a confounded bore, who'd been there before, and wanted to point out things. He lived part of the year in Australia and the rest in England. He was not an Englishman, as far as I could see, and not an Australian—nor yet what is next best to it, an Englishman Australianized. He'd been all over the world—he was simply a type of the born-and-bred idiots, who travel to see things, so that they will be able to say that they have seen 'em, and who couldn't describe them any more than they could fly. He hadn't the brains to be a liar—he had no

brains at all—he hadn't even any politics.

Every now and again he'd come up and say: "Well, we're in the Thames now—what do you think of it?"

I was leaning over the rail, taking in things quietly, and looking at some old warships cut down to a hulk, when he took a pinch of my arm and stuck his finger out in another direction from that in which I was looking. He paused a moment, as if he was going to say something very impressive, then he said—

"See that boat there?"

I saw a boat like one of our Manly steamers, crowded with holiday people.

"Yes, I see it. What's wrong with it?"

"There's nothing wrong with it. It's an excursion steamer taking a holiday crowd from London down to Margate, or some of them places."

If the holiday crowd had been naked, and painted in red and blue stripes, there might have been something to look at. As it was, I couldn't see any difference between them and an ordinary Manly beach crowd. And the pointing-out friend seemed to expect me to stare and be astonished. "You'll open your eyes when you see the docks," he said; but I saw nothing in the docks to open my eyes any wider than usual. The docks are simply big dam arrangements of masonry, one leading into another, built in the river bank, and ships are floated in, and the water-gate closed behind them, to keep up the floating depth of water when the tide goes out of the river.

This explains why captains are anxious to catch a tide. Australian boats are timed to arrive on Saturday, and if they miss a tide and get in on Sunday it's awkward for all parties.

I suppose that when the tide goes out of the river you could row outside on a level with the keels of the vessels in dock. And if the water-gates were to break things would get mixed, I fancy; there'd be a lot of running round and swearing.

The Buster's father met us at the docks. You remember the day I took you to the Buster's studio in Sydney, and he showed you how he made men out of mud?

We settled to stay at the Buster's Dad's place, in City Road, for a day or two, until we had time to look round.

We hadn't been allowed to land at Teneriffe, on account of the plague in Australia, so the custom officers weren't strict. I got on with them all right. You get tobacco cheap at Teneriffe.

We took the train from the Albert Docks to Fenchurch Street, third class, and the worst accommodation I ever experienced. We came over London East, but I was too knocked out to take much notice of it. A wilderness of

houses, where you might easily get bushed. The first difference that struck me was the absence of awnings and verandahs.

At Fenchurch Street I said good-bye to my chum of the voyage. He was a lanky Victorian, from West Australia last. He must have been near seven feet. I thought I was the tallest man on board until a couple of days after King George's Sound (he'd been down sea-sick), when I came on deck one morning and saw him standing by the rail. By way of introduction I went and stood back-to-back with him. He grinned. "That's nothing," he said, "there's some terribly tall fellows where I come from." He came from Bendigo way, in Victoria. He was of a type of bushman that I always liked—the sort that seem to get more good-natured the longer they grow; yet are hard-knuckled, and would accommodate a man who wanted to fight, or thrash a bully, in a good-natured way. He wore a good-humoured grin at all times, and was nearly always carrying somebody's baby about, or making tea at the galley for some of the women, or cadging extras for them. He'd been "doin' a bit of diggin' in West Australia." "The West was dead," he said, and there was nothing doing in the Eastern colonies, so far as he could hear; he'd made a "few quid," and had made up his mind to take a run across to South Africa and have a look round. I was glad to see him still on board after Cape Town. "I was just beginning to feel at home on the ship," he explained, "so I thought I might just as well go right on and have a look at London and the Paris Exhibition. You see I booked right through, and I mightn't get the chance again. I can have a look round South Africa just as well coming back; and things will be more settled there then."

The fare from Australia to England by the Cape was the same as by Suez, because of competition, but the fare to the Cape was only a pound less; so many booked right through who'd only intended to go to the Cape. This led to trouble over selling and transferring tickets in South Africa.

When I ran against the Victorian at Fenchurch Street he looked the same as ever, and grinned his broadest grin of good nature. He'd stuck to his soft felt hat, and wore a comfortable sac suit of grey saddle tweed—such as you, Jack, wear on Sundays. He had on a white shirt, though it was a hot day, and, out of respect for a strange country, he had buttoned his waistcoat. He had sewn a pocket inside that waistcoat for his money.

"I've just heard of a cheap boardin'-house," he said, "where they don't pop it on too stiff, and a man can get a square feed. I'll stay and knock round London for a few days, and see what's to be seen; and then I'll take a run over and have a look at the Frenchmen. I reckon I'd better take a cab, or I'll get bushed. Well, so long, old man, and good luck! We're pretty sure to run against each other again, knockin' round the world." He gave my

fingers a squeeze that glued them together with pain; and so I parted with the last of the Australians for a while. Outside the station I saw him grinning good-naturedly down on a very short, fat cabman.

We took a four-wheeler from Fenchurch Street. Looking at things from the outside, the principal business streets of Australian capitals, narrower, without the verandahs, and with a little more traffic, would do for London; and streets like Pitt Street, Sydney, or Collins Street, Melbourne, would ornament the old city. The dirty, gritty, blackened walls are very striking, after the yellow-tinted freestone, clean brick and painted cement of Sydney. The walls of old Newgate are coated like the inside of a neglected chimney. When I first saw the blackened walls I had a vague sort of notion that there had been a big fire round there lately, and for days I had a kind of idea that the terraces had been painted black, or some dark colour, so as not to show the dirt.

Just as we were turning out of the streets which I thought, by the look of them, must run down towards the City, the Buster's Dad pointed to a dingy black wall, and said: "There's the Bank." It was low and very dirty, and not particularly solid looking. I thought it would be all the better for a scrape down and a couple of coats of stone-colour. I would have expected to see a better rear wall to the backyard of the Bank of England, for, of course, I thought the front of the building must be round in a main street. I asked the Buster's Dad if we'd go round by the front?

"That's the front," he said.

The Buster's Dad lived in a terrace built in a half-circle, back from the street, the space in front filled by a half-moon of stone or cement, with posts round it, and seats on it. The Buster's Dad says he remembers when trees grew there. On the opposite side of the street was a big hoarding covered with advertisements. After tea, when we had told them all about the Buster's family in Australia, I sat by the window (it was Saturday evening) and watched the 'buses and horse-trams go by, painted pink and blue and yellow, according to their routes, and covered with advertisements; and I watched the people who drifted round and rested on the dusty seats of the dusty little stone half-moon. It was a hot day, and dust and straw and bits of paper drifted round.

There were draggled girls with rag babies—at least the babies were mostly rags—who came from back courts; there were shapeless, rusty black bundles, tied round the middle, with dingy shawls three-corner-wise over the shoulders, and knobs on top, in the shape of black bonnets: old women who met on their way from the pubs, with jugs half under their shawls, and who rested a while on a seat and helped, no doubt, to blacken a dirty, mean street with their tongues. It would surprise a Sydneysider to see

how many respectable working women go into pubs as a matter of course; but you soon get used to these things. There was the drunk who hooked his elbow on to the back of a seat and half hung, half sat, and talked to himself, until he felt able to get up and stagger to the pub.

There was one man, or the shadow of a man, who drifted on to that space with a human eddy from the street, and rested on a seat for a while. He wore a white shirt and a high collar, and his boots were pathetically well polished; his clothes seemed decent and whole, though the cloth rather dull and the linen cloudy; his face was white and worn sharp—a dead white, with something bluish about it, I fancied. He drew in his shoulders, as if he were cold, and, as he sat down he bent forward and hitched up the knee of his trousers. The “dicky,” or false shirt-front, worked up and buckled outwards, and I could see through between it and his bare bony breast. And when he got up and moved away I saw that he was walking on his bare feet. Things hadn't changed much since Dickens' time. I had seen something like this in Sydney, and I felt that I would live to see the same scene from a Sydney or Melbourne window. I began to feel pretty dismal.

On Sunday morning the Buster's Dad and a couple of friends took me round to show me the city, and point out places which were as familiar to me as the face of the old *Boomerang* cashier—or as mine should be to him—because I had seen those places, from as far back as I could remember, in every variety of picture-show—from the old peep-show and magic-lantern, to the improved cinematograph; and speaking of the cinematograph, it was in a “ride down the Strand” in a vitascope show in Sydney that I first experienced the feeling of disappointment—I kept expecting to come into a big street, or to see something presently, right up to the moment the picture was shut off the screen.

And my London friends seemed to expect me to open my mouth or show some sign of astonishment. The only thing that surprised me was to see St. Paul's and those places reduced to about half the size I expected them to be, and very black and dirty. I wanted to see the Monument close, and my friends took me round by it, but didn't seem to think much of it. I drifted back into an old London fog, and saw the London coach come in, and Mr. Pecksniff and his daughters get down and start to walk to the Commercial Boarding-house, where poor silly little Mercy met the brute her father sold her to. I'd have followed (and no doubt have found the Commercial Boarding-house little changed), but I hadn't time before my friends wanted to point out something else.

English people seem unable to realize the progress of a new country. Leaving out St. Paul's and the Abbey, and those old institutions, most things that are in London we have in Australia on a smaller scale —some

on a larger—and we have—because of our readiness to give Yankee and foreign notions a show—many things that they haven't got in London yet.

I remember reading a magazine article by a leading English writer, in which he censured the average Australian in London for his “affectation of indifference,” pointed out that it was only an exhibition of weakness or ignorance, and that it would be more manly to express his honest astonishment at the marvels he saw. That writer will probably never understand that his article was only another example of the stay-at-home Englishman's hopeless inability to realize progress outside his own country.

My first landlady expressed surprise at hearing me speak “such good English”; she said she thought that Australians had a language of their own; and, now I come to think of it, she wasn't so far out.

The Buster's Dad took me round some of the way in the underground railway. I noticed that a young friend of his watched me closely, to see if I'd be nervous, I suppose. The Underground was about as hot as the centre of Bulli Tunnel, near Sydney, and a good deal dirtier; in some places the smoke goes up through gratings along the middle of the street. The stations, big, grimy, gritty cellars, and you go up dusty steps and stumble into mean streets and other unexpected places.

The size of London lies in the spread of it; but you can no more realize it than you can the mighty extent of the Bush—the land of magnificent distances. In the latter case you only remember the day's ride or tramp through scrubs and clearings—and other days like it. The day's work or walk. It is the same with distance at sea; you realize the horizon around you all day, for weeks—or months—and that's about all.

To me, the first, the most ghastly thing in London, was broad daylight after nine o'clock at night. When I am hurried round, and things are pointed out to me, I lose my bearings and see through cockney eyes. I like to go alone. So, on Monday morning, I slipped out and took a walk down to the City. It was another hot day, and there was plenty of dust. I was already used to the absence of verandahs, and felt just as much at home as if I were walking down George Street from Redfern. I had decided that the best way to learn the City was to blunder round and ask as little as possible. I called to mind certain instructions given me, but decided to make back for the Bank whenever I got hopelessly mixed, and make a fresh start from there.

But the trouble was to find the Bank. It is the most modest building I ever met; most unobtrusive, as it should be, if only on account of its dirt. On more than one occasion I asked to be directed to the Bank, and was told that I was at it. It had a shut-up and deserted appearance, as if it went bung about fifty years ago, and closed for reconstruction (as most of our banks

did in '92), and had never opened since. I have a faint recollection of having seen a door in the front wall, and, if there really is one, I'll go in next time I'm down in the City, and see what it's like inside.

We have in Australia an exaggerated idea of the volume and rush and roar of London traffic. I'd rather cross at the Bank (and not use the subways) than at the corner of King and George Streets, Sydney, where we have a double line of fast electric tramway, and the 'Bus Companies are still hanging on. But this is mainly because London traffic is so perfectly managed.

From the top of a 'bus the only real difference I could see between the business street crowd of London and that of Sydney or Melbourne was, while there is a sprinkling of frock-coats and tall hats in the young cities, there is a shower in London. I fancied that the Sydney people, when I last saw them, seemed the more haggard, worried and hurried; but that might have been a trick of memory.

Down Fenchurch Street I was looking for a place in a hurry, and passed it twice—because it was up a court instead of in the main street, where it advertised itself to be—and was passing it for the third time when I was aware of a shadow at my elbow. Poor devil!— he had been a man, I suppose; there was little manhood left in him now. Imagine a Sydney Domain Dossier in his last stage of dosserdom—imagine him several degrees worse than he could possibly become in Sydney! This man was apparently a hopeless drunkard; long past the bloated stage. He wore an old frock-coat that was in rags round his wrists, and so smeared with grease and dirt that it hung heavy from his sharp shoulder-blades. His hat, a level-brimmed stove-pipe, rested on his ears, which supported it like brackets, the rim seemed only held together by grease and dirt, and the crown was of the same materials, with, perhaps, a thin under lining of felt. Where the grease was thin on his clothes there were patches of collar green. And the most wretched Sydney gutter-raker would not do more than turn the boots over with a stick if he saw them lying in the rubbish. His trousers legs (they don't call trousers pants in England)—his trousers were stiff as buckram, and by the hang of them may have been suspended from his waist by shreds or bits of string. Heaven only knows what ghastly skeleton in dirt that old frock-coat covered.

“Excuse me, sir!” he said, hurriedly and hoarsely, “is there any place you want to find? I can direct you. I'm—I'm a messenger! I've been thirty-five years here, and I know every hole and corner——”

“No,” I said, with the distrust of the stranger in London; “I can find my way.” We hear so much about the cleverness of London pickpockets, confidence men, etc., that some of us, for the first week, take precautions

which seem childish and silly when we look back at them.

“But—but you've passed the place!” (Observation told him that—his wits were sharpened by the drunkard's thirst.) “Only tell me what place you want to find. I'll show you at once!” (His hands began to tremble—then to shake.) “What—what place is it, sir? I've been here thirty-five years and I——” (every now and again his voice broke into an involuntary whine; the cry that breaks out in the speech of the hopeless drunkard, who is suffering a recovery, and has been too long without a drink). “I can show you, sir. I can show you at once, any place, sir! Only tell me the name of the place!” (He was trembling now from head to foot. I told him where I wanted to go.)

“Come with me, sir! Come with me. I know it! I'll show you the place!—it's up here! You passed it! You'd never find it!” (His limbs were trembling violently now. God help us all!) “There it is; go right up those steps and in through that big door! Do you want to find any other place, sir? I'll show you any place! Shall I wait, sir? I'm—I'm a messenger— I've been round here for thirty-five years, and——”

“You've been here for thirty-five years?”

“Yes, sir! thirty-five years——” His whine broke loose again on the “thirty-five.”

“You don't seem to have done much good with your time,” I said.

The words were scarcely out of my mouth before I felt the foolish brutality of them. It benefited him, though, for I gave him enough to drown his hell for a while. He wanted more (“make it even money, sir!”), but that was human nature.

But London is perhaps the easiest city in the world to find your way about in. It is here that you get the full benefit of the advice, “Ask a policeman.” I like the London policeman; he is large, good-natured and seemingly broad-minded. When you speak to him he doesn't turn slowly, and, if you are shabby, regard you as if you had shoved up against him on purpose. He doesn't look you up and down and say, “Phwhat's that? Oh, the Barrank! You ought to know where that is. Where do you want to go to?” Neither does he turn his back on you, jerk his thumb over his shoulder and say, “It's beyant.”

He doesn't scratch his head, think lazily, and say, “Go round the carrner, turn up the third turrnin' to the rroight. Keep straight down till ye come to the top an a hill. Thin keep straight up till ye see a church forninst ye. And thin arsk.”

No. The London policeman attends to you instantly, and his directions are prompt, plain and concise. He is recruited mostly from the provinces, I believe, and there is a certain democratic dignity about him which appeals

to me. I like his “Second to the right, sir”; or “Third—no—wait a moment” (with a cheerful smile) “fourth to the left—ask the policeman there.”

He knows most things about London. He is supposed to know everything in existence—and many things which do not exist, except in the imaginations of strangers from all possible parts of the world (and from many places which would seem impossible to the untravelled English mind). He turns from explaining to you where you are, and where you'll have to go to get anywhere else, to attend to a slow old lady who wants to be put in a tram, that doesn't come within half a mile of where she is, in order to reach a place where trams don't run. He has to keep one eye on the traffic and the other on her while she finds her purse and looks out a piece of paper with an illegible address scrawled on it; and he must put her right, somehow. Also amongst hundreds of other things, he has to attend to strangers who want clean good board and lodging cheap. And, mind you, all this time he is probably stationed in the middle of a cross street, managing four streams of traffic, of which the vehicles can go in twelve lawful directions (if you count round the corners); while there is sure to be a cabby trying variations. Also he has to take nervous women across the street and save them in spite of themselves.

The London policeman wears two breast-pockets on his tunic (this is a hint for Australian artists), and I think the pockets would be an improvement to the uniforms of the “traps” of a certain city I know— with, in one pocket, a small book in big type, “Defoe” style for preference, setting forth the virtues of common civility, and, in the other, a book which would explain to the Bobby, in language fitted to his comprehension, that he is a servant of the people, and not a recruiting agent for the gaols.

In my next letter I'll tell you about St. Paul's, the Abbey, and the Tower, and a good many other things.

II From an Australian in London

LONDON

ENGLAND, *December*, 1900.

DEAR JACK,—In my last letter I promised to tell you something about St. Paul's, the Tower, and those places. You remember the story of a rising young Australian politician who came home (how glibly the “home” comes!)—who came home on business, stayed some months, and went back without having seen either Westminster Abbey or the Tower, and without having been once inside the British House of Commons. He saw

St. Paul's—he couldn't very well have dodged it. We couldn't understand his constitution at the time, but I think I realize the thing now. You see, we have come so far to see the big, old, or otherwise wonderful (or eccentric) things that we've been hearing about since childhood, and they are so near that we experience that feeling of dullness or disinterestedness that comes after long waiting, or expectation, and just before the climax. Besides, we come from the land o' lots of time and bring the atmosphere of it with us, round ourselves; so we reckon we'll just take things easy to-day and go and do the Abbey or one of those places to-morrow—take a full day for it. I wouldn't be surprised to know that hundreds come from Australia to London, stay some time, and go away without having seen anything to talk about.

If you come to make a living in London it doesn't do to lean up against the Post of To-morrow. Rent days fly round and bills fly in. Your landlady, if you board and have apartments, meets you with a smile of anticipation before you know where you are, and they all think that because you came from Australia you must have plenty of money. You can't take a supply of tea, sugar and flour and pitch your camp down the creek, where there's plenty of wood and water, and take a fortnight to think over things. No; you must hustle round. You can live about as cheaply or as expensively as you like in London, but you've got to find those things out before you blue your cheque. You can't borrow a few quid from your mate Jim, or Bill, and take another week or so waiting for something to turn up. A Sydney University boy of my acquaintance came “home” about two years ago to make a living in London with his pen, and he took things easy for a while. Now he answers letters by return post, with perhaps a letter-card following his letter, and containing something which he forgot to say in the letter; and I have known him to dash off a postcard by the same post with something of importance on it which he forgot to mention in the letter-card. When he arrived he wore comfortable clothes and a soft felt hat; now he wears a frock-coat, a top-hat, gloves, a stick, a card-case, a pair of glasses to nip on to his nose with a spring, and all the rest of it. When he has an appointment you'll see him burst out of the front door and rush down the street, jerking his watch out every few yards, his coat tails flying and his top-hat lowered like a battering-ram. It's a wonder he doesn't telescope into that hat against something.

He is a good magazine writer, and a grand chap personally; and when I get him quiet for an hour he's just the same old chap I knew in Sydney. He has had a gruelling which he will never forget. Some day I'll tell you about his life in London—the tragedy of it scared me. Talk about heroes!

But where was I? Oh, about St. Paul's and those places. I went through

St. Paul's because I found myself on the steps and couldn't think of anywhere else to go just then. I went through the Art Gallery and the Abbey because my literary friend rushed me round and through those places. I must go and see for myself later on.

St. Paul's is one of those places which are built too big, in a way, to look large. Looming out of London, it does not appear more imposing than a big corrugated iron shed looming out of the lonely scrubs Out Back in Australia, and certainly less impressive when you are properly impressed (or rather oppressed) by the extent and loneliness of the mighty Bush.

I haven't seen the ruins of ancient lands—probably they would impress me; but as far as I have seen of the works of modern man, I can't help thinking that when he sets to work to build a great, useless building with an eye to bigness only he succeeds in putting up a perishable monument to his own paltriness and the littleness of all his works. And the monument is usually an obstruction to the air, the view, and the traffic—a square with a fountain would be far better there. There's a lot more sense in an ant-hill than in St. Paul's. When man builds a big thing like St. Paul's or St. Peter's, he builds so high that when he wants to put stone josses—I mean statues—on the walls and in the niches, and pictures up round inside, he has to make representations of giants—monsters—else they wouldn't be visible to people on the pavement or floor. And of what use is the result? You've got to study relative distance and heights—say, the size of a man as against the size of the building—in order to get some idea of the “vastness” of the work or structure, and when you have got it of what use is it to you? When a dome swells as big as the dome of St. Paul's it suggests a silly attempt to rival the dome of the sky—and there you are.

Mind I am not writing with the idea of pulling down everything that's up in theory without suggesting anything in its place. Have patience with me for a while. Neither am I going to use the worn-out argument that the millions spent on these buildings would feed and clothe thousands who are starving and in rags. The great majority of mankind would not be content for a month unless they were slaves; and so why abuse the few who will not be slaves, at least not slaves from a worldly point of view—who escape from being slaves to man, either by making money and sticking to it or by blowing out their brain matter.

I've seen buildings in Australia and elsewhere of less than half the size of St. Paul's, which look much more imposing—the *Hotel Australia* in Sydney, for instance, or the Yankee insurance offices next the G.P.O.; but then in one case we have unbroken height, and in the other fresh clean granite and freestone work. In the guide-book pictures St. Paul's stands out complete—as in the guide-book pictures of most buildings in the world.

There is an atmosphere suggestive of wide spaces—of asphalt walks and gardens running out a mile or two in any direction. This is one of the apparently useless lies of civilization—but I suppose it's born of commercialism, like most other lies—a little branch line lie of commercialism. You don't see much of St. Paul's in London—it is so crowded by buildings nearly as grimy and dingy as itself. A coat of soot round the lower part of the building hides the fine or graceful lines which may be in the stone work, and throws the columns—which should stand out clean and defined—flat against the inner wall; also it reduces the height of the building. The upper half of the building is a dirty, rain-washed white, and the soot is washed in streaks down over the ledges. I remember a black cliff in a corner of the coast in New Zealand with a cave in it and a round tussock hill on the top; on the upper ledges of the cliff millions of sea-birds were in the habit of roosting. St. Paul's, from a distance, reminds me of that cliff.

A Londoner tells me that by and by I'll look at St. Paul's and other London things, and be ready to kick myself to think I was so foolish as to write as I am writing now. If I do, I'll say so—and probably kick myself. I have so often had occasion to kick myself that I am getting hardened to it.

This Londoner says that he'll go past St. Paul's every day for nine days and see nothing in it, but on the tenth day he'll look up and have a feeling. I suppose when I go back to Sydney and see the General Post Office or the Town Hall, I'll have a feeling too—because of many things; but when I was in Sydney I passed those buildings nearly every day for years, and the only feeling I had was one of resentment, called up by the vicinity of a cheap restaurant in which I did a six months' perish in other and braver years. Different billets make men look at things in different ways.

English home people are remarkable for their invulnerable common sense, but they allow the appearance of an awful lot of senseless idolatry in London. And worse!—there is in London a fashionable dog graveyard—headstones and all complete—and on one of those headstones the fashionable bereaved one expresses a hope that she'll meet her darling in heaven. But I didn't mean to touch on that; I'm not ready for it yet. Such things excite me.

I take off my hat and go into St. Paul's (you have to take off your hat, and that fact is pregnant). I take off my hat and go into St. Paul's, expecting to be impressed and awed—and wishing to be. I think it's a very good and hopeful thing to be impressed, and to feel a reverence for something in these shallow cowardly days of a false feeling of manliness, and of the sex problem. But the interior of St. Paul's does not impress me; it suggests to me an imitation of the interior of some older and larger building which I

haven't seen yet. The statuary, of white marble, is so smoked that it suggests at once cheap plaster casts coated with grey or stone-coloured paint to preserve and keep them together. This after the pure white marble in Sydney gardens.

There is a sprinkling of people on a regiment of seats in the centre, under the dome, between the shafts, and the organ is playing. I am not educated to classical or organ music. I suppose that if I were to hear a good voice now, singing "Bonnie Doon," or "Annie Laurie" or "Mary of Argyle," or any of those old songs, I'd feel nice and miserable. Those are the sort of tunes that impress me. To me the volume of the organ of St. Paul's does not seem greater than that of the Sydney organ—the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere. But I remember what I said in my last letter about not seeing the contrast between a great thing and a small thing of the same kind seen previously.

I go round one side of the nave behind the shafts and meet a spectral figure in a black gown—a man who looks as if he's just come out of the hospital—and he closes a wicket noiselessly and raises a ghostly hand against me—as if there's some one dying up there. He doesn't impress me at all. He might impress the majority, but he impresses me least of anything in St. Paul's. I think he ought to be swept up and taken away in the dust cart.

I go back and round the other way and try to get impressed by the sculpture, and the following groups in succession is what I see (according to notes taken on the spot, while another convalescent in a black gown looked as if he'd expire before they got him back to the hospital)—

Major-General Andrew Hay.—Officer in uniform falling sideways, in most awkward position, and supported awkwardly by big, naked man on left (why naked?), who holds the Major-General as if he's got something in his hands in which he is not interested, and which he doesn't know what to do with. Supporter seemingly blind and sea-sick; lips suggest exhausted disgust. If he has any expression at all, it is the expression of a tired man who is doing a useless and idiotic thing, and knows it, and can't help himself. On the right stands the figure of a private, holding his chin and looking as if he is sorry he got the Major into his present fix. In the background to the right the usual squeezed-out little row of wooden undersized soldiers charging. The rank looks as if it's skewered.

Sir Thomas Picton.—Dressed as Alexander the Great, or something, with a property helmet on and little else. Inevitable angel handing him a wreath across the head of a lion. Lion looks currishly, maliciously inclined to bite because the wreath isn't meat. Behind Sir Thomas, and leaning familiarly on his shoulder, a naked girl, with wings on, stands cross-legged; she has a

woolly head, and all the points of a third-rate Sydney barmaid in the old sub-letting days.

Lord Rodney.—Figure of Lord Rodney up in the background. Angel standing on right, with hand thrown back towards Rodney's waistcoat, and dictating to angel on left, who sits with a book and pencil, and looks up at angel No. 1 as if to ask, "You surely don't want me to write down that?" The whole suggests the designing of a new uniform on a tailor's dummy.

Lord Rodney wears the indignant and dignified expression of a local magnate who is stopped by a beggar in his own grounds. Sir Thomas Picton wears something more like a string of small sausages bunched up than a beard, and an expression of quiet annoyance. Others regard their angels with looks more or less pained and idiotic, though some of the expressions would be natural to men accosted by strange ladies wearing wings.

Now, let any intelligent Englishman who reads this go into St. Paul's and look at these groups, and decide as to whether the sculptors were impudent humbugs, or I'm one.

How contemptible this "art" would seem by the side of the statue of Burke and Wills (the Australian explorers) in Melbourne, or of Bobbie Burns in Ballarat (the statue with a twinkle in the eye), or a hundred others in Australia.

Talking of statues, there is often, from one point of view, an unforeseen effect which is not possible in pictures—a point of a cocked hat, for instance, which suggests a beak, or a rapier sticking out behind, and giving the figure a tail. There is in the statue of Lord Nelson, on a tall column in Trafalgar Square, an effect which is greatly admired by the Americans who patronize *Morley's Hotel* on the Strand side of the Square. There is a similar—or even more so—effect in the statue of Captain Cook in Sydney, seen from one point of view. It's strange that these things are never foreseen. The sculptors must have had a rough time amongst their friends.

The Misguide Book says: "Generally speaking, the monuments in the Cathedral are more interesting from personal associations than from great artistic merit but some of the groups display vigorous action, and the likenesses are well preserved," etc., etc. You've read the same sort of stuff before. If the likenesses are preserved, then most of the heroes must have been born idiots. From my point of view, most of the statuary in St. Paul's is crude and—no, not theatrical—it doesn't even deserve that term. Reversing time, I would say that it belongs to the concert hall, living-picture school—the whole business has a concert-hally atmosphere. And I needn't have reversed time either, for the sentiment of the British Empire of to-day is popular concert hall sentiment. We can't get any lower, and that's

some comfort.

When I look at a stone angel I mostly see a shallow-brained, soulless artist or sculptor's model in part of a sheet, and with a pair of wings. The stone angel business has been carried to a sickening extent in St. Paul's. If it were not so concert-hally, and thus beneath contempt, I would call it—well, Jack, I would call it blasphemy—and you know I'm no saint. To see everywhere crude angels in stone in senseless attendance on stone gods supposed to represent dead heroes, who were only lucky to be leaders, who were no braver than thousands who fought under them, and some of whom were greater cowards in domestic life than the majority. As our friend, the shearer's cook at Come-by-Chance Station, used to say, "There's more money and sympathy wasted over dead an' rotten humbugs than there is common justice done to straight honest living men." It's the way of all the world, and all time. Make gods of the dead! Crucify the living.

If a man's name cannot live in the history of a nation it cannot live in a stone idol.

Londoners admit that the statuary in St. Paul's is notoriously bad. Then why is it there? Why is it not broken up and buried, and something sensible put in its place? Or is it an object lesson of the times when conceited, untalented humbugs, with nothing but "cheek" to recommend them, got by influence and court favour large sums of the public money for spoiling marble, while men who had the genius to put life and sense in stone were left to starve and eat their hearts out in garrets, or drink themselves to hell in wine cellars?

There is no escape from a superstition called Wren in London. Going round with my literary friend the other day, he pointed and said—

"Do you see that spire?"

"Yes."

"Perfect! by Wren."

The spire looked all right—anyway, I couldn't suggest any alteration on the spot. Looking at it later on, I had to admit that it was beautiful.

By and by he pointed to another spire.

"See that spire?"

"Yes."

"Horrible—by So-and-So."

It did look ugly. After a while he pointed again.

"See that spire?"

"Yes."

"By Wren—perfect. Slightly different in design from the other."

There was a slight difference. Later on we came to Westminster Abbey.

"See that tower?"

“Yes.”

“Restored by Wren. But—” (he hesitated), “but the top doesn't somehow seem——”

It didn't seem to fit the bottom. That's what he meant. But he was too much a Londoner, and too great a worshipper of Wren, to see where the trouble was. I think I saw it at once. Wren had simply taken the tops of four spires he had on hand and put one on each corner of the tower. If ever a pun was justified, Wren was an inspired man. He wasn't a tower man, and in restoring the Abbey he wasn't laying to his book. He was working on his reputation— or, maybe, he was hard up at the time.

I'll take you into Westminster Abbey when I'm in a more cheerful frame of mind.

III From an Australian in London

A MIDLAND VILLAGE

ENGLAND, *January*, 1901.

DEAR JACK,—When I came to England I took a house in a fair-sized, old and new fashioned village, not fifty miles from London. I came down here to get my breath after the voyage, and have a quiet think, and talk things over with myself quietly before tackling London in earnest. The village is, as I say, a new-old-fashioned one. Along one side of the village street is a row of old elms, and behind them a row of old-fashioned cottages, and an inn called the *Blue Lion*, with thatch two feet thick, and a gravelled footpath. On the other side are no trees, but a row of modern shops, such as you'd see in any decent suburb in an Australian city, with a kerbed, asphalt pavement. All round on the high ground are modern villas, detached, semi-detached, and several in a row, from the £35 a-year cottage (rates and taxes included) to the £90 or £100 house. If you take a £25 to £30 cottage, you are known as those or them new people in that house; if you take a £50 to £60 house, you are the new people in Blank Villa; if you take a £90 or £100 house, you are Mr. and Mrs. Brown-Jones (or whatever your name may be).

The country is undulating and covered with fields and hedge-rows, with parks and little woods here and there, and brooks and streams along the bottoms, that run by old brick-ways under little old-fashioned hamlets, and under the corners of decayed buildings, which might have been mills at one time; and in unexpected places in the corners of the hedges are little, very old-fashioned inns, with fixed benches and tables outside, and sanded and sawdusted floors in the bar and taprooms, and ingle-nooks and window-

seats, where customers drink, and think (if they do think), and talk—do anything but dress—pretty much as they did fifty or a hundred years ago.

The village has a big common, but the common is rather a painful place, for it is frequented every day by nursemaids with babies in perambulators, and by serious-looking individuals wheeling invalids in chairs; and when you see the baby in the perambulator beside the broken-up old party in the chair, you are apt to think of the years that go between, and ponder drearily on the futility of human life. Also troops of slum children are brought down here, now and again, for an airing, and somehow it makes me feel sadder to see them on the grass and in the sunshine for one day—and to think it's only for one day—than it would to see them in their native gutters every day for a year.

You can walk out in any direction by the country roads, and round back home; and when you get tired of walking by the narrow roads worn deep between the hedges, and seeing nothing, you can climb out and follow the field-paths. The field-roads are very narrow, barely wide enough for one vehicle; so, I was told, that if a farmer proposes to take a cart down one of these roads, he advertises the fact amongst his neighbours a week beforehand, to lessen the possibility of his meeting another cart halfway, in which case the farmer with the least moral or physical backbone might have to back his horse for miles, and that would mean inconvenience and loss of time to both sides, and possibly break up an old and convenient borrowing-and-lending friendship.

It is a very pretty place, and I only saw one blot on the scenery round here. It stands at the top of a slope in the background of as pretty a piece of rural scenery as you could imagine, and it is a big black board on which, painted in staring white letters, are the words:—

“SMITH'S KENNELS.
SPRATT'S DOG BISCUITS USED.”

The population of the village is aristocratic, “well-to-do,” “better-class” shopkeeping, mechanic and bucolic. The village is what we might call a “tourist town” in Australia. “Better-class” and “well-to-do” people take houses and bring their families down here for the summer. Some stay all the year round, but I don't know whether these are of the well-to-do or of the better-class people. I've heard of a “middle-class” in England, but not down here—perhaps the term “middle-class” is too vulgar for this village. Some do not even stay all the summer, but go away quietly towards the middle or the end of the quarter. I've heard shopkeepers refer to these as swindlers. There's a boarding-house or two, kept by workmen's wives. There are several ladies in £25—£30 houses, who let apartments. The

husband of one (we stayed with her till our house was ready) is a mechanic in the City, who comes home once or twice a week disguised as a business man; his wife lives in hourly dread of his real occupation becoming known in the village—and all the neighbours know it.

There are other ladies, in £30—£50 houses, who take in “paying guests.” One, a widow with a small income, who might be comfortable in a cottage, but who has two grown daughters, who mustn't soil their hands, and must have accomplishments and genteel society, is struggling, with the assistance of “paying guests,” to keep up an appearance in a big house. She had the bailiff in last week.

I came in touch with the bucolic element first. I was nearly a week rescuing my luggage from the Mudland Railway Company. The trouble is, I believe, that most of the trains are in such a hurry that they haven't always time to take in luggage, or, having got it aboard, they haven't time to put it out. Anyway, after waiting four days, one of the carriers (he was an intelligent type of workman) told me that my luggage was at the station. I inquired at the office, but they knew nothing about it; they told me that it might be over in the shed in the yard, so I went over there. In the shed I found a fresh-faced, unemotional youth, who wore an expression as if he were pondering deeply over a complete absence of ideas. There also seemed a something, as of resentment, in his expression, but this I believe was unconscious. I recognized him at once, or rather his type; I had met him as a loutish new chum working on Australian farms; I had come across him Out Back in Australia, “getting colonial experience” (though I could never conceive him as being capable of absorbing experience of any kind). Travel doesn't change him—strange lands and adventure make no impression on his mind. He is just as bucolic and undemonstrative camping out under the great star on the mighty plains of the never never, and comes home with no more ideas than he would have had he only gone to the next village for a day. He is not confined to England. He is not intentionally boorish nor uncivil, for if he does leave a question unanswered now and again it is only because the question fails to convey an impression to his alleged mind—or he needs time. Repeat the question two or three times if necessary, with decent intervals, and, above all, give him time. But, anyway, you can't hurry him.

The youth in the shed was cleaning out the place. He worked on for a few minutes, apparently totally unconscious of my intrusion; but I gave myself time to soak in—I gave him fifteen minutes; then I stated my name and asked if my boxes had come. He rubbed the top of his head, and looked slowly round the shed, which was nearly empty; then presently he got an idea, and asked me what I said my name was.

I told him again, and spelled it. The spelling of it seemed to rouse him a little. He looked round the shed again, and in through the window of a store-room that was locked, and up in the loft, and under the floor. I had looked myself, and told him so, but he persisted in looking. Then he asked me what my boxes were like.

I described them to him several times during the interview, at his own request. The boxes were of unusual size and shape, and there would be no mistaking them; yet he persisted in pulling out empty fruit-boxes, and barrels, and bits of machinery from amongst the rubbish, and asking me whether “any of them was them.” He looked at the label on a crate full of straw, and the name on it only differed in the matter of three letters from mine. He pulled that out at once, and wanted to know if it was mine. I am not sure now that I really convinced him that it wasn't. Then I had a happy thought—I should have had it before.

“Are you in charge of this shed?” I asked—and I waited.

“No,” he said, “I ain't.”

“Is there a man in charge?” I asked—and gave him time.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “there is.”

“Can I see him?”

“Well—you might see him—if you want to.”

“And where is he?”

“Oh! he's up the yard, he is.”

I went up the yard and found the man in charge, and got him to admit it. He might have been the youth that I'd left in the shed, suddenly grown several years older, but otherwise little changed.

He knew nothing about the luggage, but agreed to have a look at the books. We came across the name which had a syllable in it sounding like one in mine, and that delayed us a little; then he went to have a look in the shed, and I left him looking. I hunted up the carrier again, and consulted him; he was positive that he had seen my luggage arrive; and next day I found it under a tarpaulin in a truck up the yard. The yard manager didn't seem in the least surprised. He asked me which truck it was, and I took him to it and showed him the luggage. He regarded the boxes with drowsy interest, looked at the address, also the old shipping labels, and asked me if them boxes was mine. I assured him that they were. I asked him what the next move would be.

He thought a while.

“Do you want them boxes?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He thought for a long time, then said he'd see the carrier about them, if I liked.

I privately resolved to see the carrier myself, and get the boxes away at once, else some train might get hold of that truck by mistake and take it on to Scotland. I suggested that there might be some papers in the office, which would give me some idea of the charges, and which I might have to sign. He agreed that that was likely, and walked back to the office with me. On the way back he said, as if an idea got into his head somehow and he wanted it settled one way or the other—

“You come from abroad, don't you?”

“Yes; I come from Australia.”

Presently he said in a tired, disinterested tone—

“I thought you come from abroad.”

I sounded him as deep as he went, but “Abroad” was the nearest that he could get to Australia.

And I couldn't help thinking, “And are these of the people we're fighting for?”

I've had rare opportunities for studying the British shopkeeper in all his glory. I had taken a £30 house, but it soon got round that I came from abroad, or Australia, so of course I must have plenty of money. On the evening of the day we shifted into the house there came a knock at the front door, and I went to open it—we hadn't captured a maid yet. I saw a decently-dressed, respectable-looking man backing out towards the gate, and I asked him if he wanted me.

“I must apologize, sir, for coming to the front gate, sir,” he said nervously, still backing out.

“Why?” I asked.

By this time he'd got to the gate, and I couldn't catch what he said—I'm rather deaf, you know. I didn't seem able to coax him nearer, so I told him to wait while I called the wife. When she came down he'd disappeared. We stood wondering awhile, and presently the wife heard a timid knock at the back door, and we went there. It was the man—he'd slipped in and round while my back was turned. He had his hat off, and looked very apologetic.

“I really must beg yer pardon, ma'am,” he said, “for coming to the front door——”

“Why?” she asked.

“I'm very sorry, ma'am,” he said hurriedly; “but you see, I wasn't sure that there was any one in the house yet. I'll always come to the back door in the future.”

It turned out that he was a grocer's man, and his boss had been recommended to us by an Anglo-Australian acquaintance of ours in the village.

“Would you be pleased to give an order, ma'am?” he asked.

“Oh, yes,” said the wife.

“Thank yer, ma'am,” he said briskly, getting out his pocket-book and pencil. “What would you be pleased to want, ma'am? I'll take it down, ma'am.”

She gave the order from a list she had.

“Three pounds of loaf-sugar.”

Grocer's man, taking it down, “Thank yer, ma'am.”

“There pounds of moist.”

“Thank yer, ma'am!”

“One pound of fresh butter.”

“Thank yer, ma'am!”

“Two pounds of rice.”

“Thanky, mum!”

“One packet of Sunlight soap.”

“Thanky, mum!”

“Two pieces of blue.”

“Thanky, mum!”

And so on with the soda, starch, borax, etc., to the end of a long list.

“Anything more, mum?”

“No, that's all.”

“Thanky, mum!”

He begged pardon again for coming to the front door, took off his hat, and got away out of that.

Next evening the milkman mistook the wife for the maid, and growled about being kept waiting. He's been conscience-stricken and apologetic ever since. The wife, who is sympathetic, feels really sorry for him.

My hobby, as you know, is carpentering, and I often go to the shops for gimlets, bradawls, screws, nails and glue, and such like; and, in the absence of a maid, I frequently went small errands to the grocer for pounds of butter or candles and the like. I usually dress in the rough Sunday sac suit I wore in the Bush, and wear a slouch hat, and not unfrequently a coloured shirt; but I came from abroad, you know, and must have plenty of money—it's Australian fashion to dress as I do, so I might be an earl at least by the way the village shopkeeper bows and smiles and squirms when I come into his shop.

I had at first the greatest difficulty in the world to rescue my small purchase from those shopkeepers; they didn't seem to understand that I was capable of carrying anything heavier than my hands, or had ever been in the habit of doing so. They couldn't understand why, if I bought a packet of tacks that I wanted to use at once, or a pound of starch that the wife was waiting for, I preferred to carry it home with me and have done with the

business.

“We would send it up at once,” they'd protest; “the man is going directly.”

“Now look here!” I said one day to one of them. “You mustn't go by appearances.” (He bowed with humility.) “I'm not so delicate as I might look; I'm thin, but most Australians are—I'm thin, but I'm wiry.” (He bowed again.) “I've been used to hard work” (they call “graft” work in England); “I've camped out all winter in a tent on a telegraph line in New Zealand; I've probably done more hard graft than any man in this village, and as for walking and carrying, I've tramped five hundred miles at a trip in the drought, across some of the driest and hottest country Out Back in Australia, and carried a heavy swag and a load of sorrow all the way.” (He bowed.) “And now,” I said, “can't you understand that I'm able and willing to carry home that quarter of a pound of borax? My wife is waiting for it; it won't hurt me. I'll get home sooner than your man can, and you can save him to send to a weaker customer. Now, be sensible; it will save you trouble, and save me trouble, and save up your man, and save my wife inconvenience. She'll want to argue with me if I go home without that borax—I promised to bring it home —don't make me break my word! What's the matter with the arrangement, anyway?”

He bowed and smiled in a scared sort of a way; my speech didn't seem to convey the ghost of an understanding to his mind; but he let me have the borax —or rather I got out of the shop with it before he pulled himself together.

There's a grocer just round the corner from where we live; he is newly started in business; his prices are reasonable, and it would be convenient for us to deal with him, but he is a white-haired, whey-faced, abject man with pinkish eyes, and it's too painful to go into his shop. We've been there twice, and I think that if we went a third time, or gave him an order, he'd collapse, and I'd have to gather him up from the floor. And the hand-rubbing, and the writhing, and the sickly smirk of him! The British shopkeeper's smile is enough to warn off a Bushman first thing. They straighten up pretty quick when they strike a bad debt.

I went to the draper's and got a pair of gloves as a present for the wife. They insisted on sending them, so I gave in, and told the draper to send them in a van. He bowed. I asked him to send them in the best and showiest vehicle he had, if he had more than one. He bowed, and said he would. And he did. I don't think the van belonged to him—he must have borrowed or hired it. Perhaps he bought it on the strength of a new customer.

But I had hopes then. I thought I detected, in the sending of the van, the

action of a sly, dry humorist—a “joker” or “hard case,” as we’d call him in the Bush; so I determined to cultivate that draper, and if possible get him to come up to my place some time of an evening, and help me to keep from feeling homesick. But I was mistaken and disappointed; he probably had less humour in him than any other man in the village.

It is cut-throat competition that does it—makes crawlers of beings who might have been men had they had the brains or courage to emigrate. These shopkeepers will do anything, short of crawling and grovelling at your feet, while they hope to gain your patronage, and while they think you’re safe; but let trouble come to your home—they are at you like crows round a dying sheep in the Bush, though the bill be but a few shillings. They have no souls, and have learned no mercy. They know no middle level; they cannot meet you as man to man, as in Australia; they must either crawl or bully. No Australian could help feeling a hearty contempt for the average British shopkeeper. In a village like this they do all in their power to overreach their rivals; they hate each other, and yet they are all informers amongst themselves. They will supply and cheat a customer for years, and the moment they think he is going down they stop credit, and inform their rivals of his trouble. If you have a dispute and close accounts with one of them, he will often take revenge by hinting doubts of your solvency to the others.

This is plain truth. But something more must be said in truth and justice. In the Bush—take your own town of Come-by-Chance, for instance; the shopkeepers have a hard enough job to pull through; they will dump your groceries down at the front door, and growl if you growl, and swear if you swear, and sometimes call you by your Christian name; but if you’re honestly hard-up, they’ll say, “Oh! come up to the store and get what you want, and settle up when you can.” But here in England, where people do not move about as in Australia (where the husband’s work, if he is a shearer or drover, might take him away five hundred or a thousand miles, and for a year); here in England they cannot trust, not the workman, but the respectable middle class, better class, well-to-do class, independent class, or whatever you like to call them. And why? Because of the curse of England—the ghastly struggle to “keep up appearances”—because, if the tradesman is not sharp, Mrs. So-and-so will very likely spend the money that So-and-so owes him on a stylish, useless piece of furniture, which she must have or burst, because Mrs. Somebodyelse has just bought one like it.

The houses and villas round here are very much like what you’d see at Mosman, North Sydney, or any other well-to-do Australian suburb. I can see little difference between the street I’m living in and the street I lived in in North Sydney. But outside we have fields and hedges in the place of

bare fences, brown paddocks, and dreary, monotonous, endless scrubs, as round about Come-by-Chance. This is a pretty place, and a healthy place, and a bright place all summer, and the well-to-do people ought to be happy; but I believe that they are the most miserable people on the face of God's earth. It's all on account of the struggle to keep up the appearance of being twice as well off as they are.

We'll suppose that the "better class people" are tradesmen's families, mechanics, and others, who have risen in the world. We'll lump those known as "well-to-do" and "independent" people together—we'd call 'em all the middle classes in Australia, but "middle class" is only a vulgar term used by ignorant colonial democracy and bloated aristocrats. I don't know anything about the aristocrats of this village; they are driven up to the station at the last moment in dog-carts or carriages, and ushered into a first-class carriage with as much celerity and sympathetic respect as if they were royal families, and that's about all you see of them.

About a hundred of the City men, who have their families down here, go up to London every morning and come home at night. They travel third-class, and there is much of a muchness between them. They don't talk—perhaps they can't. Ten men can travel for two hours in a train without one saying a word to another. If you try to talk to them, they read a paper. This is English reserve, or English boorishness, or English suspicion, or English ignorance—whatever you like to call it. If you try to talk to them, they treat you as if you were a swindler trying to get them to take shares in a rotten concern.

I can't say whether middle and upper class Englishmen are reserved because they are shy, or because, as Dooley says, they have nothing to say. Come to think of it, I think that Dooley is right. Englishmen know nothing beyond their own little selfish and paltry little commercial world, and they have the intelligence to know that they know nothing, therefore they keep their mouths shut. Maybe it is unconscious instinct which makes them do this. And perhaps it's an instinctive knowledge of their own world-ignorance which goads them to hector people who are in a lower station of life, and whom they suppose to be more ignorant than they are themselves, and so keep up some appearance of intellectual superiority. Possibly Englishmen are silent because, when they are not thinking money, they are either brooding over the fact that the world thinks them boorish, or keeping up their reputation for being reserved. However, there are plenty of exceptions in London—though I don't know how they got there.

Englishmen—younger sons or sons of families who have spent their money to keep up appearances—ne'er-do-wells—anyway, Englishmen who came out to Australia and drift into the Bush (provided they are not

old men), soon lose their reserve, and become grand fellows—humorous, sympathetic and open-handed—the best we have.

Our street is furnished partly on the time-payment system, and partly (and furtively) second-hand; so the furniture is either gimcrack or full of white ants. It is fashionable or genteel and uncomfortable, and most of it useless—plain comfortable furniture would cost less than half the price. The villa ladies are wearing out their lives (and souls, if they have any) in the ghastly struggle to “keep up appearances.” They talk of nothing but their servants. They never work themselves—only worry, whine, and lie, and grow more selfish every day—consequently they are frequently ill. They treat their servants like dogs—often stint and half-starve the girl who has to do the work, and therefore really needs the best, and most food, because every penny that can be “saved out of the servant” is needed to “keep up appearances.” Consequently it is hard to get servants here—the girls prefer to go into factories. One lady I know, a big, strong, childless, discontented woman, recently dismissed her servant because said servant refused to address her as “Mistress” and her husband as “Master,” instead of Mrs. Blank and Mr. Blank. Then the lady had to do her housework for three days, when she broke down; she has had the doctor ever since.

The servants, as far as my experience goes, are honest, healthy-minded, and rather more intelligent than their mistresses. I have talked to some of them! Yes, actually placed myself on a level with common servants. I suppose it's about the lowest-down thing I could do in this village. But it seems quite right and fashionable to talk about servants, to lie about them, and scandalize them behind their backs over four o'clock teas.

I've been introduced to the broad-minded intelligence of this village. There is an artist acquaintance of mine here—a black and white artist, cursed, as usual, with an idea that he can paint. He has no children, and makes a comfortable income, but his wife says that they must keep up appearances; so whenever they get a cheque the best part of it has to go for rubbish in the furnishing line. But that's neither here nor there. The other day he gave a private view of his pictures, and invited me to meet some intelligent “well-to-do” or independent people, who he said were broad-minded and unaffected—very “nice people” indeed. He said I'd be sure to like them; so I went. The visitors were a married couple, tall and thin; the husband wore a frock-coat and was very English. He told me that he understood that Australians were very unconventional in Australia; that was the only idea he seemed to have (if it was an idea). Whenever my friend put a picture on the easel the lady would clap her hands and exclaim—

“How jolly!” or “Isn't that jolly!” or “Oh, Edward! Isn't that jolly!”

Sometimes they'd both say it together.

My friend put up a picture called "Sad Autumn."

"Oh, isn't that jolly!"

He put up a picture labelled "The Death of Day."

"How jolly!"

He put up a picture of "A Village Churchyard in the Gloaming."

"Oh, isn't that jolly!"

If he'd had a picture of a disembowelled corpse, they'd have said it was jolly.

But neither the artist nor his wife could see it.

And I couldn't help wondering, "And are these of the people we fight for?"

There is a factory or two on the outskirts of the village—not staring and unsightly as in Australia, but back behind trees and hedges—and the work-people live in little rows and squares of cottages at the end of the village and "over the Common." The working people seem to me to be honest and healthy-minded, even humorous, and more intelligent than the well-to-do class. But I came across one who seemed to have less humour in him than the draper mentioned above. He is the village coachbuilder, a tall, thin man, with very hollow cheeks and thin red whiskers growing in the hollows. We struck up an acquaintance on the strength of the fact that an uncle of his had gone out to Australia in the early days and made money.

"And he came home, and paid all his debts, and went out again," said the coachbuilder, impressively.

I didn't seem impressed.

"He came a long way out of his track," I said.

"They respected him for it," said the coachbuilder severely.

I got a better opinion of creditors.

"And when he went back," said the coachbuilder triumphantly, "he took out nineteen relations with him!"

"How many?" I asked.

"Nineteen," said the coachbuilder.

I reckon I've got upwards of two hundred relatives in Australia, and if I make a pile in England I'll strongly advise them to stay where they are.

There's no getting away from the shopkeeping atmosphere in England. The village post and telegraph, savings' bank and money order office is in a toy and stationery shop, in a corner amongst the packages and shelves. Fancy this in Australia, where, in the smallest town, these offices, with the postmaster's residence attached, are in a substantial brick or stone building by themselves. But if the English public (especially those in London) will stand anything labelled "Company," there's no reason why they shouldn't

stand anything marked "Government." By the way, I haven't noticed any politics here. I suppose this village, like most of its kind, gets its politics, as well as its newspaper, fixed up for it in London.

Our postmaster has the soul of a shopkeeper, and shows you novelties when you call for letters. And strange to say (or is it strange?) while he and his wife are servile as shopkeepers, they are mighty independent in their official capacity. They change quickly and draw the line very plain. The wants of the village in the way of maids, situations, houses to let or sublet, or wanted, are pasted up in the post office window, in the advertiser's own writing, at the rate of sixpence a week. You can read the domestic and business troubles of the village between the lines of these advertisements. Villagers study that window with interest—it is their newspaper. But then, as most of the servants are related, some way or other, the private affairs of half the villa ladies are public property already.

We've got a maid (they call servants "maids" in England); she isn't trained. When she applied for the place she stated that her mother was a respectable woman. She is as light and graceful as a cow, and stubbornly honest. All English country working people are obstinately and aggressively honest. The man is "a honest working man," and the woman is "a respectable woman," or "a respectable married woman," which last fact is stated and repeated and reiterated in almost every neighbourly row or outside dispute, no matter what the disagreement is about.

Our servant starts first thing in the morning by scrubbing the middle of the kitchen floor hard. If she overhears us say anything which she considers funny she chuckles out loud. When visitors are in we often hear a loud guffaw from the pantry or kitchen. She says "Hey!" or "What-say?" but I like her, and would rather have her than a girl who has been trained—that is, bullied and stinted, and suspected, and watched, until she is forced to become deceitful and sly in her own defence.

Our girl has been greatly troubled lately on her father's account; he is a gardener; he has not been taking his food, and is falling away in consequence, I understand.

"He's gettin' so narrer, Mrs. Lawson," says Amy; "he's nearly as narrer as Mr. Lawson."

You know I'm rather thin.

There are plenty of young people here amongst the working-classes who have never been in London in their lives.

We haven't been troubled much by callers. I believe that when strangers settle down here people leave their cards or call on them, to see what they're like and what sort of furniture they've got in the house, and whether the wife has a tea-gown, a maid, and a tea service, and what the service and

the tea-gown are like; and to go out afterwards and tell their friends all they've found out or supposed. But I got an idea. I had some cheap curtains hung up to the front window, and that scared 'em. A few factory girls and eighteen-penny to half-crown a week slaveys go along our street sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, and when they catch sight of the curtains they squeak and giggle, and say—

“O—oh! Look at the penny-a-yard curtings!”

It's very interesting—shows how the minds of the middle class are poisoning those of the working people. But the worship of appearance is spreading its poison over Australian cities.

I notice that it's the fashion for the ladies down here to grab their skirts up from the front when they walk out in wet weather; in London they grab themselves behind. Englishwomen strike me as being, in nature and appearance, hard, unsympathetic, selfish and ungraceful.

I haven't seen the parson yet. The old doctor is a very aristocratic old gentleman, who, if a member of your family happens to die, regards you in the light of a murderer because you sent for the young doctor and not for him.

The young doctor is a grand young fellow, a Scot, prematurely grey, whose wife was a nurse, and who is steadily working up a practice here by dint of hard graft.

The landladies of the two leading hotels are elderly ladies of severe aspect, and one of them has a moustache. It's a slow process getting drunk here, they are so deliberate about serving you.

The publican of one of the little inns in the hedges has a face that would do for the portrait of John Bull, if it had any expression at all. He is short and as broad as he is long, and looms outside his little inn on Sunday afternoon, looking at the weather. He walks slowly into the middle of the road, with a movement as if he had clockwork inside him, to get a view of the sky all round. Then he comes back and slowly delivers his judgment on the weather in bull-calf tones. He looks as if he has never been a mile from the village in his life. He sells “Coider” by the jugful.

The station master is a shy man with a fresh complexion and side whiskers.

The sergeant in charge of the police station is a good fellow, and, if you know him, you can go up to the station after closing time and have a nightcap with him.

The barber and tobacconist is a little Cockney, who attends on gentlemen and gentlemen's families at their own 'omes and sells tobacco by the hounce.

The village policeman is a heavy-footed countryman in uniform, who

sees you home if you happen to have had a drop too much, and calls round next morning ostentatiously to ask “how the gentleman is?” but really to see if you have forgotten that you tipped him generously last night, and if so, to get another tip.

And that's about all at present, from yours truly.

A Long Way to Cork

THEY were spelling in the shade of a bush fence, or pile of cut scrub, or something, and Pat O'Brien had a place that ought've bin covered by his pants, or a patch; and it was in the sun with Pat's outlying regions. And Dave Regan had a burning glass. Whispered Dave to his mate lazily—

“I'll pop the glass onter Pat, Joe, an' when he jumps you jump too, an' yell ‘Snake!’ ”

“Uh-um,” murmured Joe, and he reached carelessly for a new axe handle, which he fingered abstractedly.

Joe rolled over very lazily on to his elbow, and applied the glass like a magnifying glass to a common print.

In a little while Pat got up like a nervous horse that had thought it was miles away from man, and alone, till suddenly yelled at. And his language was bad about bull-dog ants. But at the same time, almost, Joe jumped up, yelled “Snake!” and started to slash the bushes with the axe handle.

“Beggod, boys,” said Pat, “I'm bit!”

They were all up now.

“I'm bit, boys; an' where ye can't tie it!”

Joe and Dave took him, one on each side, and started to run him on the track to Government House; but they hadn't gone far when at the hurried suggestion of one of the others, and clamorous approval of the rest (there were four others), they threw Pat on his flat, and knelt and sat on him while Dave cut the place with his pocket-knife, and squeezed out as much blood as he could.

Then they ran him on again, only stopping once to take more of his blood, till they got to the huts.

The storekeeper was absent after his horse, so they walked Pat up and down while the super opened the store with the wood axe, and handed out two bottles of brandy.

They gave Pat a long pull, gave two fresh men a nip, who relieved the pacers, and walked Pat up and down with a spurt, while the rest had a nip to brace their nerves.

“It's a long way to Cork, boys,” said Pat. “It's a long way to Cork.”

They gave him another pull, and walked him up and down.

“I can feel it goin' through me like fire, boys,” he said. “I can feel it going through me like fire. Can't ye tie up me roomp somehow? Take a twist on a bit of fincin' wire or something.”

One of them picked up a piece of fencing wire, but dropped it hopelessly.

They gave him another pull, and walked him up and down. And every

time they walked him up and down the others had nips to keep up their spirits.

“I'm drowsin' down, boys,” he said, wearily. “I'm drowsin' down. Ah! boys, it's a pity to lose such a man.”

They roused him up, and walked him up and down before giving him another pull, but they had nips themselves to keep up to it.

“Ah! boys!” he said. “It's a long way to Cork.”

“So it seems,” said the super; but he got out a couple more bottles to be ready. He had some himself. They gave Pat another pull, and walked him up and down. The relief had pulls before they went in, and the relieved had pulls when they fell out.

And they walked him up and down.

They started one off on horseback to “Stiffners,” on the main road, to see if there was a doctor or snakebite expert there, and to bring back more spirits, in case they ran short. The super gave him two quid, but he never came back.

And they walked Pat up and down and did exactly as before, till they couldn't wake him, nor the super—nor themselves till next day.

Pat woke first, and thought, and remembered; then he roused Dave, and, staggering, walked *him* up and down.

“Dave,” he said (in conclusion). “Dave, me friend. Ye saved me life wid ye're pocket-knife, and soocked me blood. Here's a couple of quid for ye're sweetheart, me boy. An' there's wan of the same again whinever and any time ye ask for it.”

“Don't mention, Pat,” said Dave. “It was nothing. I'd do the same to yer any day.”

“I know ye would, me boy,” said Pat, and, the super being still unconscious, they lay down again, well within the home gums' shade, and slept like brothers.

The Ridiculous Family

EVERYTHING happened to the Mathews family, but Andy Page stuck to it all through, because he had—secretly and unsuspectedly—worshipped little Nelly Mathews, who died and became “Helen”; and because he was Andy Page. Andy stuck to trouble all his life, and trouble stuck to him.

There is something infinitely sad about the death of a grown-up daughter in the Bush, so we'll pass away from Helen's death and Andy's sorrow, that he shared with the people, and Andy's secret heart-bursting grief that no earthly people could share with him, and Andy's practical sympathy that was the more tender and touching for being “uncouth.”

Old Mathews drank to drown sorrow, which is the strongest swimmer in the world. They said that any one would have thought he'd have kept straight because of Helen—because of Nelly's death, I suppose they meant—which is a way people have of looking at things. Or, rather, of not looking at things.

Then Andy lent a hand. He finished ploughing the ten-acre paddock, and put in the crop, and shepherded old Mathews, and saddled up in the gloaming and followed him to Mudgee (or some wayside shanty, when he missed him there), and wrestled with him, or waited and bore with him with infinite patience until he got him home. And after a very bad and heart-breaking time of this kind, and in the dusk—or in the moonlight—an ungainly spook would haunt the grave that was

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
HELEN MATHEWS,
BORN FEBRUARY 10th, 1862,
AND
DEPARTED THIS LIFE ON THE
9th JUNE, A.D. 1885.

And the spook seemed to find comfort there, for after a while it would sit on a log by the cemetery fence, at a respectful distance from the grave, and calmly smoke, with eyes to the stars.

One time, when Andy was known to be out of work, the grave was found, on a Sunday visit, to have been carefully weeded round the mound, and the palisading had been given a coat of paint, by snatches between daylight and sunrise—or in the moonlight, or partly by candlelight, perhaps. There *were* signs of candle-grease—and a scare about ghosts. But Andy never touched the mound. The old caretaker (who fossicked in the

gullies in his spare time—which was mostly) said he'd fix that. He'd got a letter with a “note” an' no name, askin' him to do it. As to the rest, and the ghost, he only cocked his pipe and looked as if he knew as much about the ways of the living as he did about the doings of the dead.

Then one morning Mrs. Mathews couldn't, and didn't, get up, and this stunning event sobered and steadied Mathews, and he did his level best for all of them—as, indeed, he always had done when he wasn't drinking.

Andy made the best nurse of all of them. It isn't the comic man that makes the best clown, nor the solemn the best tragedian—whether on stage or page.

When Mrs. Mathews got well, Bob came home from shearing and halved his cheque with his mother, and went to town with the other half and the old man, to get a rig-out and presents. They got “glorious” together, and Bob fought for the old man (and was obliged to fight him afterwards, they said), and Andy could get neither of them out of Mudgee while the cheque lasted. And he couldn't get one of them more than a mile from the town while Bob's credit lasted. And Andy was obliged to fight them both, and in turns, before it ended; for he was the most obstinate galoot in Australia when doing what he considered “the right thing.”

Then, after a day or two, Bob kissed the girls, and his mother last; then shook hands with the rest and Andy, and then, at the very last, and safe in the saddle, he gave the old man's hand a hurried grip, gulped, and rode away for Out Back; and his pack-horse followed him. Bob loved the old man, though Jim was the Joseph. But they both and all the rest loved Jim. The old man blundered blindly and hurriedly round to the back of the house to see to something that wanted seeing to, and the dust hid Bob and his horses in the West.

The spook sought Nelly's grave that night; for Andy Page loved Bob better than them all, and felt “terrible” dull whenever he was gone.

Then drought, then rust in wheat, then smut, then the “ploorer,” of course; and, when all was gone, Andy went out with the old man and bullocked on clearing and tank-sinking contracts that would break the heart of a working bullock; and he drew no wages, so that the family might have full rations.

Then the glorious seasons when the prices went down to nothing—but there was more than plenty to eat, and clothes didn't matter much. And Andy came home—he had come to call Mathews' home—and went up in the afternoon to see how the wattles looked above the cemetery. And they were all in bloom.

The old people thought it would be the best thing to fix things up between Andy and Susan-the-Plain. Andy also thought it would be the

right thing, both to the family and the memory of Helen; for Susan was *her* sister, and seemed hopeless, not so much on account of her plainness and age, as because of her temper. But Susan thought Andy was too much of a “goat” altogether, and, when all was settled, she “chucked” him for an animal of another kind, and married a brute, after all, who wanted a woman to do a man's work for him. Andy had got his heart sort of indirectly set on her because of—well, that night, the night of Susan's marriage, a doleful spook haunted the cemetery and didn't smoke.

But Andy stuck to Susan all through the poor girl's life trouble with the other animal, which was several kinds of Hog, and the struggle was long and great and cruel.

Uncle Bob was killed riding home from the races (horse threw back its head and smashed his face) and a nephew was thrown while riding for a doctor for a dead man, and died next day; and Andy broke his favourite mare's heart riding to Mudgee for both of them, and nearly broke his own over it.

His brother's death sent old Mathews on the drink again, and this time, by way of variety, he fell down a diggers' hole on the Old Pipe Clay in the dark, on his way home. It was Andy who found him, of course— or, rather, Andy's dog. The old man was howling for them to open the door, and Andy heard him when the dog led him to the shaft. When they got him out and home, and when the doctor searched him, he found that his arm was broken close up to the joint, and his right ankle either badly sprained or fractured—two little matters that the old man began to notice, and mention, himself, when the gin worked off.

Then Mary—but we don't want to talk about that. No gentleman born and bred could have been more delicately and tactfully sympathetic and helpful than Andy was in that trouble.

Then, while the old man's arm and ankle and poor Mary's reputation slowly mended, came Jim, the dark blue-eyed and dark curly-haired and popular. Poor Jim had something wrong with the shape of his head, which was constantly sending him into trouble connected with cards, or dice, or two pennies—or about a horse. The business about the last horse was very bad, and they came and took Jim.

The old man went on grubbing round a stump, as if he was done with all things in this world now except the getting out of that stump. But the old woman (they were neither old in years) lay down on the rough bed—in her clothes, this time—and turned her face to the split-slab wall, which was lined with scrim and pasted over with old newspapers.

She turned from the wall for Andy, and for no one else.

“D—don't take it like that, Mrs. Mathews,” said Andy. “Yer know—yer

know ye're like a mother t' me." Then, with a burst: "An' yer might 'a' bin—an' I might 'a' bin yer son all right if I'd bin a different kinder cove."

She sat up and put both hands on his shoulders, and looked at him for a space.

"Andy," she said, "was it Helen?"

"Yes," said Andy.

"Poor Andy!" she said. "But, Andy; you *are* my son—the only son I've got now." Then, with a sudden and fearful change of expression that scared Andy: "Andy, you'd do anything for me, wouldn't you?—poor Nelly's heart-broken mother?"

"I'd do anything for you, Mrs. Mathews. I'd do anything for you that I'd do for—for Nelly."

"And for Jim, for our sakes—mine and poor dead Nelly's?"

"Y—yes, Mrs. Mathews."

"Then you are my son, just as much as if Nelly had lived and you had married her."

That night Andy Page walked down the gullies with his hat back and his face up, and a new light on it, like a lad who had just won the best girl in the world. But the pull or wrench was to come, as it generally comes, the day after the wedding, so to speak, when most men want an hour or so to themselves.

It was a question of proving an *alibi* in Jim's case, and so it came to pass that Andy stood up in Court at the next circuit, and told the first deliberate lie he had ever told in his life. Jim turned deathly, and one or two others shook in their shoes as Andy took the oath, for he seemed more deliberately awkward than usual, and fumbled with the Bible, while old Mathews grew corpse-like, and there was a blasphemous and furtive whisper that Andy had funk'd it. But Andy straightened himself, took up the book firmly, kissed it squarely, and told the lie—after swearing on the Holy Bible to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help him God!

And Andy's word got Jim off.

They slunk away from Andy's hopelessly staring eyes, as he stumbled dazedly out of Court, and let him go. He didn't go home to Mathews', nor yet to the spot that was sacred to the memory of Helen Mathews; but he rode round through dark gullies behind old Mt. Buckaroo, and went seven miles in an opposite direction to Home Rule, where he had struggled through a blank childhood and a terrible boyhood, and where his mother was buried. And she had been a good woman. Perhaps this was a case to take to his mother's grave.

So some men will do for the sake of a dead girl what they will not do for

any living soul on earth.

Jim was getting into more trouble, when, a few days later, Andy took him for a walk—past the cemetery, as it happened, and, at the end of the walk and talk, he put his arm round Jim's shoulders, and said—

“An' now, Jim, it's a fair thing. Take my advice and go Out Back, and stay there till Christmas.”

“I—I will,” blubbered Jim, who had broken down. “I—I'll go next week, Andy; I'd go to-morrow if I had a quid or two more to git a horse.”

“Go to-morrow then, Jim,” said Andy, and he pressed five dusty notes into Jim's hand. Jim still blubbered, but his fingers closed over the notes like the fingers of a schoolboy, who had been given a pocketknife to comfort him or keep him quiet.

“I will, Andy; I'll go to-morrow.” Then with a weak attempt to look Andy squarely in the face: “And I'll turn over a new leaf, Andy; I swear to God I will. Just you wait and see, Andy.”

“And you'll go to-morrow, Jim.”

“I'll go to-morrow, Andy, as true as there's a God above me.”

And he kept his word. He stole another horse, and started early.

They called, or sent for, and claimed Andy Page in all times of trouble—no matter what the trouble was; and forgot him, of course, in all scenes that aped festivity. Andy being wanted meant trouble with others, just as surely as it meant trouble for poor Jim (and, of course, his family) when any one, and no matter who it was, wanted to see Jim particularly. And Andy got into the way of starting when a message or call came from “home,” just as Jim would start at the gleam of a “mounted trooper's” cap.

And they blamed Andy for every misfortune. No matter what it was, the blame would be screwed, by the family mental twist, round on to Andy. It was Andy's blundering—who never blundered from the right thing; or it was Andy's “thick tongue”—who had a silent and “straight” one. If Andy hadn't done this; or if Andy hadn't done that. If Andy hadn't said this; or if Andy hadn't said that. If Andy hadn't told.

There is a gap in the catalogue of family troubles, for I was away from the district; but the first day of my return it was my misfortune to have to ride on to Mathews', which meant Andy, with the cheerful message that Bob had been thrown from his horse on the way home from his last shed; or rather, that both his horses and he had fallen into a gully, and one horse had broken his neck and the other her leg (and had to be shot), and Bob was lying more or less broken-up at the Halfway House, where his recovery would be doubtful.

I found Andy rigging a Spanish windlass over a shaft in Sapling Gully, above the farm, where one of the plough horses had fallen down in the

night. Old Mathews had just run home for tools, a pole, or fencing-wire, of something.

Billy Leonard, Mrs. Mathews' brother, arrived with me, having been sent for, and he was wild. He thought it was his horse he had lent Andy the week before, and had been stoking himself and boiling-over all the way, and, as is usual in such cases, he was not mollified to find that he had worked himself up for nothing.

"Look here, Andy Page!" he said, "send back my horse to-morrow. I can't breed horses to burst themselves for other people, and be let loose to fall down a shaft any night."

"But it isn't your horse, Mr. Leonard," said Andy.

"Don't you mind whose horse it is. You send it back to-night. You won't want it now, anyway, by the look of things."

"Well, Mr. Leonard," said Andy, plucking up, "I only borrowed it to help your own sister, anyway. You might think of that."

"Well, if that's the way you're going to talk to me, Andy Page," snarled Billy, "you can get your horse out yourself. An' look here, before you begin to talk to me, you can let me have the rest of that fiver I lent you. Send back my horse to-night, that's all!" and he rode off.

It struck Andy's face stoney, for he knew why the "fiver" had been borrowed, and where it went. But there was no help for it. I had to tell him about Bob.

Then Andy gave his head a despairing jerk, and his arm a great, impatient swing—the first time I remember him showing a sign of impatience, and he said to me, as if struck with a sudden idea—

"Look here, Harry! That family's gettin' redicklus!"

Then, as though momentarily stunned by the stupendous ingratitude of it all, he passed his hand across his sweaty, clayey brow, and added—

"An' it's lucky for me that I didn't marry inter it. I'll say that now."

But just here there was a great screaming and running about and wringing of helpless hands down at the house. Then Mary came running, screaming all the way up the gully. Andy seemed rooted to the spot, awaiting the worst in deadly calmness.

"Andy! Andy!!" she screamed, "father's just bin found unconscious in the middle of ther forty-acre paddock."

Andy turned slowly, as though turned by hypnotism, and, after a short helpless stare in the direction where, I knew, lay the little cemetery on the hillside, he swung back again and started running in the direction of the forty-acre paddock.

She had loved, and had always shielded and stuck up for her father.

I thought I might as well follow.

The world is a ridiculous family, but it's safe to follow the Andies—at a little distance.

His Mistake

THERE is one Chinaman the less in Australia by a mistake that was purely aboriginal. Perhaps he is missed in China. Ted Butler brings the account of the tragedy from Northern Queensland or somewhere.

The old shepherd had died, or got drunk, or got rats, or got the sack, or a legacy, or got sane, or chucked it, or got lost, or found, or a wife, or had cut his throat, or hanged himself, or got into Parliament or the peerage—anyway, anything had happened to him that can happen to an old shepherd or any other man in the bush, and he wasn't there.

Then a Chinaman came from nowhere, with nothing, apparently, save a suit of dungaree, basket boots and hat, and a smile that was three thousand years old. He looked as if he had fallen out of China last night, and had been blown all the way in a dust storm, and the cracked sweat and dust made him look more like an ancient Joss. He had no English, but understood the boss as new chum Chinamen always understand bosses, or as bosses can always make them understand.

“You want a job?”

“Yel,” said the Chinaman.

“Can you shepherd sheep?”

“Yel.”

“You saw that hut along the track, where there were some sheep in a yard?”

“Yel.”

“You go back there, and put the sheep out in the morning, and put them in at night.”

“Yel.”

“By and by I send you some ration.”

“Yel.”

“Well, stop yellin' and get.”

“Yel.”

“Get—go back.”

“Yel.” And China toiled and ploughed through the dust towards the hut.

Presently Billy, the black boy, came riding home.

“I say, Billy.”

“Yahs, boss.”

“Don't take the saddle off yet. I want you to take some tucker along to the Mile Hut, and give it to the new shepherd you'll see there. Go to the storekeeper, and he'll give you a bag of ration.”

“Yahs, boss.”

But in about three-quarters of an hour Billy was back, and he brought the rations back with him.

“Wotinel, now, Billy? Didn't you see the new shepherd?”

“No, boss.”

“Didn't you see anybody there at the hut?”

“No, boss.”

“—— it. Didn't you see a Chinaman there?”

“No, boss. What like it that phella?”

“X X X!——!!! Didn't you see a man—or a —— woman if you like? Didn't yer seen any double dash thing?”

“No, boss.” Then, as an afterthought, “I see it something. Yellow, like it dingo. Tail like it yarramin.” (A horse. John had his pigtail down and loose, and was dressing it when Billy happened.) “Talk it like a plurry cockatoo. Bin killit sheep, mine think it. I bin kill it!”

I suppose they buried the Chow—and the boss carefully gave Billy an elementary lesson on the Races of Man before another blew out of China.

A Child in the Dark, and a Foreign Father

NEW Year's Eve! A hot night in midsummer in the drought. It was so dark—with a smothering darkness—that even the low loom of the scrub-covered ridges, close at hand across the creek, was not to be seen. The sky was not clouded for rain, but with drought haze and the smoke of distant bush fires.

Down the hard road to the crossing at Pipeclay Creek sounded the footsteps of a man. Not the crunching steps of an English labourer, clod-hopping contentedly home; these sounded more like the footsteps of one pacing steadily to and fro, and thinking steadily and hopelessly—sorting out the past. Only the steps went on. A glimmer of white moleskin trousers and a suggestion of light-coloured tweed jacket, now and again, as if in the glimmer of a faint ghost light in the darkness.

The road ran along by the foot of a line of low ridges, or spurs, and, as he passed the gullies or gaps, he felt a breath of hotter air, like blasts from a furnace in the suffocating atmosphere. He followed a two-railed fence for a short distance, and turned in at a white batten gate. It seemed lighter now. There was a house, or, rather, a hut suggested, with whitewashed slab walls and a bark roof. He walked quietly round to the door of a detached kitchen, opened it softly, went in and struck a match. A candle stood, stuck in a blot of its own grease, on one end of the dresser. He lit the candle and looked round.

The walls of the kitchen were of split slabs, the roof box-bark, the floor clay, and there was a large clay-lined fireplace, the sides a dirty brown, and the back black. It had evidently never been whitewashed. There was a bed of about a week's ashes, and above it, suspended by a blackened hook and chain from a grimy cross-bar, hung a black bucket full of warm water. The man got a fork, explored the bucket, and found what he expected—a piece of raw corned-beef in water, which had gone off the boil before the meat had been heated through.

The kitchen was furnished with a pine table, a well-made flour bin, and a neat safe and side-board, or dresser—evidently the work of a carpenter. The top of the safe was dirty—covered with crumbs and grease and tea stains. On one corner lay a school exercise book, with a stone ink-bottle and a pen beside it. The book was open at a page written in the form of verse, in a woman's hand, and headed—

“Misunderstood.”

He took the edges of the book between his fingers and thumbs, and made to tear it, but, the cover being tough, and resisting the first savage tug, he

altered his mind, and put the book down. Then he turned to the table. There was a jumble of dirty crockery on one end, and on the other, set on a sheet of stained newspaper, the remains of a meal—a junk of badly-hacked bread, a basin of dripping (with the fat over the edges), and a tin of treacle. The treacle had run down the sides of the tin on to the paper. Knives, heavy with treacle, lay glued to the paper. There was a dish with some water, a rag, and a cup or two in it—evidently an attempt to wash-up.

The man took up a cup and pressed it hard between his palms, until it broke. Then he felt relieved. He gathered the fragments in one hand, took the candle, and stumbled out to where there was a dust-heap. Kicking a hole in the ashes, he dropped in the bits of broken crockery, and covered them. Then his anger blazed again. He walked quickly to the back door of the house, thrust the door open, and flung in, but a child's voice said from the dark—

“Is that you, father? Don't tread on me, father.”

The room was nearly as bare as the kitchen. There was a table, covered with cheap American oilcloth, and, on the other side, a sofa on which a straw mattress, a cloudy blanket, and a pillow without a slip had been thrown in a heap. On the floor, between the sofa and the table, lay a boy—child almost—on a similar mattress, with a cover of coarse sacking, and a bundle of dirty clothes for a pillow. A pale, thin-faced, dark-eyed boy.

“What are you doing here, sonny?” asked the father.

“Mother's bad again with her head. She says to tell you to come in quiet, and sleep on the sofa tonight. I started to wash up and clean up the kitchen, father, but I got sick.”

“Why, what is the matter with you, sonny?” His voice quickened, and he held the candle down to the child's face.

“Oh, nothing much, father. I felt sick, but I feel better now.”

“What have you been eating?”

“Nothing that I know of; I think it was the hot weather, father.”

The father spread the mattress, blew out the candle, and lay down in his clothes. After a while the boy began to toss restlessly.

“Oh, it's too hot, father,” he said. “I'm smothering.”

The father got up, lit the candle, took a corner of the newspaper-covered “scrim” lining that screened the cracks of the slab wall, and tore it away; then he propped open the door with a chair.

“Oh, that's better already, father,” said the boy.

The hut was three rooms long and one deep, with a verandah in front and a skillion, harness and tool room, about half the length, behind. The father opened the door of the next room softly, and propped that open, too. There was another boy on the sofa, younger than the first, but healthy and sturdy-

looking. He had nothing on him but a very dirty shirt, a patchwork quilt was slipping from under him, and most of it was on the floor; the boy and the pillow were nearly off, too.

The father fixed him as comfortably as possible, and put some chairs by the sofa to keep him from rolling off. He noticed that somebody had started to scrub this room, and left it. He listened at the door of the third room for a few moments to the breathing within; then he opened it and gently walked in. There was an old-fashioned four-poster cedar bedstead, a chest of drawers, and a baby's cradle made out of a gin-case. The woman was fast asleep. She was a big, strong, and healthy-looking woman, with dark hair and strong, square features. There was a plate, a knife and fork, and egg-shells, and a cup and saucer on the top of the chest of drawers; also two candles, one stuck in a mustard tin, and one in a pickle bottle, and a copy of *Ardath*.

He stepped out into the skillion, and lifted some harness on to its pegs from chaff-bags in the corner. Coming in again, he nearly stumbled over a bucket half-full of dirty water on the floor, with a scrubbing brush, some wet rags, and half a bar of yellow soap beside it. He put these things in the bucket, and carried it out. As he passed through the first room the sick boy said—

“I couldn't lift the saddle of the harness on to the peg, father. I had to leave the scrubbing to make some tea and cook some eggs for mother, and put baby to bed, and then I felt too bad to go on with the scrubbing—and I forgot about the bucket.”

“Did the baby have any tea, sonny?”

“Yes. I made her bread and milk, and she ate a big plateful. The calves are in the pen alright, and I fixed the gate. And I brought a load of wood this morning, father, before mother took bad.”

“You should not have done that. I told you not to. I could have done that on Sunday. Now, are you sure you didn't lift a log into the cart that was too heavy for you?”

“Quite sure, father. Oh, I'm plenty strong enough to put a load of wood on the cart.”

The father lay on his back on the sofa, with his hands behind his head, for a few minutes.

“Aren't you tired, father?” asked the boy.

“No, sonny, not very tired; you must try and go to sleep now,” and he reached across the table for the candle, and blew it out.

Presently the baby cried, and in a moment the mother's voice was heard.

“Nils! Nils! Are you there, Nils?”

“Yes, Emma.”

“Then for God's sake come and take this child away before she drives me mad! My head's splitting.”

The father went in to the child and presently returned for a cup of water.

“She only wanted a drink,” the boy heard him say to the mother.

“Well, didn't I tell you she wanted a drink? I've been calling for the last half-hour, with that child screaming, and not a soul to come near me, and me lying here helpless all day, and not a wink of sleep for two nights.”

“But, Emma, you were asleep when I came in.”

“How can you tell such infernal lies? I——. To think I'm chained to a man who can't say a word of truth! God help me! To have to lie night after night in the same bed with a liar!”

The child in the first room lay quaking with terror, dreading one of those cruel and shameful scenes which had made a hell of his childhood.

“Hush, Emma!” the man kept saying. “Do be reasonable. Think of the children. They'll hear us.”

“I don't care if they do. They'll know soon enough, God knows! I wish I was under the turf!”

“Emma, do be reasonable.”

“Reasonable! I——”

The child was crying again. The father came back to the first room, got something from his coat pocket, and took it in.

“Nils, are you quite mad, or do you want to drive me mad? Don't give the child that rattle! You must be either mad or a brute, and my nerves in this state. Haven't you got the slightest consideration for——”

“It's not a rattle, Emma; it's a doll.”

“There you go again! Flinging your money away on rubbish that'll be on the dust-heap to-morrow, and your poor wife slaving her finger-nails off for you in this wretched hole, and not a decent rag to her back. Me, your clever wife that ought to be——. Light those candles and bring me a wet towel for my head. I must read now, and try and compose my nerves, if I can.”

When the father returned to the first room, the boy was sitting up in bed, looking deathly white.

“Why, what's the matter, sonny?” said the father, bending over him, and putting a hand to his back.

“Nothing, father. I'll be all right directly. Don't you worry, father.”

“Where do you feel bad, sonny?”

“In my head and stomach, father; but I'll be all right d'rectly. I've often been that way.”

In a minute or two he was worse.

“For God's sake, Nils, take that boy into the kitchen, or somewhere,”

cried the woman, “or I'll go mad. It's enough to kill a horse. Do you want to drive me into a lunatic asylum?”

“Do you feel better now, sonny?” asked the father.

“Yes, ever so much better, father,” said the boy, white and weak. “I'll be all right in a minute, father.”

“You had best sleep on the sofa to-night, sonny. It's cooler there.”

“No, father, I'd rather stay here; it's much cooler now.”

The father fixed the bed as comfortably as he could, and, despite the boy's protest, put his own pillow under his head. Then he made a fire in the kitchen, and hung the kettle and a big billy of water over it. He was haunted by recollections of convulsions amongst the children while they were teething. He took off his boots, and was about to lie down again when the mother called—

“Nils, Nils, have you made a fire?”

“Yes, Emma.”

“Then for God's sake make me a cup of tea. I must have it after all this.”

He hurried up the kettle—she calling every few minutes to know if “that kettle was boiling yet.” He took her a cup of tea, and then a second. She said the tea was slush, and as sweet as syrup, and called for more, and hot water.

“How do you feel now, sonny?” he asked as he lay down on the sofa once more.

“Much better, father. You can put out the light now if you like.”

The father blew out the candle, and settled back again, still dressed, save for his coat, and presently the small, weak hand sought the hard, strong, horny, knotted one; and so they lay, as was customary with them. After a while the father leaned over a little and whispered—

“Asleep, sonny?”

“No, father.”

“Feel bad again?”

“No, father.”

Pause.

“What are you thinking about, sonny?”

“Nothing, father.”

“But what is it? What are you worrying about? Tell me.”

“Nothing, father, only—it'll be a good while yet before I grow up to be a man, won't it, father?”

The father lay silent and troubled for a few moments.

“Why do you ask me that question to-night, sonny? I thought you'd done with all that. You were always asking me that question when you were a child. You're getting too old for those foolish fancies now. Why have you

always had such a horror of growing up to be a man?"

"I don't know, father. I always had funny thoughts—you know, father. I used to think that I'd been a child once before, and grew up to be a man, and grew old and died."

"You're not well to-night, sonny—that's what's the matter. You're queer, sonny; it's a touch of sun—that's all. Now, try to go to sleep. You'll grow up to be a man, in spite of laying awake worrying about it. If you do, you'll be a man all the sooner."

Suddenly the mother called out—

"Can't you be quiet? What do you mean by talking at this hour of the night? Am I never to get another wink of sleep? Shut those doors, Nils, for God's sake, if you don't want to drive me mad—and make that boy hold his tongue!"

The father closed the doors.

"Better try to go to sleep now, sonny," he whispered, as he lay down again.

The father waited for some time, then, moving very softly, he lit the candle at the kitchen fire, put it where it shouldn't light the boy's face, and watched him. And the child knew he was watching him, and pretended to sleep, and, so pretending, he slept. And the old year died as many old years had died.

The father was up about four o'clock—he worked at his trade in a farming town about five miles away, and was struggling to make a farm and a home between jobs. He cooked bacon for breakfast, washed up the dishes and tidied the kitchen, gave the boys some bread and bacon fat, of which they were very fond, and told the eldest to take a cup of tea and some bread and milk to his mother and the baby when they woke.

The boy milked the three cows, set the milk, and heard his mother calling—

"Nils! Nils!"

"Yes, mother."

"Why didn't you answer when I called you? I've been calling here for the last three hours. Is your father gone out?"

"Yes, mother."

"Thank God! It's a relief to be rid of his everlasting growling. Bring me a cup of tea and the *Australian Journal*, and take this child out and dress her; she should have been up hours ago."

And so the New Year began.

A Romance of Three Huts

THE cloud of thick, brownish dust, that indicated the passing of the mail coach, paused opposite the claim, and the driver left a brown paper parcel on the corner post of the new-split, two-rail fence which had recently taken the place of the old, convict-built log fence round the Log Paddock. The Quiet Man took the parcel, and put it in a box, which held nails, candle ends, etc., under the bellows of the pick-pointing forge. Then he climbed to the top of the logged-up waste-heap, sat on the edge, and dropped his feet over the shaft into the suspended green-hide bucket, and took a grip of the rope, and his mate, taking a turn of the rope round a cross-piece on the whip-pole, lowered him to the bottom for his shift below.

“Now, I wonder what Tom got up by the coach,” reflected the man on top, with a lazy mental effort. “It was too light for groceries, and it can't be fancy goods.”

There were three huts on the siding of a spur of the ridge that came down to the corner of Log Paddock. One, a one-roomed bark hut, with the chimney and door in an end, stood down close to the road, within stone-throw of the claim. The other two were up the hill a bit, to right and left, the one on the left a two-roomed bark hut, the other had four rooms, a skillion, and a shed, and whitewashed slab walls, and was called a house—“Mrs. Foster's House,” or “Mrs. Foster's Place,” or, for short, “the Fosters'.” Mrs. Foster's husband and sons were away mostly, working with the drays—tank-sinking, dam-making, etc.—and her daughter was in service with the old land-grant family who owned Log Paddock—several thousands of acres of good, clear, level creek and river frontage land—and did nothing with it, while the selectors broke their backs and hearts trying to make farms in the barren ridges. Mrs. Foster was just a gaunt, practical bushwoman, who, in long years of hardship, drought and struggle, had lost the faculty of bothering about things. She kept some cows and fowls and sold eggs and butter, and assisted at bush confinements gratis. She worked hard always—it was a habit she couldn't break herself of; besides, there was nothing to rest for. She took the good, old, quiet *Australian Journal*—they had got into the habit of subscribing for it years and years before—and when it came she read it by snatches, between mending and patching, or over a lonely cup of tea, as if it were a less important part of her work, or duty, yet a part. She gave tramps their allowance of tucker, too, as a matter of course, as though she regarded them as details of ordinary bush life, in the ordinary bush day's work. And so they were.

The woman who lived in the two-roomed hut was quite a young

woman—thirty-two or thirty-three—and quite good-looking. She had in her grey eyes something that was past being haggard, and past being haunted, and past being contemptuous; an expression—if you might call it an expression, or the ghost of an expression—as if hope, love, terror, horror, remorse, hatred and ice-cold contempt for the world and all in it had all been there at one time, but years ago. I saw just such an expression once in the eyes of a girl-singer who was playing a harp and singing in a low pub in a sailors' bar in Genoa. The woman in the hut had a weak face, or a face that had been weak, with a curved-down mouth, but looking as if it had been chiselled down with hard cuts in hard stone. She had belonged to a family of publicans on the old Pipe-clay goldfield; had run away to Sydney with some one as a girl, and come back in two or three years with a sewing machine and a baby girl; had gone with the rush to Gulgong and other fields, keeping grimly to herself, and working as a dressmaker. The vicious cackle of women's tongues had died out with the years, other children had been allowed and encouraged to play with her little girl—now a sweet, gentle little thing of ten or twelve—and from being referred to viciously as “Mrs. Brent-as-she-calls-herself,” she came to be called Mrs. Brent by courtesy, then by custom, and now respectfully. The quiet influence of quiet, respectable men, who knew the world, had a lot to do in bringing this change about—they always treated her very respectfully. Mrs. Foster was her friend. They had been neighbours on Gulgong, too, where, one day, Mrs. Foster got a suspicion. Then she watched, and next day, after breakfast, and when Mrs. Brent's little girl had gone to school, she dropped on her unexpectedly with a length of dress material. Mrs. Brent hastily threw a sheet of newspaper over half a loaf of bread, a saucer of dripping, and a cup of milkless, sugarless tea on the table; but she was too late. She was making moleskin trousers for the stores at that time. Mrs. Foster was a woman of hard, practical kindness, and little or no tact, and she offended Mrs. Brent at once.

“What do you mean,” she demanded, “to come here and talk to me like that? What is it to you whether I had any breakfast or not? I don't know you! It's a new thing for a strange woman to come into a woman's house and insult her. Who are you, and what do you want?”

“I'm Mrs. Foster, and I was there when you were born, but you don't remember that. All I know is that you're starving yourself—you can't work on an empty stomach; no woman can. You'll break down. And there's your little girl——”

“She had an egg for her breakfast,” broke in Mrs. Brent passionately. “There's the shell in the fireplace if you don't believe me. If you think I'm a pauper to be—to be—But why! To think of the brazen impudence of it!”

she gasped. "Now you just get out of this house, whoever you are! There's the door!"

And so it was, but so there was Mrs. Foster, who had managed men in the D.T.'s and had nursed a mad woman in her time; and so, in two minutes, the door was shut, and the girl who had gone wrong was sobbing on the flat breast of the woman who had never got the chance.

They often sewed together, mostly in silence, and had a cup of tea together—sometimes at Mrs. Brent's hut and sometimes at Mrs. Foster's. I don't know whether Mrs. Brent told Mrs. Foster all about it, but most probably she did once, and was done with it. When they sat and worked together in silence the chances are that the younger woman brooded over the old wrong, and her relatives who were scattered, and from whom she had never heard "since it happened." It would, I think, be impossible to puzzle out what women like Mrs. Foster think about over their work. She was past hoping or fretting, and past complaining. There was nothing in the future, and there could have been very little brightness in the past. Yet she knitted her forehead, and seemed to be thinking deeply at times; but perhaps she was only considering the advisability of buying another yard or two of that stuff she got at the store in town.

The Quiet Man lived in the hut near the road, with his little boy of five or six. The Quiet Man's name was Tom Moore, and he had been a popular man on the goldfields. He married a girl at Gulgong about seven years before, and she died before they had their first serious quarrel. She died in child-birth. Mrs. Foster was a neighbour then; she nursed Mrs. Moore, took charge of the child, cooked Tom's meals, and saw that he ate them. He had been a quiet man ever since. There had been talk of him and Mrs. Brent when she was a girl and he little more than a boy, on the old Pipeclay diggings years ago; but he very seldom spoke to, and never of, her, and he treated her with the greatest respect. It was noticed that while other diggers gave her clothes to make and mend, he never did; but he saw that her water cask was kept filled, in dry weather, from the spring on the flat, and that a load of cut firewood was dumped at the back of the hut occasionally.

Log Paddock was nearly done, and there were fewer diggers than selectors in the vicinity. The children went to a small "provisional" school, over the ridges—where, by the way, little else than geography was provided, the teacher being well up in that branch, and no other.

Little Harry Moore went there occasionally, and was taken in strict and motherly custody, from the time he left his father's hut until he returned to it, by little Lily Brent. Mrs. Foster looked after little Harry's stomach, and the seats of his breeches, while the father was at work; and little Harry usually slept at her place while Tom was on night shift. The child knew her

as "Aunty Foster" all his life, and every male in the vicinity was "uncle" to him.

Now, along about this Christmas time, Aunty Foster got another suspicion. On one or two occasions Tom thanked her for certain repairs and additions to his son's wardrobe, which she couldn't remember—wasn't responsible for, in fact; and it puzzled her vaguely, but she was past bothering over riddles. But one day he thanked her very kindly for a new shirt for Harry, and insisted on paying for the material, anyhow; and she knew she hadn't made that shirt. And this, of course, puzzled her a bit. Then she said, "Oh, that's all right!"

Some days later Mrs. Brent fell ill, and Mrs. Foster nursed her for a day and a night. Early next morning Tom saw her hurrying across from Mrs. Brent's hut to her own, and stumbled hastily up the hill to cut her off—and seemed to have nothing to say to her when he stopped her. But Mrs. Foster understood him as he stood helplessly and purposelessly before her.

"She's much better, Tom," she said. "She's had a good sleep, and she'll be alright by to-morrow."

"Thank you, Mrs. Foster," said Tom, and retreated in confusion to his hut, where he let the chops burn, and started to put on his little boy's trousers back to front.

"Father," said Harry suddenly, "are you in love?"

"Wha'—what?" gasped Tom.

"Because," said Harry, "Lily Brent says that when people are in love they forget and do things wrong."

"Don't talk nonsense, sonny," said Tom, so the conversation closed.

Tom had always been extremely shy of his little boy, and avoided conversation, and they were strangers yet; but an incident was coming along that was to bring those two lonely hearts close together.

It was Christmas Eve, and Tom and his mate knocked off a few minutes before twelve at night. The hut and its shadow stood a dark patch in the bright moonlight. Tom went in softly and lit the candle. Little Harry was asleep—or seemed asleep. Tom changed his wet flannel and moleskins, and then opened the parcel he had brought with him. A woman's stocking hung to a nail at the head of the boy's bunk, and the sight of it gave Tom a pang; he thought at first that it was one of his wife's stockings, which had remained all this time unnoticed amongst his belongings, and which the boy had found; but, on second thoughts, he concluded that it must have been borrowed for the purpose from Mrs. Foster. Moving softly, Tom put the lollies, ball, stem of a jumping-jack and tin whistle in the stocking, and laid a *Chatterbox* and a popgun on the table close handy. He turned to see if he had missed anything, when the boy spoke suddenly, and Tom started

as if he had been shot. Little Harry was sitting up, his eyes wide open and bright, and his arms stretched out towards his father.

“Father! Father!” he cried. “Oh, I’m so glad you’re Santa Claus. I suspected it for such a long time.”

And the lonely man went down on his knees by the bunk, and the little arms went round his neck.

“Father,” said Harry presently, “why do you turn your face away? Why don’t you look at me?”

But the father couldn’t for a while. Presently he asked, in a strange voice—

“Where did you get the stocking, sonny?”

“From Mrs. Brent,” said Harry; “but I promised her not to tell.”

A thought struck Tom.

“Did Mrs. Brent make any clothes or things for you, Harry?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Harry. “And, father, she’s got an old portrait of you—same’s what we’ve got. I saw her looking at it one day—but I promised not to tell that either.”

Just then there was a step outside, and Tom opened the door, and there stood Mrs. Brent, who started, gasped, turned very white, and then flushed in the moonlight.

“Oh!” she gasped, “I—I—didn’t know you were home, and—and I just come to see if little Harry was alright.”

Tom suddenly stepped forward, took both her hands, and looked into her startled eyes. They stood so for a moment; then, as she felt, or fancied she felt, his hands loosen, she cried out, as though pleading for life.

“Tom—Tom! It happened so long ago, and I’d be a good wife to you; forgive me.”

And Tom took her to him.

And, one morning in the New Year, after the wash-up (and the claim panned out very well), the four of them went away in the coach, and for a long time after the dust cloud disappeared down the road, Mrs. Foster sat staring blindly at the pages of the *Australian Journal*.

Drifting Apart

I TOLD you how we took up a selection at Lahey's Creek, and how little Jim had convulsions on the road out, and Brighton's sister-in-law saved him; and about the hard struggle we had for years, and poor Mrs. Spicer, who was "past carin'," and died like a broken-down horse; and how I was lucky, got to be a squatter, and bought a brand-new, first-class double buggy for Mary—and how her brother James brought it as a surprise to Lahey's Creek. And before that I told you all about how I first met Mary at Haviland Station, and how we fell in love, courted, and got married. Ah, well! How the time goes by!

I had luck, and did well for three or four seasons running. I was always going to build a new brick-and-shingle house for Mary—bricks and shingles are cooler than slabs and iron—but that was one of the houses I never built—except in the air. I've lived on the bank of the creek, and the place looked about the same as ever—and about as dreary and lonely and God-forsaken. I didn't even get any more furniture, in a good many of 'em.

So we still lived in the old slab-and-bark house and Mary got tired of bothering me about it. I'd always say, "Wait till the new house is built." It was no home for a woman. I can see that now.

You remember how I was always talking about making a nice home for Mary, and giving her more of my time, and trying to make her life a little brighter when things brightened up. I tried to do it by taking her trips to Sydney whenever I could get her to go, leaving her brother James to look after the station. At first I'd send the black boy ahead with fresh horses, and we'd flash down in the buggy the hundred miles or so of glorious mountain and valley road to Wallerawang, leave the buggy and two horses there, and take the train over the Blue Mountains to the Big Smoke. Then again, when wool was up, I'd take berths in a sleeping carriage from Dubbo, and put up at the *Royal* in Sydney, and do the thing in great style. But Mary thought the sleeping carriage was unnecessary expense, and she didn't like stopping at an hotel. She was always anxious about me and the drink. She preferred some "cheap, quiet place." "A run of bad seasons might come along at any time, Joe," she said, "and then you'll be sorry for the money you throw away now."

I thought it was very unjust of her to talk of throwing away money when I was only trying to give her pleasure—but then women were always unjust and unreasonable.

"If we don't enjoy ourselves when we've got the chance, we never will," I said.

“We could do that just as well at home, Joe,” said Mary, “if you only knew—if you'd listen to me, and go the right way to work about it. Why can't you settle down in your own home, and make it bright, and be contented?”

“Well, what's the use of furniture, or a new house for that matter, when there's no one but Bushies to look at it?” I said. “We might just as well live in a tent. What's the use of burying ourselves in the blasted Bush altogether? We've got two pretty children, and you're good-looking yet, Mary, and it isn't as if we were an old man and woman.”

“I'm nearly twenty-seven,” said Mary. “I only thought of it to-day, and it came like a shock to me. I feel like an old woman.”

I'd learned enough of women not to argue with Mary while she was in that mood. The fact of the matter was that after the first trip or two she didn't seem to enjoy herself in the city. You see, she always insisted on taking the children with her. She couldn't bring herself to trust them at home with the girl, and I knew that if she did, she'd be worrying all the time, and spoil her pleasure and mine, and so we always took them with us. But they were an awful drag in the city. Mary wouldn't trust 'em with a strange woman or girl, except perhaps for a few hours when they were in bed, and we went to one of the theatres. So we always carted them round the town with us. I soon got tired of humping one or the other of 'em. But crossing the streets was the worst. It was bad enough with Mary when we were out alone. She would hang back when the crossing was clear, and suddenly make a start when there was a rush of traffic, and baulk as often as not, and sometimes turn and run back to the kerb from the middle of the street—me trying to hang on to her all the time—till I'd get rippin' wild, and go for her.

“Damn it all!” I said, “why can't you trust to me and come when I tell you? One would think I came out with the fixed intention of getting you run over, and getting rid of you.” And Mary would lose her temper, and say, “Ah, well, Joe, I sometimes think you do want to get rid of me, the way you go on,” or something like that, and our pleasure would be spoilt for the day. But with the children! What with one or the other of them always whimpering or crying, and Jim always yelling when we got into a tram, or 'bus, or boat, or into some place that he didn't trust, or when we reckoned we were lost, which was about every twenty minutes—and, what with Mary losing her temper every time I lost mine, there were times when I really wished in my heart I was on my own. . . . Ah, well, there came a day when I had my wish.

I forgot about the hard life in huts and camps in the Bush, and the bitter, heart-breaking struggle she'd shared with me since we were married, and

how she'd slaved and fought through the blazing drought on that wretched, lonely selection, in the first year, while I was away with the team most of the time—how she'd stuck to me through thick and thin. I only thought she was very irritable and selfish and unreasonable, and that she ought to be able to keep the children in better order. I believed that she had spoiled them. And I was wild to think how our holiday was being wasted.

After the first time or two, Mary didn't seem to enjoy the theatre. She told me one night, when we got a bit confidential, that the play had depressed her, and made her sad.

“How's that?” I asked.

“Well, Joe,” she said, “I don't want to hurt you, Joe, but, if you must know, I was thinking all the time of the past—of our own lives.”

That hurt me and made me wild. I'd been thinking, too, all the time I was watching the play, of life as it was, and my own dull, sordid, hopeless, monotonous life in particular. But I hadn't been thinking of hers. The truth seemed that we were getting on each other's nerves—we'd been too long together alone in the Bush; and it isn't good for a man and his wife to be too much alone. I at least had come to think that when Mary said unpleasant things she only did it to irritate me.

“What are you always raking up the past for?” I said. “Can't you have done with it? Ain't I doing my best to make you happy? What more do you want?”

“I want a good many little things, Joe,” said Mary.

We quarrelled then, but in the hard, cold, quiet, sarcastic way we'd got into lately—not the old short, fierce quarrel of other days, when we'd make it up, and love each other all the more afterwards. I don't know how much I hurt her, but I know she cut me to the heart sometimes, as a woman can cut a man.

Next evening I went out alone, and didn't get back to the hotel till after twelve. Mary was up, waiting; but she didn't say much, only that she had been afraid to go to bed. Next morning she asked me to stay in and watch the children while she went shopping, and bought the things she wanted to take home, and I did, and we made it up, and got along smoothly until after tea; then I wanted to go out, and Mary didn't want me to—she wanted me to sit on the balcony with her.

I remember she was very earnest about me staying in with her that evening, and if I hadn't been drinking the night before I would have stayed. I waited awhile, and then I got restless, and found I was out of tobacco.

“I will send out for it, Joe,” said Mary.

“What nonsense,” I said. “I'll run out and get it myself. I'm all right. I'll get some fruit, too, and chocolates, for the children. I'll only be a few

minutes.”

“Well, if you must go, you must,” she said, in the hard tone again.

“I’ll only be a few minutes, I tell you,” I said. “Don’t start the thing again, for God’s sake.”

“Well, promise me you won’t be more than a quarter of an hour,” said Mary, “and I’ll wait here for you. I don’t like being left alone in a place full of strange men.”

“That’s all right, Mary,” I said, and I stepped out for half an hour. I was restless as a hen that didn’t know where to lay. I wanted to walk, and was fond of the noise and bustle of the streets. They fascinated me, and dragged me out.

I didn’t get back to the hotel till daylight.

I hoped to find Mary asleep, and I went into the bedroom very softly. She was in bed, but she was awake. She took the thing so quietly that it made me uneasy. When an impulsive, determined little woman begins to take things very quietly, it’s time for the man to straighten up and look out. She didn’t even ask me where I’d been, and that made me more uneasy (I had a good yarn readied up), and when she spoke of a murder case in the *Herald* and asked me if I’d read the divorce case, where a wife sued her husband for drunkenness and adultery, I began to get scared. I wished she’d go for me, and have done with it, but she didn’t. At last, at breakfast, she said—

“I think we’ll go home to-day, Joe; we’ll take the evening train from Redfern. You can get any business done that you want to do by that time.”

And I thought so, too.

It was a miserable journey—one of the most dreary and miserable I ever made in my life. Both the children were peevish all the way. While there were other passengers in the carriage I couldn’t talk to Mary, and when we were alone she wouldn’t talk to me—except to answer yes and no.

The worst of it was that I didn’t know what she thought, or how much she suspected. I wondered whether she believed that I had deceived her, and that worried me a lot. I hadn’t been drinking much, and I came home sober that morning, so drink was no excuse for me being out all night. I thought once or twice that it would have been much better if I’d come home drunk, with a muddled yarn about meeting an old chum and having a glorious “auld-lang-syne” night at some club.

I was very attentive all the way. I got tea and cake and sandwiches at every refreshment room, and whatever fruit I could lay hands on, and nursed the children to sleep by turns; but it didn’t soften Mary. She wasn’t a child any longer. She only said, “Thank you, Joe,” and as I watched her face it seemed to grow harder and more set and obstinate.

“Mary,” I said at last, when we were going down the Great Zig-zag,

“suppose we get out at Wallerawang, and go up through Cudgegong? We can rest there for a day, and then go on to Gulgong, and see your sister and Dick, and stay there for a night perhaps.”

“If you like, Joe,” said Mary.

“You'll like to see Hilda, Mary, wouldn't you?”

“Yes, Joe,” she said, in the same cold, disinterested tone, “I would like to see her.”

The case seemed hopeless. I had first-class tickets through to Dubbo, and would have to get others for the Cudgegong (Mudgee) line; besides, the coach fares would be extra, and I thought Mary would rouse herself, and buck at the waste of money, but she didn't seem to mind that a bit. But Haviland cattle station was on the Cudgegong line, and it was at Haviland where I first met Mary. She was brought up there from a child, and I thought that the sight of the place would break her down, if anything would.

We changed trains at Wallerawang Junction at midnight, and passed the great Capertee Valley and Macdonald's Hole in the moonlight—a great basin in the mountains, where “Starlight” and the Marsdens used to ride, and hide sometimes for months together, in *Robbery Under Arms*, and where thousands of tourists will go some day. All along the Western line I saw old roads and tracks where I came droving as a boy, and old camps where I camped; and the ruins of one old Halfway House, dismal and haunted, in the heavy scrub, where my old chum Jack Barnes and I had a glorious spree one time; and Gerty—but never mind that; and lonely, deserted old roads, where I carried when I grew up, and often tramped beside the bullocks or horses, and spouted Gordon's poetry till it lifted me, and wished to God that I could write like that, or do something, or break away from the life that was driving me mad. And it all made me feel very dismal now and hopeless, and I hated the Bush worse than ever, and made up my mind to take Mary and the children out of it, just as soon as I could get rid of the station. I'd take the first reasonable offer that came.

Mary slept, or pretended to sleep, most of the time. and I kept the children quiet. I watched her face a good deal, and tried to persuade myself that she hadn't changed much since the days when I had courted her at Haviland; but somehow, Mary and the girl I got to love me years ago seemed very different. It seemed to me as if—well, as if I'd courted a girl and married a woman. But perhaps it was time and distance—or I might have changed most. I began to feel myself getting old (forty was very near), but it had never struck me that Mary would feel that way too.

We had breakfast at Rylstone. After that Mary talked a little, but still in a hard, cold way. She wondered how things were at home, and hoped it

would rain soon. She said the weather looked and smelt like the beginning of a drought. Hanging out blue lights, I thought. Then she'd be silent for miles, except to speak to the children; and then I got a suspicion that she was talking at me through them, and it made me wild, and I had a job to keep from breaking out. It was during that journey that I first began to wonder what my wife was thinking about, and to worry over it—to distrust her silence. I wished she'd cry, and then it struck me that I hadn't seen tears in Mary's eyes for God knows how long—and the thought of it hurt me a lot.

We had the carriage to ourselves after Dungaree, and Haviland was the next station. I wished we could have passed Haviland by moonlight, or in the evening, instead of the garish morning. I thought it would have been more likely to soften Mary. I'd rehearsed the business, half unconsciously, humbugging myself, as men will. I was going to be very silent, and look extra sad, and keep gazing out of the window, and never look at Mary, and try, if possible, to squeeze some suspicious moisture into my eyes, as we passed the place. But I felt by instinct that my barneying and pleading and bluffing and acting and humbugging days were past—also my bullying days. I couldn't work on Mary's feelings now like I used to. I knew, or thought I knew, that she saw through me, and felt that she knew I knew it. Most men's wives see through their husband's sooner or later, and when a wife does, it's time for a husband to drop his nonsense, and go straight. She'll know when he's sincere and when he's not—he needn't be afraid of that.

And so, the nearer we got to Haviland, the more helpless and unprepared I felt. But when the train swung round the horn of the crescent of hills in which Haviland lay there wasn't any need for acting. There was the old homestead, little changed, and as fair as it seemed in those far-away days, nearly eight years ago, when that lanky scamp, Joe Wilson, came hanging round after "Little 'Possum," who was far too good for the likes of him. There was the stable and buggy house that Jack Barnes and I built between shearings. There was the wide, brick-floored, vine-covered verandah where I first saw Mary; and there was the little green flat by the river where I stood up, that moonlight night, like a man, and thrashed big "Romany," the station hand, because he'd said something nasty about little Mary Brand—all the time she was sitting singing with the other girls under the verandah to amuse a new chum Jackeroo. And there, near the willows by the river, was the same old white, hardwood log where Mary and I sat in the moonlight next night, while all the rest were dancing in the big woolshed—when I made her understand how awfully fond of her I was. And there—

There was no need for humbugging now. The trouble was to swallow the

lumps in my throat, and keep back the warm gush of suspicious moisture that came to my eyes. Mary sat opposite, and I stole a glance at her. She was staring out with wide-opened eyes, and there were tears in them—and a scared look, I fancied for the moment. Then suddenly she turned from the window and looked at me, her eyes wide and brimming, and—well, it was the same little Mary, my sweetheart, after our first quarrel years ago.

I jumped up and sat down by her side, and put my arm round her; and she just put her arms round my neck and her head down on my chest, and cried till the children cried too, and little Jim interfered—he thought I was hurting his mother. Then Mary looked up and smiled. She comforted the children, and told them to kiss their father, and for the rest of the journey we talked of those old days, and at last Mary put her arms round my neck, and said—

“You never did deceive me, Joe, did you? I want you to swear that to me.”

“No, Mary,” I said, “I never did. I swear to God I never did!”

And God knew whether I had done so or not.

* * * * *

“You've got the scar on the bridge of your nose still,” said Mary, kissing it, “and”—as if she'd just noticed it for the first time—“why! your hair is greyer than ever,” and she pulled down my head, and her fingers began to go through my hair as in the days of old. And when we got to the hotel at Cudgegong, she made me have a bath and lie down on the bed and go to sleep. And when I awoke, late in the afternoon, she was sitting by my side, smoothing my hair.

James and Maggie

A JOE WILSON STORY

IT was a long time before we knew for certain that Mary's brother James was shook after Maggie Charlesworth, the girl from Wall's station. James always kept his business and his feelings to himself, if he had any—I suppose he had. Perhaps he felt as much as, or more than, the most of us, but hadn't the gift of expression, and felt and suffered more on that account—but that's got nothing to do with it.

Maggie was a sort of adopted daughter at Wall's, and took a great fancy to Mary, my wife, as all the girls and most of the women did. She used to ride over to our place two or three times on weekdays and always on Sunday afternoon. Mary and Maggie were great chums. Maggie was a big, fine-looking Bush girl—a rare lump of a girl. A regular tomboy, she used to be, they said, and chummy with every one, and they said she used to tuck her petticoats under her when she thought she was alone, and gallop through the Bush, riding man fashion. In fact, they said she never got used to the side-saddle.

Even Mary, a woman, and Maggie's friend, and James' sister, was never quite sure that there was anything between him and Maggie, though she joked about it and chaffed Maggie sometimes. She didn't chaff James, because she was his sister, and he was too sulky and short-tempered. If Maggie knew, she kept it to herself. She kept James' secret, and her own if she had one. She was very quick and witty, and could turn off anything with a laugh and a joke. Perhaps it was because Mary was James' sister that she didn't see the truth. Sisters don't know everything, any more than mothers do, or wives for that matter.

But I had my own opinions—suspicions first, and then certainties. “Take notice,” my father used to say, “take notice of little things”: and I inherited the faculty from him, and took notice. Maybe, as I grew up, and in after life, I took more notice of little things than was good for my comfort or peace of mind—but that's got nothing to do with it. I took notice of James. I noticed that when I happened to ride up to the homestead at an odd hour of the day, when James ought to be out on the run, and saw his horse in the yard and him pottering round—patching up hurdles or doing something that ought to be done by one of the men in the cool of the evening—it was a pretty sure sign that Maggie Charlesworth was down at the house. I noticed later on that James always had a new shed or bit of fencing on the way about the homestead; and when he stayed at home, and took a few

hours' spell at the shed or fence, I felt pretty certain that Maggie would be down to see Mary during the day. Mary would call him in to have a cup of tea, when she made one for herself and Maggie, and James would drink it grumpily and never say a word to Maggie, except "Ello, Maggie!" when he saw her, unless she spoke to him. She'd chaff him a bit sometimes, and he'd take it quietly—or sulkily, rather. He'd only talk about the drought and the rain, and station and Bush things, and only when he was asked about them. I've seen him squat and loll about the verandah all Sunday afternoon and for hours in the cool of a weekday evening, and never say a word to Maggie Charlesworth, or seem to take the slightest interest in her or what she was saying. James was one of these men who listen, or seem to listen, a great deal and think, or seem to think, a mighty lot.

And if I happened to pass Wall's and see James' horse hanging up there, and him squatting on his heels or leaning on a fence, smoking and yarning to young Billy Wall or one of the men, I'd know that Maggie Charlesworth was at home. But Billy Wall told me that he never heard James say a dozen words to Maggie, nor saw the slightest sign of spooning between them. James' idea of courting seemed to be to hover round and be within coo-ee, in case the girl made up her mind suddenly that she wanted him. But I noticed at home that he stuck about the verandah pretty close when Maggie was there and there happened to be another likely man hanging round.

But, Lord! with a character like James and a character like Maggie Charlesworth, you could never tell. They might have been courting all the time and meeting every other night or so, and kissing and hugging each other for hours, and no one any the wiser. You might as well watch, and try to fox an old hen to her nest in the bushes; though she cackles enough when the egg is laid and she's safe off the nest.

Well, it all came out by accident, as most things do. James was never much of a rider, but he managed to hold his own with the others—his obstinacy or pig-headedness helped him in that. He broke in his own horses, but he always did it when there was no one about the place, or else he took 'em away. There were other yards about the run, and James was at home at all the little out-of-the-way huts and selections about the district. Like most young fellows of his sort, he was touchy about his riding and one or two other little things. Some of the chaps used to make a joke about it, and say that James went away and got some one else to break in his horses, but I knew James, and didn't believe that for a moment. So when we saw him riding away, leading or driving a young horse, we didn't take any notice; but Mary was always relieved when he turned up without a broken neck or his shoulder put out.

Well, one day he picked up a filly cheap in the pound at Gulgong—a

likely-looking young thing, with blood in her, we could all see that. She was one of those spidery horses, with a hollow back, and looked as if she'd sag down if a big man got on her, till his feet rested on the ground. She was one of those shy, jumpy young things that suddenly sheer off sideways when they shy at anything, nearly as fast as they go ahead.

James let it drop that he didn't buy the filly for himself, but for some one else, but he wouldn't say who. You see, James was one of the sort that keep things to themselves. He'd make a mystery of little, unimportant things, and he often got me wild that way. I reckoned it was a sign of ignorance and a shallow, narrow mind.

Anyway, he wouldn't tell me whom he bought the filly for. He took her away once or twice, and perhaps he broke her in a bit early in the morning before any one was up and about. Well, one quiet Sunday morning he started down the creek, riding his own horse and leading the filly. He had a little black bundle, like a coat, strapped to the pommel of his saddle, and Mary's quick eye spotted it at once.

"Why, what's that you've got there on your saddle, James?" she said.

"Can't you mind your own business?" snarled James in a brotherly way. "Can't yer see it's me coat? You're always asking nonsensical questions."

"But you haven't got a black coat, James," said Mary, trying to get a close look. "When did you buy——"

But James swung off and rode away.

It puzzled Mary. Women do bother a lot about little things—and worry their husbands, too.

"That's funny," she said. "He could not have wanted one of my old skirts for anything! Why, I do believe he's had the infernal cheek to take my riding skirt to lend to some one. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Whoever in this world could he——"

She ran to see, but her riding skirt was safe.

"What are you raving about now?" I said. "He's bought a new coat, and he's making a bushranging mystery about it as usual—that's all it is."

"It wasn't a coat," said Mary, obstinately. "It was a dress."

I didn't bother arguing with her.

Everybody turned up that Sunday to dinner, or an hour or so afterwards—except James, and I supposed he had stayed to dinner somewhere. It was Bush fashion to drop into Sunday dinner anywhere—there was always plenty, rough as it was, and the women could wash a plate for a newcomer when somebody else was done. There was Dave Regan, the drover, and my old mate, Jack Barnes, and Andy Maculloch, an old droving chum of mine; and old Jim Bullock and Old Peter, station hands from Wall's; and little Jimmy Nowlett, the bullock-driver—he's just

brought up a load of fencing wire for Wall; and Ryan, the horse-breaker; and some women and girls who had driven over in spring carts.

We were all camped on the verandah after dinner, smoking and yarning, and some snoozing, others draining the big canvas water-bag dry while getting through the heat and over the dinner. Some one spoke of James and asked where he was, and that reminded Ryan of his buck-jumping experience, and he told it again. It was about a horse he broke in once for a Mrs. Murphy at Talbragar.

“I was passin' down by Mrs. Murphy's place one mornin',” said Ryan, “whin she says, ‘Good mornin', Mr. Ryan.’ ‘Good mornin', Mrs. Murphy,’ says I. ‘Would you ride the mare for me this mornin', Mr. Ryan,’ she says. ‘I'll ride the tail off her,’ I says. ‘All right,’ she says, ‘will you come in an' have a cup o' tay, an' ride the tail off her afterwards?’ ‘All right,’ I says, ‘I'll come in and have a cup o' tay, an' ride the tail off her afterwards.’ So I had the cup o' tay, an' thin I started down for the yard; I had a new pair of brogues on—nicely greased. So I got on the mare, an' she made three consecutive bucks. An' I made as many revolutions in the air. An' the last time I went up, I happened to look down, an' I saw the mare a quarter of a mile away. ‘Go it, you——!’ I says. ‘An' now for a wallop!’ ” (Long pause.) “I remembered no more till I woke up three days after in the Gulgong hospital.”

He'd scarcely finished when Mary jumped to her feet, and stared down the creek through the trees on the other side.

“Joe! Joe!” she screamed, “there's a horse bolting! There's a horse running away with a woman on the other side of the creek! Look! Look! There she is! Quick, Joe, quick, for God's sake! My God, she'll be thrown!”

We all jumped to our feet as if we'd been sitting on snakes, Mary singing out: “She'll be thrown! She'll be thrown!” all the-time. Sure enough there was a horse, with a woman on its back, galloping through the timber down on the other side of the creek; and she rode as if she'd go off at any moment.

Dave Regan and Andy Maculloch were on their horses and across the creek in a jiffy, to cut the other horse off from the heavy scrub, and I started to run, but the woman's horse swerved and ran down into the creek.

“Joe, Joe!” Mary screamed after me. “Run! Run! She'll be down in the creek! She'll be thrown in the creek! She's thr-o-wn!”

But she wasn't. The horse struggled up the steep bank on our side—the woman still clinging to the saddle—and made for the yard on the rise at the back of the house. Then she propped, and the woman went sprawling in the dust. We were all there in no time. It was James, with a riding skirt on; he had been riding the filly with a side-saddle. James was winded, but, by the

holy frost, he was wild! He didn't wait to unlock the waistband of his riding skirt; he tore hooks and eyes out, and got out of the skirt.

“Why, whatever have you been doing, James?” said Mary, as soon as she saw he wasn't hurt. “Why, that's Maggie Charlesworth's side-saddle—and that's her skirt! Where is she? Where did you leave her?”

James said: “Damn Maggie Charlesworth!” and then he went inside the house.

Maggie told us all about it afterwards. You see, when we broke a horse in to side-saddle, we used to hang a riding skirt from our belt or from a ring in the saddle, so that the horse would get used to the flapping of the skirt. Maggie lent James a skirt, and he hid it about the place. She wanted to ride the filly to the races at Coborrah on New Year's Day, and she met James by appointment at the old branding yard down the creek that Sunday to see if she could manage the filly. James shifted the side-saddle from Maggie's horse to the filly, and Maggie persuaded him to put the skirt on and get on the filly. Women will get commonsensible, practical men to make fools of themselves all over the world.

They were in the old yard, but James hadn't put up the rails yet, and the filly bolted with him. Now, as I told you, James wasn't used to side-saddle, and the skirt handicapped him a lot, so all he could do was to hold on like grim death and swear.

Oh, but he was wild that Sunday. He sat inside and sulked, till he could stand the three-cornered conversation of the chaps no longer; then he jumped up and came out on the verandah.

“Look here, Dave Regan,” he said, “I suppose you think it was all very funny?”

“Yes, James,” drawled Dave, “I do—an' that's a fact.”

“You're a —— fool,” said James, “and I wouldn't mind taking a fall out of you now!”

The other fellows shifted their grins inside of themselves quick, but Mary went for James red-hot and cooled him a bit. While he was getting it from her, some one sings out—

“Why, here comes Maggie Charlesworth!”

She was riding James' horse, on his saddle, but sideways, of course, and leading her own. As soon as she saw James she made for him, and held out both her hands, but he just scowled at her and jumped on his horse and rode away into the Bush.

“He'll come round,” says Dave Regan.

Mary took Maggie inside, and, after a bit, I went in, grinning, to share the laugh with them, but Mary grabbed me, and twisted me round, and ran me out.

“Get out, you great fool,” she hissed.

Maggie was crying, fit to break her heart.

Ah, well, but it's time to turn in. Some other time I'll tell you about how Mary fixed up things between James and Maggie; how we put on Dave Regan to pretend to make love to her, and how Dave got an unexpected black eye.

The Hairy Man

AS far back as I can remember, the yarn of the Hairy Man was told in the Blue Mountain district of New South Wales. It scared children coming home by bush tracks from school and boys out late after lost cows; and even grown bushmen, when going along a lonely track after sunset, would hold their backs hollow and whistle a tune when they suddenly heard a thud, thud of a kangaroo leaping off through the scrub. Other districts also had spooks and bogies—the escaped tiger, the ghost of the convict who had been done to death and buried in his irons; ghosts of men who had hanged themselves; the ghost of the hawker's wife whose husband had murdered her with a tomahawk in the lonely camp by the track; the ghost of the murdered bushman whose mate quietly stepped behind him as he sat reflecting over a pipe and broken in the back of his head with an axe, and afterwards burned the body between two logs; ghosts of victims whose murders had been avenged and of undiscovered murders that had been done right enough—all sorts and conditions of ghosts, none of them cheerful, most of them grimly original and characteristic of the weirdly, melancholy and aggressively lonely Australian bush. But the Hairy Man was permanent, and his country spread from the eastern slopes of the Great Dividing Range right out to the ends of the western spurs. He had been heard of and seen and described so often and by so many reliable liars, that most people agreed that there must be something. The most popular and enduring theory was that he was a gorilla, or an ourang-outang which had escaped from a menagerie long ago. He was also said to be a new kind of kangaroo, or the last of a species of Australian animals which hadn't been discovered yet. Anyway, in some places, he was regarded as a danger to children coming home from school, as were wild bullocks, snakes, and an occasional bushman in the D.T.'s. So now and then, when the yarn had a revival, search parties were organized, and went out with guns to find the Hairy Man, and to settle him and the question one way or the other. But they never found him.

Dave Regan, Jim Benley and Andy Page, bush mates, had taken a contract to clear and fence the ground for a new cemetery about three miles out of the thriving township of Mudgee-Budgee. Mudgee-Budgee had risen to the dignity of a three-pub town, and people were beginning to die. Up to now the casual and scarce corpses of Mudgee-Budgee or of Home Rule, a goldfield six miles to the west—the bushman who had been thrown from his horse or smashed against a tree while riding recklessly, as bushmen do, or the boozier who had died during a spree in hot weather—had to be taken

to the cemetery belonging to the farming town of Buckaroo, about nine miles east of Mudgee-Budgee. This meant a nine-mile, or, in the case of Home Rule, a fifteen-mile drag, which was a long-drawn-out agony in blazing hot, dusty weather, or even in the rain when the roads were boggy. The Buckaroo undertaker could only be induced to bring his hearse out two miles along the road to meet the corpse, which was carried so far in a drag, spring cart, or wagonette. This so detracted from the dignity of Mudgee-Budgee and Home Rule, that they agreed to get a cemetery between them, and Dave Regan got the contract to prepare the ground for corpse planting.

Dave and his mates camped in an old deserted slab and bark hut which happened to stand on the ground. It was a lonely place, which stood in a dark stringy-bark bush, the nearest house being the hut of a timber-getter and his family, about two miles along the track on the Home Rule side.

It was the day after Anniversary Day. Dave and Jim were patriots, and therefore were feeling very repentant and shaky. They had spent the day at the Buckaroo races, half the night in Buckaroo, and the other half in Home Rule, where the early closing law as regarded public houses was not stringent. They had enjoyed a good time; had betted and shouted away all their cash, as well as an advance drawn on the contract, had run up scores at all the pubs, and had been in several rows, and at least three fights. They weren't sure with whom, that was the trouble, but had a drink-lurid recollection of having got off their horses several times on the way home to fight each other. They were too sick to eat or to smoke yet; so they sat outside the hut with their nerves all unstrung and their imaginations therefore particularly active. Under these conditions, they so magnified the awful importance of the unknown and the nightmare portions of the prior night, that they felt very dismal and hopeless indeed. Dave had a haunting idea, which grew at last to be a sickening conviction, that he had insulted and had wanted to fight the big squatter of the district, from whom he had the promise of a big fencing contract. Jim had a smothering recollection of a row with the leading Mudgee-Budgee storekeeper, who gave them credit. And so they swore off drink—they were going to chuck it for good. Each was firmly resolved this time. But they said nothing about it to each other. They had sworn off mutually so often that the thing had become boresome. But the worst of it was that they had broken the bottle with the morning reviver, and had nothing to straighten up on, and their nerves were not in a fit state to allow of their going to Mudgee-Budgee at the risk of hearing some new and awful truths of last night's doings, and they hadn't the courage to ask Andy to go. They were very contrite and gentle towards him with their “Yes, Andy,” and “No, Andy,” and “No, thank you, Andy,” when he fried chops and made coffee for them. The day before they had

both sworn to him—solemnly, affectionately, and at last impatiently, and even angrily—that they wouldn't get drunk, that they wouldn't bet, that they wouldn't draw a penny on the contract, that they'd buy a week's provisions first thing, that they'd bring the things home with them on their horses, and that they'd come home early. And now—they'd spent his money as well as their own! Andy made no remarks and asked no questions when they woke at midday; and they took his silence in a chastened spirit.

Andy Page was a patriot and a democrat, too, the most earnest of the three; but he was as obstinately teetotal as he was honest and truthful. Dave was the head of the party, but Andy was the father. Andy had, on several occasions, gone into town with Dave and Jim on pay nights—to look after them, to fight for them if necessary, and to get them home, if possible, when they'd had enough. It was a thankless job, but Andy was loved by his mates, who nevertheless, when drunk, even wanted to fight him when he stood out against “one more drink for the last.” He was as strong physically, as well as morally, as the two put together; and was respected even by the publican whom he abused for serving his mates when they'd had enough. But the last spree but one had disgusted Andy. He swore he'd never go into town with them again, and like most simple-minded, honest, good-natured fellows whose ideas come slowly, who are slow at arriving at decisions (and whose decisions are nearly invariably right), when he'd once made up his mind nothing short of a severe shock of earthquake could move him. So he stayed at home on Anniversary Day, and washed and mended his clothes.

Dave and Jim were still moping wretchedly about the hut when, towards the middle of the afternoon, an angel came along on horseback. It was Jack Jones from Mudgee-Budgee, a drinking mate of theirs, a bush-telegraph joker, and the ne'er-do-well of the district. He hung up his shy, spidery filly under a shed at the back of the hut.

“I thought you chaps would be feeling shaky,” he said, “and I've been feeling as lonely and dismal as a bandicoot on a burnt ridge, so I thought I'd come out. I've brought a flask of whisky.”

Never were two souls more grateful. Bush mate-ship is a grand thing, drunk or sober.

Andy promptly took charge of the whisky, and proceeded to dole out judicious doses at decent intervals.

Jack, who was a sandy-complexioned young fellow with the expression of a born humorist, had some news.

“You know Corny George?” They had heard of him. He was an old Cornishman who split shingles and palings in the Black Range, and lived

alone in a hut in a dark gully under the shadow of Dead Man's Gap.

"He went in to Buckaroo to the police station yesterday," said Jack Jones, "in a very bad state. He swore he'd seen the Hairy Man."

"The watter?"

"Yes, the Hairy Man. He swore that the Hairy Man had come down to his hut the night before last, just after dark, and tried to break in. The Hairy Man stayed about the hut all night, trying to pull the slabs off the walls, and get the bark off the roof, and didn't go away till daylight. Corny says he fired at him two or three times, through the cracks, with his old shot gun, but the Hairy Man didn't take any notice. The old chap was pretty shaky on it."

"Drink, I s'pose," grunted Andy contemptuously.

"No, it wasn't drink. They reckoned he'd been 'hatting' it too long. They've got him at the police station."

"What did he say the Hairy Man was like?" asked Jim Bentley.

"Oh, the usual thing," said Jack. "'Bout as tall as a man and twice as broad, arms nearly as long as himself, big wide mouth with grinning teeth—and covered all over with red hair."

"Why, that's just what my uncle said he was like," exclaimed Andy Page, suddenly taking great interest in the conversation. He was passing in with some firewood to stick under a pot in which he was boiling a piece of salt beef; but he stood stock still and stared at Jim Bentley, with the blank, breathless expression of a man who has just heard astounding news.

"Did your uncle see the Hairy Man, Andy?" inquired Dave Regan feebly. He felt too sick to take much interest.

"Yes," said Andy, staring at Jack with great earnestness. "Didn't I tell you? He was drivin' home up the pass to Dead Man's Gap, where he lived then, and he seen the Hairy Man, bundlin' off among the rocks."

Andy paused impressively, and stared at Jack.

"And what did your uncle do, Andy?" asked Jack, with a jerky little cough.

"He stood up in the cart and hammered into the horse, and galloped it all the way home, full-bat up to the door; then he jumped down, leaving the cart and horse standing there, and went in and lay down on the bed, and wouldn't speak to anybody for two hours."

"How long?" asked Jim, still feebly.

"Two hours," said Andy earnestly, as he went in with the firewood.

Jack Jones proposed "a bit of a stroll"; he said it would do them good. He felt an irresistible inclination to giggle, and wished to get out of the hearing of Andy, whom he respected. As they slouched along the track there was an incident which proved the state of their nerves. A big brown snake

whipped across the dusty path into a heap of dead boughs. They stared at each other for a full minute, then Jack summoned courage to ask—

“Did you chaps see that snake?”

“Yes,” and so it was all right. Then they put a match to the boughs, and stood round with long sticks till the snake came out.

They went back to the hut, and managed a cup of coffee. Presently they got on to ghost and Hairy Man yarns again.

“That was God's truth,” said Jack, “that yarn I told you about what happened to me going up Dead Man's Pass. It was just as I told you. I was driving slowly up in that little old spring cart of mine, when something—I don't know what it was—made me look behind, and there was a woman walking along behind the cart with her hands on the tail-board. It was just above the spot where the hawker's wife was murdered. She was dressed in black, and had black hair, and her face was dead white. At first I thought that it was some woman who wanted a lift, or a chap in woman's clothes playing the ghost, so I pulled up. And when I looked round again she was gone. I thought she'd crouched under the cart, so I whipped up the horse and then looked round again, but there was nothing there. Then I reckon I drove home as fast as Andy's uncle did. You needn't believe me unless you like.”

“Thunderstorm coming,” said Dave, sniffing and looking round the corner to the east. “I thought this weather would bring something.”

“My oath,” said Jim, “a regular old-man storm, too.”

The big, blue-black bank of storm cloud rose bodily from the east, and was right overhead and sweeping down the sunset in a very few minutes. Then the lightning blazed out, and swallowed up daylight as well as darkness. But it was not a rain storm—it was the biggest hail storm ever experienced in that district. Orchards and vineyards were stripped, and many were ruined. Some said there were stones as big as hen's eggs; some said the storm lasted over an hour, and some said more—but the time was probably half or three-quarters of an hour. Hail lay feet deep in the old diggers' holes for a fortnight after. The mates half expected the hail to come through the roof of the hut.

Just as the storm began to hold up a little, they heard a louder pattering outside, and a bang at the door. The door was of hardwood boards with wide cracks; Andy rose to open it, but squinted through a crack first. Then he snatched the big crowbar from the corner, dug the foot of it into the earth floor, and jammed the pointed head under a cross piece of the door; he did the same with a smaller crowbar, and looked wildly round for more material for a barricade.

“What are you doing? Who is it, Andy?” wildly cried the others.

"It's the Hairy Man!" gasped Andy.

They quickly got to the door and squinted through the cracks. One squint was sufficient. It was the Hairy Man right enough. He was about as tall as an ordinary man, but seemed twice as broad across the shoulders. He had long arms, and was covered with hair, face and all. He had a big, ugly mouth, and wild, bloodshot eyes. So they helped Andy to barricade the door.

There was another bang at the door. A cart rattled past, a woman screamed, and the cart went on at an increased pace. There was a shot-gun hanging on the wall, loaded—Andy had left it loaded to save ammunition the last time he'd been out kangaroo shooting. Andy, like most slow-thinking men, often did desperate things in a crisis. He snatched down the gun, stepped back a pace or two, aimed at the door low down, and fired. He doesn't know why he aimed low down—except that it "was too much like shooting at a man." They heard a howl, and the thing, whatever it was, running off. Then they barricaded the door some more ere they scanned the door planking and found that about half the charge had gone through.

"The powder must have got damp," said Andy. "I'll put in a double charge to make sure," and he re-loaded the gun with trembling hands. The other three bumped their heads over the whisky. They can't say for certain how they got through that night or what they said or did. The first idea was to get out of there and run to Mudgee-Budgee, but they were reluctant to leave their fort. "Who'd go out and reconnoitre?" "Besides," said Jack Jones, "we're safer here, and the thing's gone, whatever it was. What would they think of us if we went into town with a yarn about a Hairy Man?" He had heard his horse breaking away, and didn't care to take the chance of being chased on foot.

About an hour later they heard a horse galloping past, and, looking through the cracks, saw a boy riding towards Mudgee-Budgee.

"It's young Foley," said Jack, "the son of that old timber-getter that's just taken up a selection along the road near Home Rule."

"I wonder what's up?" said Andy. "Perhaps the Hairy Man's been there. We ought to go along and help."

"They can take care of themselves," said Jack hurriedly. "They're close to Home Rule, and can get plenty of help. The boy wouldn't ride to Mudgee-Budgee if there was anything wrong."

The moon had risen full. Some two or three hours later they saw Mahoney, the mounted constable, and the young doctor from Buckaroo, ride past towards Home Rule.

"There's something up, right enough," said Jim Bentley.

Later on, about daybreak, Andy was sitting obstinately on guard, with the

gun across his knees and the others dozing on the bunks (and waking now and then with jerks), when Constable Mahoney rode up to the door and knocked a business knock that brought them all to their feet.

Andy asked him to come in, and placed a stool for him, but he didn't see it. He looked round the hut.

"Whose fowlin' piece is that?" he asked.

"It's—it's mine," said Andy.

Mahoney took the gun up and examined it.

"Is this fowlin' piece loaded?" he asked.

"Yes," said Andy, "it is."

"Now, listen to me, boys," said the constable. "Was the fowlin' piece discharged last night?"

"Yes," said Andy, "it was."

"What's up? What have we done?" asked Jim Bentley, desperately.

"Done?" shouted Mahoney. "Done? Why, you've filled old Foley's legs with kangaroo shot. That's what you've done! Do you know what that is?"

"No," said Jack Jones. He was thinking hard.

"It's manslaughter!" roared Mahoney. "That's the meanin' of it!"

They explained what had happened as far as they were able. Now, Mahoney had a weakness for the boys, and a keen sense of humour—outside himself.

"Best come along with me," he said.

Andy had a stiff Sunday sac suit, of chocolate colour, and a starched white shirt and collar, which he kept in a gin case. He always put them all on when anything happened. On this occasion he fastened his braces over his waistcoat, and didn't notice it until he had gone some distance along the road.

There was great excitement at Foley's shanty—women and children crying, and neighbours hanging round.

Foley was lying on his face on a stretcher, while the young doctor was taking shot from the hairiest leg that Regan and Co. had ever seen on man or beast. The doctor said, afterwards, that some of the shot had only flattened inside the outer skin, and that others had a covering of hair twisted round them. When Foley was turned round to give his "dispositions," as Mahoney called them, they saw that he had enough hair on his chest to stuff a set of buggy cushions. He had red whiskers all over his face, rusty-red, spikey hair all over his head, and a big mouth and bloodshot eyes. He was the hairiest and ugliest man in the district.

His language was hardly understandable, partly because of the excitement he was still labouring under, and partly because of his peculiar shade of brogue. Where Mahoney said "shtone" Foley would say

“stawn”—a brogue with a drawl which sounded ridiculous in an angry man. He drawled most over his oaths.

It seems that he was splitting fencing timber down “beyant the new cimitry,” when the storm came on. He thought it would be the usual warm thunderstorm, and it was too far to run home. He didn't want to get wet, so he took his clothes off, and put them in a hollow log till the storm should be past. Then the lightning played round his tools—the cross-cut saw, axe, wedges, etc.—and he had to get away from there. He didn't bargain for “thim blanky hail-sta-w-n-s.” “It's a wonder I wasn't scalped and drilled full of hawls.” He thought of the hut, and made for it, but they wouldn't let him in. Then he suddenly saw some women in a tilt cart comin' round a bend in the road, and saw no chance of getting out of sight—there was a clearing round the hut, and so he banged at the door again. “I thawt the wimmin would stop.”

“Whoy did ye think that?” asked Mahoney. “What would they shtop for?”

“How th' hell was I to know?—curiosity, I suppose. They welted into their old hawse, an', as I turned to look after thim, the murderin' villains inside shot a gun at me. I got back to me clawthes, an' dressed somehow. Some one will have to pay for it. I'll be laid up on me back for six weeks.”

The young doctor excused himself, and went out for a few minutes. Mahoney winked at Regan and party—a wink you could hear—and it comforted them mightily. When they went out they saw the doctor hanging to a sapling, some distance from the hut. He swung with his back to the sapling, and slid to the ground, his legs stretched out in front of him, He said he would be all right presently.

The thing was fixed up, but the young doctor wanted badly to have the case brought into court. He said it would cheer up the district for years, and add ten years to the life of the oldest inhabitant.

The Strangers' Friend

SOBER, honest, steady and kindly men have too little place in our short-story literature. They are not “romantic” enough—not humorous enough—they are not “picturesque.” Yet the grandest of them all has lived for ages in one of the best short stories ever written, for longer than we know—in old Chinese Bibles perhaps—and he'll live till the end of human troubles. We do not know his station and condition; we do not know his religion, except it be the religion of mateship.

He was not a “Christian” as the name is understood by us, for Christ had not been born. We don't even know his name; I can't think of him as a fat or stout man, or a rich man; not even as a man who was moderately well off. Dickens thinks that he was lank and lean, and found it hard to live. I picture him as a silent, grave, earnest man, with very, very sad eyes. Perhaps he had dealt in myrrh and spicery from Gilead, and, being honest and unworldly, had fallen amongst thieves himself, and lost all he had. No doubt he had his troubles too. It is certain he was a sober and honest man, and it is equally certain that he was well known on the roads to Jericho, and known for more than one act of kindness, else the host of that old inn wouldn't have trusted him so readily, as it is inferred he did. For: “And whatsoe'er thou spendest more, when I return I will repay thee.”

And there was a certain Nazarene about whom we know so much and so little, and Whose teaching we preach so widely and practise so narrowly, Who was so touched by this little story about the man from Samaria that He told it wherever He could, to the multitude and in high places; saying: “Go thou and do likewise.” And certain men have been doing likewise ever since.

For a certain man from anywhere, call him Biljim, journeying out to Hungerford, leaves a sick mate at the Half-way Pub. (A man need only be sick, or a stranger in distress, to be a “mate” in this case.) And Biljim gives the boss of the shanty a couple of quid, and says: “You stick to the poor—, an' fix him up; an' if it's anything more, I'll pay yer when I come back after shearin'.”

And so they pass on: the man from Samaria, with his patched and dusty gown, his sand-worn sandals, and his patient ass, journeying down to Jericho; and the man from anywhere, with his hack and pack-horse “trav'lin' ” out to Hungerford and beyond; with but two thousand years between them, and little else in the matter of climate or character.

It may be heroic for a drunkard to do a brave deed, and save lives, as drunkards often do. It is certainly picturesque, but there is such a thing as

Dutch courage. It may be noble, and it is romantic and picturesque, for a scamp to do a deed of self-sacrifice, but there is generally little to lose, even with life, and there is vanity—and there is a character to be regained. It may be generous, even noble, for a drunkard to stick to another through thick and thin, but there is the bond, or the sympathy, of the craving for drink—and there is such a thing as maudlin sentiment. How much greater it is for a sober man to stick to a drunkard! But it is neither picturesque nor romantic. How much greater is it for an honest man to stick to a scamp! But it is not picturesque nor romantic enough for most writers.

One of the beauties of human nature is the fulfilment of its duty to the stranger. “The stranger within thy gates.” In all civilized lands, and in many uncivilized ones, the stranger's presence is sacred. “The stranger's hand to the stranger yet” may be all very well, but there is the bond of the sympathy of exile—the sort of roving clannishness about it. Nowhere is the duty to the stranger more willingly and more eagerly performed, nor his presence held more sacred, than in places where the folk have never been fifty miles from their birthplace.

A humorous side of the stranger question appeared in California of half a century ago, when so many were strangers that all were familiar: “Now, look yar, stranger.”

Australia is the land of strangers, as were the Western States of America. I met Out Back, once upon a time, a man they called the Strangers' Friend. I met him in Bourke last, and his name was, say, Jimmy Noland. He was a stout, nuggety man, in clean white “moles,” crimson shirt, and red neck-handkerchief with white spots; and he wore belt and bowyangs. He had a square face of severe expression that might have been cut out of a block of wood. He had something of the appearance of a better-class and serious bricklayer's labourer; or, better still, a man in charge of the coaching stables of earlier days; or, still better, a man who, by sheer force of hard work and dogged honesty, had risen to be manager or foreman of a small station or something Out Back.

He used to come into the pub on the main road, or the township, for his half-yearly spree, and, though he seemed to drink level with everybody, he never got really drunk. He took the spree seriously, as he took everything else far too seriously to enjoy it, you'd think. The spree seemed a religious rite with him, and he, as a shouter, was something sacred to the drunks to whom drinking was religion all the time. First he'd shout (sternly) for all he found on the verandah and in the bar, and the drinks would be taken in solemn silence. Then he'd shout again, rounding-up any stragglers he might have missed (or who might have missed him) and any dead-drunks he could wake and get on their feet. Then he'd demand of the boss, or barman,

in a tone that admitted of no nonsense or frivolity—

“Enny wimmin here?”

“Yes.”

“Take ennythin’?”

“Yes. The cook, and ther's a washerwoman round at the back.”

“Wotter they take?”

Being told, he'd presently go round to the back with a couple of glasses. But he was never known to stay and do any fooling round there. He'd arrange, though, to have an extra pair of moleskins, shirt, neckerchief, handkerchief and pair of socks washed against the end of his spree, and pay well for them. Not that he couldn't or wouldn't wash for himself, but he thought it his duty “to pay the wimmin for doin' what they was made for doin', an' pay 'em well.”

Then, after another shout or two all round, he'd look up the stranger.

The stranger's only qualifications need be that he should be fairly decent, a stranger, and hard-up or sick.

“I'm the Strangers' Friend,” said Jimmy, severely. “The fellers as knows can battle around for their bloomin' selves, but I'll look after the stranger.”

If the stranger was ragged, Jimmy would shout him a new shirt, pair of trousers, and maybe a pair of boots, at the store; and he'd shout him drinks, but see that he didn't take too much. He'd arrange for the stranger's bed and tucker, and find out the stranger's name and where he came from and the places he'd been in, and he'd yarn with the stranger about those places, no matter where they were. And he'd talk to the stranger about the back-country, and its old times, and its future, or its chances—and the stranger's chances, too. And if the stranger got confidential or maudlin on the verandah after sunset, he'd comfort or check the stranger with some blunt philosophy which might sound brutal in cities. If he knew of a place where there was a chance of a job, on the back track, he'd fix up a swag, water-bag and tucker for the stranger, and start him on the track with full directions that sounded like a stiff lecture from a magistrate. And if he had a commission to take a new hand back to his station, he'd be happy; happier still if he had a commission to take two, for then he would look up a second likely stranger and fix him up, and take them both back with him at the end of his spree, when he would appear exactly the same as when he started it.

Jimmy's boss was one of the best-hearted squatters west the Darling. He was a small squatter, but he *was* a squatter, not a bank, syndicate nor manager. Jimmy was said to be the real boss, as far as station work went, by virtue of his long years of service, his capacity for hard work and his obstinate honesty. About sundown he'd come over to the “travellers'

” (strangers') hut, put his head in at the door, and demand, in the tone of a boss who would take no nonsense—

“Enny trav'ler here?”

One or two new chums or green hands might start to their feet, expecting to be ordered off the station; but some one would answer: “Yes.”

“Then come up an' git yer tea.”

After tea—

“You chaps got enny tobaccer?”

And he'd hand out a stick to be divided amongst them.

It was said that a great part of his wages went on strangers. But they said he was never so happy as when he caught a sick traveller at the hut. Jimmy would cross-examine him at length and with apparent severity—as if it were the stranger's fault—and then he'd get out his patent medicines. In the same tone, with a note of shocked decency, he'd ask a man if that was the only pair of trousers he had to go on the track with; and then he'd proceed to look him up an other pair.

But no one, not even his nearest friend, if he had one in the squatter, could accuse Jimmy of having the faintest streak of sentiment, poetry or romance in his soul. They said that the cult of the stranger was a mania with Jimmy—a curious branch of insanity. The stranger was to him something sacred, and his duty to the stranger was a religious rite, without a suggestion of reward, whether here or in the Hereafter. But, perhaps, long years ago, when women, or a woman, was to Jimmy something more than a being to be paid for doing what she was made for doing, he, a stranger himself, and sick in body, and heart-sick, in a strange land, had been found by another Strangers' Friend who stuck to him. And the memory of it had stuck to Jimmy all his life.

The only explanation he was ever reported to have given was that once—and it must have been in a weak moment—when remonstrated with for squandering time and money over a “waster,” he said—

“Ah, well, poor beggar, some day, when he's in a better fix, he might go and do something for s'mother pore chap as he drops across.”

It was in the drought of '91, that broke almost with the new year in '92. Jack Mitchell and I were “carrying swags” west from the Darling in hopes of “stragglers” to shear, and one morning we started from a place that begins with “G,” making for a place that ought to begin with “Z,” and, after an hour or so, we noticed, by the age of the wheel tracks, that we'd taken the wet weather and much longer track to the next Government tank. We decided to strike across the awful lignum flats, or dry marshes, to the right track, and got lost, of course; and it was late in the day when we struck the track—or rather when we didn't. We stumbled on a private tank

in the lignum, where there were still a few buckets of water, and, under the alleged shade of three stunted mulga saplings, we found two green hands, slight young Sydney jackeroos, in the remains of tailor-made suits, with one small water-bag between them, and the smallest of "stage" swags. They had good lace-up boots, I noticed; but it takes a long time for boots to wear out on those soft, dusty tracks. One man was knocked up and very ill, and more sick with the horror of his condition in such a country; and his mate was nearly as bad, what with the scare of his mate's condition and out-back "stage fright." It was boiling hot, with a smoky, smothering drought-sky over the awful, dry lignum swamps.

"Now, this would be a job for Mark Tapley, Harry," said Mitchell. "But neither of us is built for the character, and I don't know what we can do just yet. We can't carry him on to the tank nor back to the shanty; besides, they're all drunk there, from the boss down, and the missus has got her hands full. Best camp and boil the billy, anyhow, and see how he gets on; and then one of us can go back and see what can be done. Some horsemen might come along in the meantime."

The tank was just off the dry weather track, with a little track of its own, and the jackeroos had struck it more by new chum luck (which is akin to the drunk's luck) than by directions. We kept an ear out for the sound of wheels or of horses' feet, and now and then one of us would go out of the lignum on to the track, and look up and down it; and, at last, just as Mitchell and I were deciding that one of us should leave his swag and walk right back to the shanty, we suddenly heard the click-clack of wheel-hubs quite close, and saw two horses' heads and the head and shoulders of the driver over a corner of the dry lignum. I started forward, and was about to call out when Mitchell said: "Never mind, Harry, he's coming into the tank." As the turn-out came round I saw it was a four-wheeled trap, with a spring stretcher on the load, and a mattress rolled up in sackcloth on top of it. I glanced at Mitchell, and saw one of his strange, faint grins on his face.

"What is it, Jack?" I asked.

"It's Jimmy Noland," he said, "and without a stranger. Jimmy's in luck to-day" (and with a cluck, as if it were a mild sort of joke), "and he don't know it yet."

It was Jimmy, and he'd been into the "township" for a temporary supply of necessaries for the station. (By the mattress we reckoned that a kid, or a death, was expected out there.)

Jimmy got down, took a bucket that was slung under the tailboard, and, seeing something peculiar about us, he came over.

"What's up here?" he demanded, in the tone of a boss whose men have gone on strike, or left off work without warning.

We told him as much as we knew, and that the man seemed very bad. Then, for the first time, I saw what might be likened to the shadow of a smile of satisfaction on Jimmy Noland's face. But the next instant his face was severe, and I thought I was mistaken.

"Here!" he said to me, as if I were one of his hands, and he had an urgent appointment elsewhere. "Here!" he said, handing me the bucket, "water my horses while I go and see what's up with the man."

He went over and squatted down by the sick man's side.

I'd finished watering the horses when he came back. "That's right," he said. "Now, help me shift some of these boxes over, and get the mattresses out in the side of the trap. I'll cover the soft 'un with the baggin', and you'd best roll a swag out on it, for it's for some one at the station and it mustn't get dirty. . . . Now come and help us lift the man on. . . . Not that way, I tell yer. Lift him this way—I never seed such orkard men in me life."

And so we got the sick man on to the mattress in the trap.

"Chuck up yer swags," he said to us, "and jab yer trotters (step out), for it's too hot an' heavy for the horses to take all on yer."

We tramped on ahead, or beside the trap, to escape the dust. It was a long, smothering, hot stretch, and we had to stop now and again to attend to the sick man; and at last we struck one of the long gutters that ran the water into the Government tank, and presently, round a bend in the track, the tank-heap loomed before us on the open plain like a mountain against the afterglow.

While Jimmy was watering his horses at the long troughs, Mitchell went, with the billy, into the little galvanized iron pumping-engine room, where the tank-keeper (an old sailor) was, and when he came out I saw, by the half-moon, a decided grin on his face.

"What now, Jack?" I asked.

"Jimmy's luck's in for the day, Harry, and no mistake," said Mitchell. "There's a man there with a bad leg!"

"Wot's that about a bad leg?" demanded Jimmy, whose sharp ears caught the last words.

Jack told him.

"Where's his mate?" growled Jimmy.

"Left him at the border Saturday week, and he's been crawling back ever since," said Mitchell. "Making for the hospital at Bourke. Says he was bit by a dog a couple of years ago. His leg looks a sight."

The station was not far away, but on a branch track of its own, an anbranch track, in fact; and Jimmy had told us we'd better come on to the station and have a good tuck-out, and one of us, at least, would get a cut at the "stragglers." So presently we started again, the man with the leg sitting

on the trap's seat beside Jimmy, and Jimmy smoking, and with a look of stolid satisfaction on his face, talking to the man with the leg about the various bad legs he had known, and now and then grunting an inquiry over his shoulder to his other patient in the body of the trap.

Mitchell asked Jimmy who the fancy mattresses were for, and he said they were for a stranger. "Man or woman?" asked Mitchell.

"Dunno yit," grunted Jimmy. "It ain't come yet."

They said at the station that four strangers at one time was Jimmy's record, but one or two said it wasn't.

I think that that old Jericho track, where so many men fell amongst thieves and were left sore, hurt, and like to die, would have been right into Jimmy's hands.

And, come to think of it, none of them "rightly knew" Jimmy's real name, or where he came from. Jimmy said "Somewheres."

But when he dies the boys will have a good headstone, if they have to bring it all the way from Sydney, and on it they'll have chiselled the words—

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY OF
JIMMY NOLAND
THE STRANGERS' FRIEND.

And underneath, if the advice of one prevails—

"Go thou and do likewise."

And men shall do likewise until the Great Strangers' Friend calls them.

Mateship

THE grandest stories ever written were the stories of two men. That holds good up to our times, from Sidney Carton and Charles Darnay to Tennessee's Partner and Tennessee.

I can always see Sidney Carton mounting the scaffold to the guillotine, his hands tied behind, a dreamy, far-away expression in his eyes; his hair bound back in its ribband, much more carefully than was usual with him; himself clothed more tidily than was usual with him, because he was supposed to be the man for the sake of whose wife and little girl he was about to die. Poor Sidney was a drunkard, and perhaps that is why some of us are drawn to him all the more.

And Tennessee's Partner at the Court of Judge Lynch: "An' I answers you fair and square, Jedge, as between man and man, 'What should a man know about his partner?'" And Tennessee's Partner knew all.

And Tennessee's Partner, with his donkey Jenny and cart, and rough coffin, in the shadow of the trees, after the lynching. He didn't want to hurry the gentlemen at all. "But if yer quite done with Tennessee, my partner thar"—And the last glimpse of Tennessee, the grave filled up—the grave in the little digger's vegetable garden, I've seen them in Australia—Tennessee sitting on the foot of the mound, wiping his face with his red bandana handkerchief.

They used to say I was influenced by Bret Harte. I hope so. I read "Tennessee's Partner" and the other stories when I was about thirteen, and Dickens a little later on. Bret Harte died near to where I lived in England, by the way.

Tennessee forgave his partner the greatest wrong that one man can do another; and that's one thing that mateship can do.

The man who hasn't a male mate is a lonely man indeed, or a strange man, though he have a wife and family. I believe there are few such men. If the mate isn't here, he is somewhere else in the world, or perhaps he may be dead.

Marcus Clarke speaks of a recaptured convict being asked where his mate was, in a tone as if a mate were something a convict was born with—like a mole, for instance. When I was on the track alone for a stretch, I was always asked where my mate was, or if I had a mate.

* * * * *

And so it is, from "Boko Bill" (bottle-ho!) and "Three-Pea Ginger," of Red Rock Lane, up or down—or up and down—to Percy and Harold who

fraternize at the Union Club. Bill gets “pinched” for shifting cases from a cart, or something of that sort, and Ginger, who is “pretty swift with the three-pea,” but never rises above a little safe “thieving” or paltry swindling, and is, therefore, never likely to need serious “outside” assistance, works for Bill for all he is worth. For a good deal more than he is worth, in fact. But in spite of the positive and unanimous testimony of “Frowsy Sal” (one time “The Red Streak”), Bill's “piece,” “Ginger,” “The Red Rover,” “One-Eyed Kate,” “Stousher,” “Pincher,” and as many other equally respectable and well-known ladies and gentlemen as the Court will listen to, Bill goes up for a “sixer.”

Ginger's work doesn't end here. Others are “pinched” and sent up, and they take messages into Bill, and arrange with certain prisoners who are “on tobacco” to help Bill, and be helped themselves when they come out. Poor Pincher being pinched, Sal says to him: “If yer do get fixed, Pincher, tell Bill I'm stickin'.”

Presently the word goes round that Frowsy Sal is stickin' ter Boko Bill, and is received, for the most part, with blasphemous incredulity by the “talent.” But Sal cooks in third-rate public-houses, and washes and works hard to keep the kid, the room, and the “sticks,” and have a few shillings for Bill against he comes out, and she keeps “the blokes” out of her kitchen. Which facts are commented on with yet further wondering blasphemy, into which creeps a note almost of reverence.

So Ginger, being Bill's cobber, is deputed to send round the hat to help Sal, because Sal is sticking to Bill. It is a furtive hat, but the money comes in, and so Ginger sticks to Bill through Sal. The money is from thievish hearts and thievish hands; but the hearts o' men are there all the same.

Ginger, by the way, gets two black eyes, and a blue, swollen nose, from a bigger “bloke,” in an argument concerning Sal, and is hurt about it. But wait till Bill comes out!

Hearts o' men are kind to Sal in other places. The warder inside the gaol gate lays a kindly hand on her shoulder, and says, “Come along, my girl.” But Sal has no use for sympathy, and little for kindness. “Blarst their eyes!” she says. “They can always ketch and gaol better men than themselves. If it wasn't for the likes of poor Bill they'd have to go to work themselves, from the Guv'nor down, blarst 'em!”

* * * * *

Let's have a look where Bill is, and, though I might seem to be on branch tracks from my subject, the red thread is running all through.

If you go in “under the Government,” and not as a visitor, you might be the Duke of All-That-Is, and yet little Cooney, who is finishing a sentence

for breakin' 'n' enterin', and is "on tobacco," is a greater man than you. Because he is on tobacco, which is worth twice its weight in gold in gaol, and can lend bits to his mates.

In gaol the initiated help the awkward newcomers all they can. There is much sympathy and practical human kindness cramped and cooped up in gaol. A good-conduct prisoner with a "billet"—say, warder or pantry-man in the hospital or observation ward, or cook or assistant in some position which enables him to move about—will often risk his billet, food and comfort (aye and extra punishment) in order to smuggle tobacco to a prisoner whom he never met outside, and is never likely to meet again. And this is often done at the instance of the prisoner's mate. Mateship again!

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True mateship looks for no limelight. They say that self-preservation is the strongest instinct of mankind; it may come with the last gasp, but I think the preservation of the life or liberty of a mate—man or woman—is the first and strongest. It is the instinct that irresistibly impels a thirsty, parched man, out on the burning sands, to pour the last drop of water down the throat of a dying mate, where none save the sun or moon or stars may see. And the sun, moon and stars do not write to the newspapers. To give a weaker "partner" the last sup of coffee, or bite of boiled beans and bacon, on the snow wastes of Alaska, when the rim of the sun only touches the rim of the south at noon. To give up the only vacant place in the boats at sea, and die that perhaps most dreaded of all deaths—the death by drowning in mid-ocean.

And the simple heroes of common life! They come down to us from a certain Samaritan who journeyed down to Jericho one time, and pass—mostly through Dickens in my case. Kit Nubbles, the uncouth champion of Little Nell! The world is full of Kits, and this is one of the reasons why the world lasts. Young John Chivery, turnkey at the Marshalsea, who loved Little Dorrit! There was never a gentleman in all his family, he said; but he stood, in the end, the greatest gentleman in that book. All the others had something to gain—either money, fame, or a woman's love; but he had nothing. Mark Tapley, poor Tom Pinch, and simple Jo Gargery, Cap'n Cuttle, and—and Newman Noggs. Newman Noggs, the drink-ruined scarecrow and money-lender's drudge, wiping little Kate Nickleby's eyes with something that might have been his handkerchief, but looked like a duster, and risking his very bread to fight for her afterwards. Newman was a gentleman once, they said, and kept his dogs. I think he was a gentleman yet. And little Snagsby, the mild and the hopelessly henpecked, with his

little cough of deference behind his hand, and his furtive half-crown for a case of distress.

The creed of mateship embraces an old mate's wife, sons and daughters. "Yes, I'll lend you the money, Jack; don't mention it—your father an' me was mates on the diggings long before you was thought of, my boy." Or, simply: "I'm an old mate of your father's."

Mateship extends to an old absent mate's new mates and friends; as with the present generation of Bush mates: "Why!"—with a surprised and joyful oath, and a mighty clout on back or shoulder—"Did *you* know Bill? Comeanavadrink!!" And, when you get confidential: "You don't happen to be stiff, do you? Don't be frightened to say so! There's always a quid or two there for any of blanky old Bill's friends as is hard up!" (Bill is still young, by the way.) And the mighty burst of joyous profanity when two Bush mates meet after a separation of some years!

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Visiting an old mate in the hospital! The broad grins! Bill wasn't used to being fixed up like that in the old days, with pretty nurses, in caps and uniforms, gliding round him. But there was a woman——

Bill-o'-th'-Bush being dead, Jim and mates bury him, and Jim blubbers and is unashamed. Later it is Jim's sad duty to take round the hat and gather in the quids for poor Bill's missus and kids. And Jim sticks to them, and helps them all he can; though Bill's missus always hated Jim like poison, and Jim "could never stand her."

In ordinary cases, when a man or woman is in a hole—and the man need not be a saint, nor the woman any better than she ought to be, either—the hat is started round with bad swear words of unnecessary vehemence, lest some —— might cherish a suspicion that there is any —— sentiment behind it at all. "Chuck in half a quid and give the poor —— a show!"

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Another kind of case—a little story of two men who went up and down in the world. One mate went up because Fortune took a fancy to him, and he didn't discredit Fortune; the other went down because he drank, and Luck forbore to camp by his fire. In later years the pair came together, and the mate who was up gave the mate who was down a billet in his business in town, and bore with him with boundless patience, and took him back time and again. And it came to pass that one day the mate who was down saved the life of the little girl of the mate who was up. Forthwith, the mate who was down rolled up his swag and took the track, without even giving the mate who was up a chance to try and thank him. He felt he couldn't

meet him and look him in the face again. And the old mate who was up understood. It was an extremely awkward and embarrassing case all round. A money gift was absolutely impossible—utterly out of the question; and it was equally impossible for them to continue comfortably in their old relations. The only way to mend matters would have been for the mate who was up to save the life of the child of the mate who was down, in return; but the mate who was down didn't have a child that he knew of. He went away, and straightened up, and did not return until he was on his feet, and the late affair had had time to blow over.

A man will more often reform because of a good or heroic deed he has done, and has not been rewarded for, than because of a foolish or bad one he has done and been punished for. Punishment does not reform *men*.

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Mateship is jealous at times; and, if any jealousy can be unselfish, free from vindictiveness, and even noble, this can be. Which reminds me of an incident in the mateship of Bob Lucas and Jim Barnes, professional shearers, west of the Darling River.

Bob was a good cove, a straight chap, a white man. So was Jim, so long as he kept away from drink, cards, dice, and headin' 'em. They had lost sight of each other for two or three years, and it had been whispered that Bob had been in trouble, but for “nothin' bad.” But it wasn't whispered in Jim's presence, for he was always over-eager to fight where Bob's name was concerned.

But there came a man, or a chap, to the shed where Bob and Jim shore—or rather, a cove, in the vague sense of the term. Some of the chaps referred to him as “a ————.” Call him Cooney. Cooney was short and stout, or rather fat, where some men would be called burly, or nuggety. He had, where it showed through holes in his rags, the unhealthy pallid fatness of the tramp or gaol-bird who hasn't worked for a long time. He had no moustache, but stubble nearly all over his face. He had no proper swag, just a roll of rags on a string; he had no water-bag, only a billy. To the surprise of some, Bob recognized him and went and spoke to him. And Bob gave him tobacco, and spoke to the boss over the board, and got him on picking up in the place of a rouse-about who was leaving.

Jim was greatly disgusted, for Cooney was picking up for him and Bob and three others, and was no good. “We'll cut out in a week or so, and he'll get into it,” said Bob. “Give the man a show.” Jim and mates grumbled, but mateship forbore to ask Bob's reasons for sticking to the ———. It was the etiquette of mateship. But Cooney, who was short of something in his head, and got worse, instead of better, though Bob helped him all he could,

and Cooney had to be put off when an old hand turned up. But Bob stuck to him, got him a few things from the store, and arranged about his tucker for a day or two.

Cooney seemed neither slouching nor sullen, but he kept vaguely and unobtrusively to himself. He would sit smoking in the row by the hut after tea. His manner suggested that of a mild, harmless, deaf man of rather low intelligence. Bob, who was a silent, serious man, would sometimes squat beside him and talk in a low voice, and Jim began to brood, as much as it was in his nature to brood, and to wonder more often what there was between Cooney and his old mate. But mateship forbade him to inquire. And so till "cut-out," and next day, the river-boat being delayed, and time of little importance (for it was the end of the season), while for an extra pound or two they decided to take the track up the river to the township where they intended to spend Christmas. As fuel to Jim's growing resentment, Cooney—who had a decent swag by this time, and a water-bag, thanks to Bob—seemed prepared to travel with them. Then Jim burst out—

"——it all, Bob! Yer ain't going to take that —— on the track with us, are yer?"

"He's only going as far as the Wanaaring track," said Bob, "and then he's going to strike Out Back to look for a chance amongst the stragglers." Then he added in a mutter: "He's got pluck anyhow, poor devil."

"Well, I don't know about the pluck," said Jim. "But—why, he's got all the brands of a gaol-bird or something, and I can't make out how in —— you came to cotton to him. I ain't goin' to ask neither, but if it goes much farther it'll be a case of either him or me."

"You wait, Jim," said Bob, quietly. "I've got my reasons, and I might tell you afterwards."

"Oh, orlright. I don't want to know."

They said little all day, except a word or two, now and again, with reference to matches, the direction, and the distance to water, for they were on the outside track from the river, and they were very quiet by the camp-fire, and turned in early. Cooney made his camp some distance from the fire, and Jim some distance from Bob—they lay as at the points of a triangle, as it happened; a common triangle of life.

Next day it was much the same, but that night, while Bob was walking up and down, as he often did, even after a long day's tramp, Jim, tired of silence, stretched himself, and said to the silent Cooney—

"Well, Cooney! What'yer got on your mind? Writin' poetry, eh? What's the trouble all this time, old horse?"

And Cooney answered quietly, and the reverse of offensively—

“Wotter yer care?”

“Wotyer say?”

“Wotter yer care?”

“Wotyer say that for?”

“Oh, it's only a sayin' I have.”

That hopelessly widened the breach, if there could be said to have been a breach, between Jim and Cooney, and increased Jim's irritability towards his mate. But they were on the Wanaaring track, and, next morning, after an early breakfast, Cooney, who had rolled his swag at daylight, took the track. He had the bulk of the tucker in his nose-bag, for they would reach the township in the afternoon, and would not need it. Bob walked along the track with him for a bit, while Jim sulkily rolled up his swag. Jim saw the two men stop about half a mile away, and something pass between them, and he guessed it was a pound-note, possibly two, and maybe a stick or so of tobacco. For a moment Bob stood with his hand on Cooney's shoulder, then they shook hands, and Cooney went on, and Bob came back to camp. He sat for a few minutes on his swag in front of the fire (for early mornings can be chilly Out Back, even in midsummer), and had another pint of tea to give zest to his morning pipe. He said nothing, but seemed very thoughtful.

“Well, Bob!” Jim blurted out at last. “What the——are yer thinkin' about? Frettin' about yer new mate? Hey?”

Bob stood up slowly, and stood with hands behind, looking down at the fire.

“Jim,” he said, in his sadly quiet way, “that man and me was in gaol together.”

It brought Jim to his feet in an instant.

“Bob,” he said, holding out his hand, “I'm sorry. I didn't know what I was drivin' at.”

“It's all right, Jim,” said Bob, with a quiet smile; “don't say no more about it.”

But Jim had driven to gold.

A friend or a chum might have shunned Bob after that; a partner might have at least asked what he had been in trouble for; “a pal” would certainly have done so out of curiosity, and probably with rising admiration. But mateship didn't.

The faith of men is as strong as the sympathy between them, and perhaps the hardest thing on earth for a woman to kill.

Jim only glanced a little regretfully after the lonely little blur in the west, and said—

“I'm sorry I didn't shake hands with the poor little ——. But it can't be helped now.”

“Never mind,” said Bob. “You might drop across him some day.”
