

Australian Life

Black and White

Praed, Campbell, Mrs (1851-1935)

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**Australian Life
Black and White
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Sketches of Australian Life.

Chapter 1.

FAST steamboats and new mail routes have brought the Australian colonies into comparatively intimate relations with the mother-land; and in these days of “globe trotting,” when every fifth man one meets has “gone round the world,” it is usual enough to find that the tour has comprised visits to the Australian capitals and perhaps a little mild roughing it on some cattle or sheep station within easy distance of rail or high road.

The inquiring tourist of to-day who wishes to gain personal knowledge of life at the Antipodes, has a fairly smooth path before him. He is usually armed with letters of introduction to various magnates in the colonies he proposes to visit; and, arrived there, is thus made free of Government House, provided with passes upon the railways, and fêted and lionised in the towns, where he probably spends most of his time and where he observes with a little surprise that social observances differ in no marked respect from those in England. In the Bush, life is still made pleasant to him. Wild horse-hunts, kangaroo *battues*, and camping out expeditions, are organised for his amusement; and performances of mustering, cattle drafting, and such like mysteries of stock-keeping, rehearsed for his instruction. Or he may go further, even beyond the bounds of civilisation. He may spend a month or so on the Diggings, do an overland ride, or experience the hardships of residence on a northern run, and then go home with a sufficiently correct idea of Australia as it *is*. But his impressions are after all, only those of an outsider, and under any circumstances he can form but an imperfect picture of Australia as it *was* — in the early days of pioneering, when Queensland, then Moreton Bay, was a small penal settlement, when convicts and bush-rangers abounded, and many a white man went west or north, and never returned to tell the tale of outrage and murder by *myall*¹ Blacks.

There were no roads then from one colony to another. Only the coast-line had been explored. It was known that New Holland stretched over 2,500 miles from east to west, and nearly that distance from north to south; but it could only be conjectured that beyond the inhabited, or rather habitable, rim, extending inland some two or three hundred miles, lay a vast Sahara fatal to man and beast.

The squatters of those times were, as might be supposed, a brave, reckless band. Quick to love and quick to hate, full of pluck and endurance, dauntless before danger, iron in physique and nerve, and ready for any difficult or dare-devil feat, their adventures, escapes, practical jokes, and carouses, would have furnished rich material to an Australian Lever or Fenimore Cooper.

A party of these young men, mostly cadets of English and Irish families, some, undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge, some, sons of soldiers with no fortune but that which their own energy might make for them, all resolute and keen after adventure and exploration, left Sydney and pushed north into the country which is now known as Queensland. The Government, eager to encourage a free population, gave extensive grants of land to the pioneers; and hitherto undiscovered country was thrown open. The first stockman on horseback seemed to the Blacks a kind of centaur. They took him for a new species of animal, and he was afterwards known among his companions by the *sobriquet* of Yarraman Dick—*yarraman* being the native word for horse. Beyond a certain range of mountains there was no law. As in the days of Abraham and Lot, the first occupants of the land stoutly maintained their exclusive right to the grass and water, and were engaged in constant squabbles with the new-comers. Then legislation stepped in, granted licenses and defined boundaries. A Land Commissioner was appointed who ruled the district with a rod of iron. Many will remember “King Tom” and his factotum, familiarly styled “Unbranded Kelly.” For, in those times, all animals which at the age of twelve months, were still unbranded, became by law the property of the Crown, and were impounded and sold. Kelly, with a company of policemen and black boys, used to make raids upon the Stations, and bring in triumph to the Pound all the unbranded calves he could collect.

A certain buxom dame reigned as housekeeper over the somewhat grandly conducted establishment of the Commissioner. Report said that she ruled the Commissioner also. It was she who became the owner of the confiscated animals. No one dared to bid against her at the Pound, and the cattle fell to her for a mere trifle.

At first the natives retreated before the whites; and, except that they every now and then speared a beast in one of the herds, gave little cause for uneasiness. But, as the number of squatters increased, each one taking up miles of country and bringing two or three men in his train, so that shepherds' huts and stockmen's camps lay far apart, and defenceless in the midst of hostile tribes, the Blacks' depredations became more frequent and murder was no unusual event.

The loneliness of the Australian bush can hardly be painted in words. Here extends mile after mile of *primaeval* forest where perhaps foot of white man has never trod—interminable vistas where the eucalyptus trees rear their lofty trunks, and spread forth their lanky limbs, from which the red gum oozes and hangs in fantastic pendants like crimson stalactites; ravines along the sides of which the long bladed grass grows rankly; level untimbered plains alternating with undulating tracts of pasture, here and there broken by a stony ridge, steep gully, or dried-up

creek. All wild, vast, and desolate; all the same monotonous grey colouring, except where the wattle when in blossom shows patches of feathery gold, or a belt of scrub lies green, glossy, and impenetrable as Indian jungle.

The solitude seems intensified by the strange sounds of reptiles, birds, and insects, and by the absence of larger creatures; of which, in the daytime, the only audible signs are the stampede of a herd of kangaroo, or the rustle of a wallabi or dingo stirring the grass as it creeps to its lair. But there are the whirring of locusts, the demoniac chuckle of the laughing jackass, the screeching of cockatoos and parrots, the hissing of the frilled lizard, and the buzzing of innumerable insects hidden under the dense undergrowth. And then, at night, the melancholy wailing of the curlews, the dismal howling of dingoes, the discordant croaking of tree-frogs, might well shake the nerves of a solitary watcher.

Each stockman's hut stood by itself in a clearing, leagues distant from any other dwelling, and as far as might be from the nearest scrub, in the thickets of which the Blacks could always find an unassailable stronghold. The hut was built of logs and slabs, the roof of bark; the fireplace was a small room with a wide wooden chimney. Shutters there were, and a door, but locks were unknown, and bolts and bars were of the most primitive description. The settler depended for safety upon the keenness of his hearing, the excellence of his carbine, and the Blacks' superstitious dread of darkness, which makes them averse to leaving their camp except on moonlight nights, or with an illumination of burning firesticks.

At the Nie Nie station, one dark night, the unsuspecting hutkeeper, having as he believed secured himself against assault, was lying wrapped in his blanket sleeping profoundly. The Blacks crept stealthily down the chimney and battered in his skull with a *nulla-nulla* while he slept.

This murder was followed by others. The squatters of the neighbourhood assembled and made an ineffectual raid. They found only deserted camps. The Blacks had fled into a wild precipitous region at the head of several rivers, where broken gorges, caves, and ravines afforded them an almost impregnable refuge. Later, some of the supposed ringleaders were taken by a detachment of mounted police and solemnly led to Sydney for trial. The formalities of the law were duly observed; but identification being a difficulty—for the Black clothed and in a prisoner's dock can seldom be conscientiously sworn to as the naked, pipeclayed, tattooed savage seen in the heat of encounter—the crime could not be legally proven, and the case fell through. The prisoners were released; there was a reaction in their favour; they were laden with beads, tomahawks, and other acceptable presents, and returned to their tribe exultant. “My word!” said the dusky criminals, after this their first peep at civilisation; “Blackfellow nangery along a gaol. That corbon budgery.

Plenty patter, plenty blanket. No coolla, budgery play about.”² And they were quite impressed with the notion that in the event of war between Blacks and Whites “that big fellow Gubbernor along a Sydney” would hang the White man and let the Black go free.

The absurdity of dealing with savages by our code is manifest. Their law is that any one individual in a tribe may be held responsible for the misdemeanours of any other member of the same tribe. Thus punishment inflicted in a somewhat promiscuous fashion would not have offended against their sense of justice.

The squatters of the north rose up in fury, and swore that their chums should not be slain and their cattle scattered without vengeance being taken upon the aggressors. They armed, rode forth and surrounded the camp, killing some of the natives and taking many prisoners. Maddened with bloodshed and thirsting for revenge, they built up a great pile of wood, slaughtered their prisoners—men, women, and children—and hurling the scarcely lifeless bodies upon the pile, set it on fire.

The affair was reported at head-quarters. A band of police was sent up, and seven of the settlers were brought to Sydney, tried for murder, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Party feeling ran high in Sydney. Mr. Wentworth, pleading for the accused, and at daggers drawn with Mr. Plunkett, the Attorney-General, hotly defied the Government to carry out the sentence. Mr. Plunkett, determined upon the defeat of his adversary, swore that not only should these men be hanged, but that any white man who could be proved to have killed a blackfellow not in self-defence should be held guilty of murder. New South Wales was then a crown colony, and the Attorney-General, officially a member of the Council, had great power. The seven men were executed, and while in office Mr. Plunkett carried out his threat to the best of his ability. He was detested by the squatters, and the wish was frequently expressed in language more forcible than becoming, that the Attorney-General could change places for six months with a shepherd upon the Myall Creek.

When the Blacks heard that seven white men had been hanged for the Myall Creek fray, they grew more and more daring. It was their custom after each outrage to shelter themselves in the broken country before mentioned, which was called The Falls, only issuing forth to commit further depredations. The Government became alive to the necessity for action. A body of mounted police, formed of picked men from the different regiments then in Sydney, who did special service among the bush-rangers, was sent to punish and drive the Blacks from their stronghold. A fine corps it was, under the command of a certain Major Munn, a dark, handsome, aristocratic-featured man, as popular in drawing-rooms as he was unpopular among bushrangers, who looked an imposing figure on his grand grey charger, and stuck at

nothing, being ready to meet the Blacks' treachery with guile, and fearing no foe on open field. Many were the tales told by camp fires of the exploits of Major Munn and his followers.

Several natives were enlisted in the band. One, a small black boy, a good tracker, led the soldiers to the stronghold of the tribe. The Blacks were caught in a gorge, from which their only outlet was by a waterfall. The troopers fired down into the camp, and then rushed upon their prey. Many natives were killed, some in leaping down the precipice; but few escaped. After the fray the black guide came up to Major Munn and proudly exhibited his blood-stained sword. "My word!" cried he, with an impish laugh which showed all his glistening teeth, "corbon budgery this long fellow knife. Plenty mine been mumkull ole fellow mammy belonging to me. I been marra cobra along a that ole woman."³

The boy was exulting in having cut off his own mother's head.

In this irregular warfare, formalities were usually dispensed with, but upon occasions they were observed after a somewhat ludicrous fashion. There is in the breast of every Englishman a rooted aversion to shooting a human being in cold blood which struggles with the instinct of the sportsman. One day Major Munn and his party were riding back to the camp after a long and, so far, fruitless man hunt. Suddenly the foremost of the band espied a blackfellow, who, hoping to escape the observation of the dreaded "Marmi" (chief of the police), had climbed into the fork of a high gum tree.

The sergeant reported to the Major "Blackfellow up a tree, sir."

"Order him down," said the Major.

"I have done so," replied the sergeant. "He won't come, and we cannot climb the tree."

"Go again," said the Major; "order him down three times in Her Majesty's name."

"And supposing Her Majesty don't fetch him," said the sergeant.

"Then *bring him down*," grimly answered Major Munn.

The sergeant advanced with carbine pointed. "I say, you nigger, come down in the Queen's name.

"Baàl mumkull" [do not kill me], shrieked the aboriginal in abject terror, not understanding one word of English, and realising only that he was in peril of his life.

Said the sergeant, "I orders you again in the Queen's name to come down."

Still piteous cries of "Baàl, Baàl."

"I orders you a third time in the Queen's name to come down," repeated the sergeant. "Then, if you ain't a-going to obey Her Majesty's orders, I must obey mine."

His hand was upon the trigger. A shot, a thud, and the “big game” fell at his feet.

There is a story of a black trooper, who on his own responsibility brought his man down. Having omitted the formula, he exclaimed, as the “game” fell,

“Tsch! Tsch! Altogether mine lose him Queen's name” [I quite forgot to say “In the Queen's name”]. Then, a happy idea striking his brain—it being quite immaterial to him whether the incantation, as he considered it, were addressed to the living or dead—he cried: “Come down in Queen's name one time.” “Come down in Queen's name two time.” “Come down in Queen's name three time.” “That budgery now' (that's all right now).

There is among the Australian Blacks no sentiment of honour, loyalty, or of the obligations of kindred. They are treacherous and time-serving, and the native tracker is always the most bloodthirsty in a fray, and the keenest in hunting down those of his own tribe.

A stratagem, conducted on the principle of “Set a thief to catch a thief,” brought the little campaign to a close. It had lasted for some time; the tribe had been hunted hither and thither, and the remaining ringleaders had hidden themselves in broken country extremely difficult of access.

The native police under white officers had been out for several days upon a fruitless search, and were about to leave that part of the district. Towards sundown they came upon a track which led them to the borders of a scrub. It was now time to camp, and the troopers went forth in search of a bandicoot for supper. One of them heard in the distance the sound of a tomahawk, and following its guidance came unseen upon a wild Black chopping an opossum out of a hollow tree. The trooper watched him to the camp; then, after consulting with his own mates, went to their chief.

“Marmi,” said he. “You pidney, plenty boy been woolla. Metancoly myall Black nangry camp. Suppose Marmi you directly blackfellow mel. No good boots, too much noise.”⁴

The boy then suggested that he and his companions should take off their clothes, steal down to the Myall's camp, and with their rifles lie there concealed till dawn. “Then,” continued he, excitedly, “murray early, when Myall first wake up, close up ogle eye that fellow. Euroka baal get up. He make him fire. Then black boy mel-mel, shoot along a daloopil, and I believe plenty catch him.” [Very early when the Myall first awakes it is nearly dark. The sun is not risen. They make their fire. Then we boys see them, and shoot them with our guns.]

The plan was adopted. At early morn it was dark and cold, and the fires had burned out during the night. Though the stars were still shining there was already a chorus of magpies, the laughing jackasses were saluting day, and there was the

strange twittering and curious murmur of insect life that may be heard before sunrise in the Australian bush, and that now covered the stealthy movements of the watchers as they got their guns ready for action. One by one, the sleepy Blacks came out of their gunyahs. They scratched themselves and yabbered unsuspectingly to each other as they blew upon the half-burnt firesticks. Soon a blaze illuminated the camp, and the shiny forms stood revealed in the glow, easy targets for the marksmen. Each covered a Myall and fired. A volley echoed through the scrub. Panic seized the Blacks; they knew not where to turn, and hardly one escaped.

Thus, in that district, the war ended for the time. Had the Blacks possessed any power of concerted action, they might have exterminated the whites; and it was a matter of wonder to the settlers that they did not collect in force and bail up the stations, which would have been quite at their mercy. This was partly explained by one of the leaders, a certain Cockatoo Billy, who had contrived to pass through the war unscathed. He said that after the first fray, the Blacks had had a "corbon woolla." Some wished to attack the stations; others to keep altogether clear of the whites, and the prudent prevailed, for, said Cockatoo Billy, with forcible logic, "White man no like it blackfellow. Suppose blackfellow go bong, baal more; but suppose blackfellow altogether mumkull white, plenty more sit down along a Sydney." Sydney to their ideas representing the habitat of the species "white man."

Metancoley is the Black's expression for a great number. The Blacks only count to five. *Kimmeroi*, one; *bulla*, two; *bulla kimmeroi*, three; *bulla bulla*, four; *bulla bulla kimmeroi*, five; after that the term used is *metancoley*.

The Blacks have a curious aptitude for concealing themselves. A mounted white man will fancy himself alone on a moderately timbered plain, whereas in reality he may be surrounded by Blacks, and as he lightly canters by a slender gum-tree, the natives gliding quickly round the trunk, and measuring the line of sight by a hairsbreadth, may be actually within spear's touch of him.

In Moreton Bay, the depredations of the Blacks were more or less regulated by the yield of the bunya forests, which clothe the ranges between two great rivers. In a year when the fruit was abundant, the natives were always more troublesome and daring, and the worst atrocities were committed.

The bunya is a handsome tree of the fir species. It grows in the shape of a pyramid, the lower branches spreading wide upon the ground, and the others graduating upward to the height of a hundred or more feet. The leaves are prickly, and of a dark glossy green; and the cone, yellow when ripe, contains many nuts which are about the size of a date, resinous but not disagreeable in flavour. When the bunya is in season, the tribes congregate from within a radius of two or three hundred miles; and for some time, the district where the nut abounds is a scene of

feasting and corroboreeing, for the Blacks who live ordinarily upon opossum, snake, iguana, and such wild animals as they can snare, enjoy the change to a vegetable diet. But after a time they begin to crave for animal food, and plentiful as is the game, the large number assembled causes it soon to become scarce.

At this crisis, before the advent of white men, a fight ensued, and the killed were roasted and devoured; or there was a grand corroboree, and certain stout young gins or lubras, set apart for the purpose, were sacrificed. But when beef and mutton became procurable, the herds naturally suffered, and fierce collision with the whites was a consequence.

Cannibalism prevails at the time of the Bunya Feast; but there is reason to believe that it is connected with some religious observance.

The Blacks are very reticent concerning the secrets of their religion, of which the Korradgees or medicine men are the chief repositories. It is sometimes denied that they have any form of worship, and asserted that their silence is due to the fact that they have nothing to tell. That they have secret rites is certain; they also acknowledge the power of a Great Spirit—not the popular Debbil-Debbil; and believe in a heaven or happy hunting-ground, in which the black man shall rise up white. A tribal combat is always followed by a corroboree and a feast upon human flesh, for the fighting man believes that by eating a portion of the body of a great warrior, he may secure to himself some share of the prowess and valour of the deceased.

The great mystery of the Blacks is the Bora—a ceremony at which the young men found worthy receive the rank of warriors and are henceforth called *Kippers*.

Previous to the ceremony they pass through a period of probation, during which their courage and endurance are tested, and they are obliged to live apart in the bush, and not allowed to see a gin. Only the initiated are permitted to assist at the Bora, and no women may be present. The Bora ground is usually in a retired spot, on a slight elevation, level at the top. A large circle is scooped out surrounded by a wall of earth in which two openings are left. The youths enter by one as neophytes, and make their exit by the other as *kippers*. In the centre is placed the rough effigy of an emu, made from twigs or saplings. Europeans are ignorant of the signification of the emblem, and it is improbable that any white man has ever witnessed the Bora rite. The grounds are held in reverence by the Blacks; and desecration of the sacred circle is followed by summary vengeance.

No Black dare divulge the secrets of the Bora. At night, over the camp fire, when the horses have been hobbled, the pipes lit, and a pannikin of grog poured out, the blackboy drawn into conversation by the master for whom he has an unbounded admiration, will sometimes wax communicative about the customs of his tribe; but

any question concerning the Bora only elicits a shake of the head, and the reply "Supposs mine pialla you, blackfellow directly mumkull mine." [If I told you the Blacks would kill me at once.]

1 *Myall Blacks*, the wild aborigines.

2

Nangery, stay.

Corbon budgery, very good.

Patter, food.

Coolla, angry.

The Blackfellows stayed in gaol. That is a very good place. There was plenty of food; plenty of blankets; no one was angry; and there was a good deal of amusement.

3 "My word, this is a very good long knife. I have killed my old mother. I took off the old woman's head."

4 "Marmi, you understand, these boys have been talking over the matter; there are a great many Myall Blacks at the camp. If you go, they will see you directly. Your boots make too much noise."

Chapter II.

MANY people know the misery of lying awake, compelled by a sort of grim necessity to piece together incidents that have made childhood a memorable part of our lives. One or two pictures stand out illuminated by a sort of lurid brightness. All the rest is misty and shadowy; and we go on groping after lost clues and tormenting ourselves till we become exasperated by the very vividness of those early impressions that are like flashes in the darkness, and cause even later experiences to seem vague and unreal.

Narcotics and anaesthetics sometimes play odd tricks in stimulating memory, and unrolling the brain-folds where things of the past lie hidden; and I commend this fact to the consideration of the Society for Psychological Research, that an overdose of opium has brought before my mind's eye scenes and faces of which, in my normal condition, I had the very faintest recollection, but which, in my abnormal state, I recognised with great inward satisfaction. I have then been able to see distinctly the wild country and the rough bush hut where my earliest years were spent, and which I have vainly puzzled my brain in trying to recall; and have gone through whole scenes and conversations that I knew perfectly well had been realities, though I could not by any possibility have remembered them.

My childhood, albeit that in some respects it was an exceedingly happy one, has always been a kind of nightmare to me. I feel occasionally that Nature having allowed me to develop certain faculties which might have been of service had I remained in my original condition of barbarism, Fate defrauded her by casting my lines in pleasant and civilised places. I still walk warily in long grass lest a death adder should be lying close to my feet. I have not ceased to dream that I am on an out-station besieged by Blacks; and during many a night do I fly through the endless forests, and hide in stony gullies, pursued by my aboriginal as ruthlessly as was ever De Quincy by his Malay. Conventionality is a burden to me, and society a penance. The wild cawing of rooks is sweeter to my ears than the song of the nightingale; and the systems of railways and of English "county families" are equally unintelligible to my understanding. I am oppressed sometimes by an insane longing to fire a volley of "Black's yabber" across a London dinner table, and am obliged to fight against a strong capacity for wonder and admiration, and a tendency to take it for granted that my next neighbour in a crowd must feel as keen an interest in my well-being or misfortunes, as though we had suddenly met in the wilds of Australia, and knew that there wasn't another human being within twenty miles of us.

I felt the deepest sympathy with an Australian stranger who occupied a stall in

front of me at the Italian Opera not many nights ago. He was alone, and I saw that he had a difficulty in containing his transports of pleasure. An august member of the Chinese Embassy came in late and took his seat beside the colonist. I observed a gleam of delight cross my compatriot's face, and knew that he mentally associated the pigtail with some friendly shepherd or intelligent hut-keeper—the sort of Chinaman who is a feature in the Bush. I was not surprised therefore to see him nudge this magnate of the Celestial Empire in the ribs and whisper audibly, “What do you think of that, John? It's fine, isn't it? They don't do anything like that in your country or in mine, eh John?”

A day or two later, I met the same gentleman wandering hopelessly about in the neighbourhood of Belgrave Square. He accosted me, and inquired his way. I directed him, and, after thanking me, he added with true Australian simplicity, “I get quite bushed in these streets. London is an awful place. It's all the same. I'd give a good deal to be able to *blaze*⁵ the houses as we do the iron-bark trees. In fact, I'd rather any day be lost in Never Never country.”

* * * * *

Naraigin was a station in one of the most unsettled districts—on the very borders of unexplored country, of which my father took possession when I was about seven or eight years' old.

My recollections of our life at that time are curiously vivid and complete, and seem to stand apart from the earlier impressions, which are a jumble of disconnected, luminous images, with mist between. As far back as I can think, there have always been trees and wide pastures, Blacks, rough-bearded white men, who usually carried revolvers, but who were invariably kind to children, few or no women and a general notion of bigness and solitude. But the journey to Naraigin must have been a break—a starting point, as it were, amid new scenes. Then the Eurogan tragedy, where our neighbours the Grants—a whole family, mother, daughters, and sons—were outraged and murdered, was a horror that couldn't fade quickly from the mind; and the raid upon the Blacks, in which my father was concerned, and which, long after the excitement was over, formed the favourite topic for a “yarn,” stamped upon my memory incidents and conversations that would otherwise have been forgotten.

The other day, a bundle of letters and memoranda written at that time by my father and mother fell into my hands and suggested these reminiscences. They brought back old days in a literal manner, as a photograph may recall a once familiar face or landscape, which, otherwise, is only rendered distinct by intermittent gleams of the imagination. With the aid of these it needs no effort to picture in my mind the head

station, and our life at Naraigin.

A queer one-storied hut, built of slabs which had shrunk apart, so that there were wide gaps everywhere, with a sloping roof of bark and a wide and roughly boarded verandah. Windows there were none, that is to say in the sense of panes of glass—there were wooden shutters that could be closed at night. Most of the floors were earthen; I think the sitting-room was boarded, but am not sure. The rooms were unceiled, and I have a vivid recollection of uncanny looking white lizards and bloated tarantulas which abode beneath the rafters. There was a kitchen behind, connected with the house by a covered passage; and there were other outbuildings—a meat store, on the roof of which the bullock hides were stretched to dry, and a wool-shed some little distance away, which with its many pens, its empty wool bales, and presses, its odd holes and corners, was the most delightful playing-ground imaginable. Then there was a garden, fenced in with hurdles, over which our tame kangaroo took his daily constitutional; but nothing grew in it except pumpkins and fat-hen. Well for us that they did flourish, for we lived on pumpkins and mutton for three months, during which time the drays were delayed by flooded creeks, and the store was empty of flour, tea, sugar, and all other groceries.

Below the house lay the stockyard, and between the stockyard and the river the camp. The Blacks were always in the water. The gins dived for the roots of waterlilies, and then roasted the bulbs in the ashes. When cooked these bulbs became yellow and powdery, and were as dear to my semi-civilised palate as they were to the stomachs of my savage companions the piccaninnies. Gastronomically speaking, I learned much from the Blacks, particularly from a certain half-caste boy called Ringo, who was the first object of my youthful affections. I seriously contemplated an elopement to the scrub with Ringo, but upon going into the question of the marriage laws of the race, discovered that he being a *Cuppi* was bound to wed with a *Dongai* or undergo the penalty of excommunication and death. I reflected that, as I was not a *Dongai*, we should probably both be knocked on the head with a nulla-nulla, and then eaten after a corroboree—and thought better of the elopement. But Ringo taught me to find and appreciate a fat white grub, the native name of which I forget, though I would fain recommend it to European and Antipodean epicures. I also made acquaintance under Ringo's auspices with the flesh of the iguana, and that especial delicacy, the eggs of the black snake. I learned, too, at the camp to plait dilly-bags, to chop sugar-bags (otherwise hives of native bees) out of trees, to make drinking-vessels from gourds, and to play the jews'-harp. But for none of these accomplishments have I found a field in England.

The camp Blacks were not considered domesticated, and were migratory, coming and going among the stations, and just staying as long as they found themselves

comfortable. They were only pressed into service when shepherds were scarce, or “rung” trees (that is, gums which had been barked and allowed to wither) required felling. But we had several black boys in regular employment, and these lived in a hut, wore clothes, and had adopted, as far as possible, the customs of the white men. These were: Bean-Tree Dick, Freddy, and Tombo. They would not do menial work, but rode among the cattle, looked for lost sheep, and brought up the horses. Their moleskins were always white. They wore Crimean shirts, with coloured handkerchiefs knotted above one shoulder and under the other, and sang songs in their own language set to operatic airs. The effect was curious. Whenever I hear “Ah che la morte,” either at Covent Garden Opera, or on a barrel organ, I always think of Tombo, with his woolly hair, his beady eyes, and glistening teeth. He had been in the native police, and had been trained by their commandant, who was a musician. Tombo was a capital mimic. There lived with us at Naraigin a sentimental German, Dr. Lanhäus by name, who had a weakness for reciting English poetry with the strongest foreign accent and most absurd gestures. Never shall I forget Tombo, as he stood in an attitude by the camp fire, with one hand on his hip and his head bent sideways, every muscle of his face quivering with suppressed amusement, while he gave a ludicrous representation of Dr. Lanhäus repeating “The Raven,” of which such absurdly pronounced phrases linger on my ear, as:—

“Sitting on my chamber door . . .

* * * * *

Quoth the Ra-à-ven, ‘Never moor.’ ”

Poor Tombo! Later on, he forsook the paths of virtue, rejoined his tribe, went south, became demoralised in a township, and took to drink. Years afterwards, in Brisbane, upon the occasion of a great political ceremony—the laying of a foundation-stone or something of the sort, at which I, as the daughter of one of the public functionaries, occupied a prominent position—I felt considerably embarrassed when Tombo, scantily clad, reeking of tobacco, with a dirty clay pipe thrust in his woolly locks, advancing from the crowd, seized my hand, and greeted me with effusion. “Hullo, Rachel! Budgery you! Tsch, tsch! My word! Baal clothes like it that at Naraigin. You pidney. Me Tombo. Plenty mine been brother belonging to you. Plenty mine been show you crack him stock whip. Plenty mine been carry you over creek,” and so on through a list of humiliating reminiscences.

My father and mother are but misty figures in these early recollections. The former, as he appeared to me then, is always mixed up in my mind with a striped poucho and a carbine—why the poucho I know not, for the heat must have rendered

such a wrap quite superfluous. I imagine him with my child's mind as being of picturesque and buccaneer-like aspect, and associate him with long cantos from "Childe Harold" and "Mazeppa," which I was in the habit of reciting to him before I learned to read, though later on, in different surroundings, he presents himself as a sufficiently prosaic squatter.

There was an odd connection of ideas in my mind between my father of those days and the figure of a fierce and melancholy Time, standing in the foreground of a queer seventeenth-century oil-painting—an altar-piece which hung upon the slab wall, above a settle covered with a red blanket, in the parlour at Naraigin. My father's love for his pictures taught me to regard them with a sort of veneration, almost as though they were living things. These paintings must have puzzled the stranger who came within our doors, to whom they must have seemed ludicrously out of keeping with our surroundings. They were mostly of the Flemish and Italian schools—Madonnas framed in wreaths that might have been gathered in the gardens of Paradise, so utterly unfamiliar were they in this arid region, where the great yellow pumpkin blossoms, the flaunting hibiscus, and the lilies on the surface of the river were all the flowers we knew. There were also some Dutch interiors, and Flemish scriptural pieces, which represented the disciples in flat caps and blue blouses; and there was a Holy Family after Rubens, where a red-bearded Joseph leaned over a florid-faced Virgin, who held a fat baby upon her knee. But that large canvas on which Time figured was the object of my particular respect, the subject of many speculations and theories. For I had been impressed with the fact that it was allegorical, and symbolical of the various stages of the human career. It was a hard task for my child's brain to reconcile the Salvator-like background, overshadowed by a great Tree of Knowledge, on which grew such huge and rosy apples as had never come within my ken, the groups of fantastically-dressed ladies, and knights in armour on richly-caparisoned horses, the mummers, and jesters, and the mediaeval pageants exhibited here—with life as it unfolded itself to me at Naraigin. Time's eyes never wandered. He looked down upon us with such deep, earnest sadness, that I felt sure there must be something in our mode of proceedings which troubled him. I wondered that my father, who often studied the picture, was not more oppressed by the disapproving gaze. Time held in his hand a scroll bearing a Latin inscription, which I was told came from the Bible, and I jumped to the conclusion that it was the commandment "That shalt not kill," and that he was grieving over its transgression.

My views about murder were from the force of circumstances rather vague. We seemed to live in its atmosphere at Naraigin. The Blacks killed the Whites when they found them defenceless, and the Whites slew the Blacks in a wholesale and promiscuous fashion which offended against my childish sense of justice. The

murder of a China-man, for whom I had an instinctive aversion—well justified, as I have since learned—was avenged by the troopers with what seemed to me undue severity. I could not understand why the innocent should suffer for the guilty. Indeed, I was sorely perplexed by the distinction, from a moral point of view, between our clever black boys and Ah Tat, the aforesaid Celestial, whom I considered infinitely lower in the scale of creation. There was treachery on both sides, and the Blacks had as good a right as the Whites to claim retribution for their wrongs. Does not the history of colonisation tell over and over again the same story? Justice has hardly been awarded by their historians to the Australian aboriginals. They are a low type of humanity, and almost incapable of civilisation, but not so debased as it is usual to believe. In some respects their quickness and dexterity are quite remarkable. They are often brave; and in individuals one finds the sentiment of justice, loyalty, and self-respect. This can hardly be said, however, of the race collectively. They have a good deal of native wit, and a keen sense of humour; but they were regarded as little above the level of brutes, and in some cases were destroyed like vermin.

Here is an instance. A squatter whose head station was surrounded by Blacks, whom he suspected to be hostile and from whom he feared an attack, parleyed with them from his house-door. He told them that it was Christmas time—a time at which all men, black or white, feasted; that there were flour, sugar plums, good things in plenty in the store, and that the white Mary would make for them such a pudding as they had never even dreamed of—a great pudding, of which all might eat and be filled. The Blacks listened and were lost. The pudding was made and distributed. Next morning there was howling in the camp, for it had been sweetened with sugar and arsenic! That squatter deserves to have his name handed down to the contempt of posterity. I know many Australian women, who, in the same extremity, would have defended themselves to the last, with shot or steel, and would have turned the pistol or knife to their own bosoms ere they fell into the hands of the savages; but not one that I know, would have poisoned her enemies like rats before a blow had been struck.

It was soon after this—and who shall wonder?—that the Donga district became notorious as one in which the Blacks were dangerous, and where it was inadvisable to take up country. The Lowes' station on the coast had been bailed up, and several of the hands massacred. Farquhar of Bulli Creek had been speared in his verandah, and another squatter was tomahawked while camping under his bullock-dray. So far, however, Naraigin had been comparatively peaceful, though a large mob of Blacks was encamped not far from the head station; they had done no damage beyond spearing a few head of cattle; and as they disclaimed any evil intentions, it

was not thought prudent to drive them away and thus provoke their enmity.

This was a great Bunya year, and on the Bunya mountains near us the tribes were assembled in large numbers. Not long before, the Government had disbanded one of the troops of native police which had guarded the district, and a feeling of insecurity was springing up among the squatters. The women began to practise the use of fire-arms; the men rode home from their day's work with tightened heart-strings. Often have I heard my father describe how each day when he had been out on the run, he used, in cold fear, to mount a hill that overlooked the head station, and draw free breath again when he saw that it lay quiet and unharmed.

We had but few neighbours, and they were far apart. Boompa, the station nearest to us, was owned by a widower, Mr. Jackson by name, who years before, when money was more plentiful, had made a trip to Europe, the glory of which still rested upon him. His wife had been an exceedingly handsome woman, and when in Paris the Jacksons contrived a presentation to the Emperor, and were invited to a Court ball. Mr. Jackson was fond of making casual reference to his intimacy at the Tuileries and his friendship with Napoleon III. In consequence, by a free translation of his name, he was familiarly styled among us Monsieur Jacques, and invariably asked upon his arrival at the station what late news he had received from the Court of France. He considered the joke rather as a compliment than otherwise, and I think that he would have been affronted had we addressed him by his proper name. He was a small wizened man, with a wart at the end of his nose, and had his mouth drawn up at one side, which gave him a comical expression. But he was famous for his coolness and daring, and for "blowing," in Australian parlance, both of his exploits and of his *bonnes fortunes*. It was whispered that many a comely lubra had found favour in his sight; but this is a fact, like others, gleaned from my father's notes, and not from my own observation. He loved children, and generally came to Naraigin with his pockets full of sticky toffee which his hut-keeper, Gritty Macalister, made out of ration sugar. I blush for my greediness to tell that when I noticed his breeches bulging out at the sides I used to creep up to his chair and begin laying siege to his heart by the petition, "Monsieur Jacques, tell me something about the Emperor." His return from the township, which happened once in two years, was a jubilee for me; and during the flour famine he saved all that he had in his store—only a few pounds—to make a weekly loaf for the "Naraigin brat."

Gritty Macalister was the ugliest woman I ever beheld or dreamed of, and she was in the habit of remarking devoutly, in her broad Scotch, "Praise be to the Lord I'm no weel-favoured; and while there's a gin in the cawmp neither Mister Jackson nor the Blacks will be seekin' an auld hag like me."

But alas for Gritty! One day Donga Billy, a suspected murderer and the Don Juan

of his tribe, broke into her kitchen and bounced her for rations. Gritty coolly threw a damper and a piece of salt junk into his dilly-bag, and proceeded with her ironing. Donga Billy, struck with admiration, cried out as he departed, "Corbon budgery you, Mary belonging to mine. Directly baàl white man sit down along a Donga. Altogether Black mumkull that fellow. Altogether cramma Mary like it gin."

[“You will make me a very good wife. Soon there will be no white men upon the Donga. The Blacks will kill them all and steal all the women for gins.”]

No longer was Gritty able to make the boast that she had never been looked upon with eyes of longing by any man.

It was Monsieur Jacques who brought us the news, told him by one of his boys, that the Blacks contemplated bailing up Milungera, the Lees' station, and Eurogan, the Grants' place, and were waiting till it was full moon to carry their plan into execution.

Naraigin, Eurogan, and Milungera formed an unequal triangle lying westward. The last named was two days' journey from us, and was the furthest station in the district. Beyond, the country was unexplored.

The Grants were a large party, consisting of Mrs. Grant, a widow, a handsome old lady, kind-hearted and hospitable, who had struggled bravely against adversity, and had brought up her children to fear none but God; her four daughters, two of whom were grown up, three sons and a tutor, and besides, several shepherds. They had settled on the Donga about a year before, and had spent a day or two at Naraigin on their way to take possession of their new home. Monsieur Jacques, after hearing the rumour of their danger, went to warn them, and stayed a night at Naraigin on his return.

I remember well the enthusiastic way in which he described the eldest Miss Grant. She was a pretty girl, with blue eyes and a fair complexion, and she and her sister sang Scotch duets without any instrumental accompaniment. She was engaged to be married to a squatter who lived farther south. Monsieur Jacques told us with a sigh that they had written to the clergyman, and that her trousseau was in the drays, which her brother was bringing up from the township. They were expected to arrive in a few weeks.

Monsieur Jacques looked so melancholy that my father began to laugh. "Cheer up, man!" he cried; "you have let an opportunity slip; and you a lady-killer and a marrying man! I am surprised at you! But it isn't too late. The rivers may be flooded, and the parson and the trousseau may not arrive for six months yet. Go over again; fight the Blacks for her, and try your luck against the other man. You've a chance of winning, especially if you write to your friend the Emperor and ask him to send you out a recommendation"

Mr. Jackson treated the matter quite seriously. He admitted that it was a great pity he had not visited Eurogan sooner, but declared heroically that he would scorn to take a mean advantage of any man. "The fact is, my dear Murray," he added, "the cattle hereabouts are too scattered, you can't inspect them properly. Next year I shall look over a heifer-paddock in Sydney and take my pick."

N.B.—Heifer-paddock in Australian slang means a ladies' school.

Alas for kindly, conceited Monsieur Jacques! Long before next summer came, he was lying in a lonely grave with a gum-tree for his headstone.

Milungera was a greater distance from us than Eurogan, and had fewer hands. A passer-by had told us some little time before, that Mr. Lee was crippled with rheumatic fever, and had also brought a piteous request from Mrs. Lee that my mother would go and visit her, for "it was so many months since she had seen a woman." My father and mother were distressed upon her account, and determined that they would ride across country, carrying me on horse-back, and, if possible, persuade Mr. and Mrs. Lee to return with them to Naraigin.

It was a wild journey, and not without danger. We took with us a little company of black boys, who cleared the way and acted as advance guard. I can remember still how intense was the heat, and how the parrots fluttered languidly from bough to bough, while the iguanas, as we passed them, seemed to have scarcely energy to drag their unwieldy crocodile-like bodies up the nearest gum-tree. But the locusts kept up their deafening whirr, and all manner of flies buzzed about us. We halted at mid-day and boiled our "quart pot tea" by a stony pinch, down which ran an almost dry watercourse bordered with gidya shrubs and stunted wattle. At night, our camp was made upon a narrow flat between two ridges. I can see the scene now. The sky moonless but gemmed with stars. Orion, upside down, the Scorpion, the Southern Cross—all the dear familiar constellations—shining clear in the deep blue above; the camp fire illuminating a shadowy patch covered with rank grass and dead timber, the tall gums rising majestic in contrast with the weird-looking tufted grass-trees that reared their brown spears slantwise like tired sentinels; and for sound the plaintive night cries of the birds and murmur of insects, mingling with the clank of the hobbles and the tread of the horses' feet. The boys had built a gunya of branches and had strewn the ground with grass-treetops upon which our blankets were spread, and I lay coiled up within, wide awake and watchful. My father sat plaiting a thong for his stock-whip, and presently I saw Tombo creep up from his own camp which had been pitched some yards distant from ours.

"Massa," he said, "mine think it plenty myall Black look out. I believe police close up. I been see it mandowie."

["Master, I think there are wild Blacks about. I believe the police are near, for I

have seen tracks.”]

Almost as he spoke another dark form crept out from among the trees—a Black, naked save for the girdle round his loins, tattooed and striped with red and blue paint, with many strings of rush-beads round his neck and an amulet of bone upon his brawny chest. He was armed with spear, boomerang, and nulla-nulla, yet held none of his weapons poised. There was something frank and fearless in his aspect. It was evident that he did not meditate treachery or midnight murder.

My father looked up and saw the Black. His gun was resting a little way from where he sat, but he made no movement towards it. The following dialogue took place.

“Murray?”

“Yohi” [Yes], said my father, nodding his head.

“You pidney. Mine Donga Billy. Black fellow been woolla that you coolla belonging to mine.” [“You understand. I am Donga Billy. The black fellows have told me that you are angry with me.”]

“Yohi,” repeated my father, imperturbably.

“You been pialla [tell] Black; suppose Donga Billy come humpy belonging to you, you shoot that fellow. What for?”

My father explained that, Donga Billy being in the habit of making disturbances upon the stations he frequented, and of inciting the Blacks to spear cattle, he would have none of him at Naraigin.

“Budgery!” said Donga Billy. “Baàl mine gerund. I come Naraigin. Suppose you coolla, you marra daloopil. I man him spear, nulla-nulla, boomerang! Which fellow budgery? Which fellow mumkull? Baàl mine gerund.” [“Good! I am not frightened. I shall come to Naraigin. If you are angry, you shall take a pistol. I will have a spear, nulla-nulla, or boomerang. We shall see which is the best man—which will kill the other. I am not frightened.”]

Having delivered his challenge, Donga Billy straightened himself in heroic style, and waited to see if it were accepted.

“Yohi,” said my father. “I pidney. Yan!” [“Go away.”]

“Budgery!” replied Donga Billy, “mine yan;” and he departed.

5 *N.B.* To blaze, to mark a track by chopping a piece of bark off each tree in a line.

Chapter III.

BUT it was not destined that the night should be passed in peace. Towards dawn we were awakened by cries from Tombo. "Massa! Massa! Murrai make haste. Woolla Captain Payne báal mine Boney. Mine Tombo. Naraigin boy. Plenty mine been save white man;" then the confused sound of several voices raised in regret and laughter. My father got up. Captain Payne, commandant of the native police, advanced and explained the cause of the disturbance. He was a tall, grim-looking man, laconic in speech and ready in action. "I'm after Boompa Boney. 'Twas he who speared Farquhar. He's about these parts. I sneaked your black boys' camp, making sure I'd get him. What in the name of wonder, Mr. Murray, are you doing here?"

"I'm on my way to Milungera," replied my father. "I hear the Blacks are threatening an attack; and I want to take the Lees back to Naraigin, where we are pretty quiet."

"Good!" said the commandant. "But they won't go. Mrs. Lee is as plucky as the devil, and the best shot in the district. You squatters will have to arm a corps of your own if this murdering business gets hotter. There aren't enough of us to do the work. Good-night. Budgery you Tombo. Hi" (throwing him a fig of tobacco) "plenty mine been hear of Tombo. Suppose mine been hurt Tombo plenty mine cry. Tombo, I ask your pardon."

Captain Payne made the black boy a magnificent bow, mounted his horse and rode away followed by his little troop.

"My word, Massa; close up baál more you been see it Tombo," said the boy. "Police been think Boney sit down along a my camp. Budgery Captain Payne! My word! That fellow Marmi [chief] close up like it, Gubbernor, 'pologise to Tombo like it gentleman!"

Tombo often talked afterwards of this adventure, and was intensely proud of having had an apology offered to him by Captain Payne.

Eurogan head station was a lonely hut with a verandah in front, and a kitchen—a smaller humpey—at the back, joined to it by a bark-covered passage, a garden fenced in with hurdles inclosing both buildings. We saw as we approached that some attempt at defence had been made. There were staples to the shutters, and bars by which the doors could be secured. Mr. Lee, unable to walk, sat in a squatter's chair in the verandah, with a loaded pistol and musket within reach of his hand. Mrs. Lee, a young, bright-faced, refined-looking woman, whom Mr. Lee had married in England and brought out not many years before, moved about her house and went to and from her kitchen with a double-barrelled revolver in her belt,

laughing and singing all the time, as cheerful as possible, and making light of difficulty and danger. It was quite true that she had not seen a white woman for many months; and her only servant was a Chinese shepherd, the most arrant coward imaginable, who barricaded himself in his room whenever a Black appeared on the scene.

Occasionally, she and her husband were left on the station without any help at all. I remember her laughter over the incongruities of Australian life. They were not then patent to me, though I recall distinctly her amused comparison between the hardships of her present lot and her former peaceful existence in an English country village. As an illustration, she told us a story of how, not long before, she and Mr. Lee had been interrupted in the act of “washing up” after their evening meal—he, with a greasy cloth tied to a stick, cleaning the frying-pan, she, wiping the plates—by the entrance of a trooper with two prisoners whom it was requested should be judged forthwith, and authority given to commit them to gaol. The magistrate therefore dropped the frying-pan, put on his coat in deference to the dignity of the occasion, judged the culprits, and returned to his menial occupation, while Mrs. Lee set to work and cooked a second supper.

A short time ago I called upon Mrs. Lee in her charming house, where she sat surrounded by the luxuries and prettinesses of modern civilisation. We talked of the troubled times upon the Donga River, and of that very visit which I am describing: “Ah!” she said with a deep sigh, “those were the happy days! They'll never come back again!”

When my father mentioned his errand, he found that Captain Payne's conclusion had been a correct one. Nothing would induce Mrs. Lee to leave Eurogan, nor would she allow that their lives were in danger. “I see,” she said, “that you don't know what a good shot I am. Let me show you. Put up your hat upon the post of one of those hurdles”—she pointed to the garden fence, which was sufficiently far off to rouse my father's incredulity—“and I'll send a bullet through its crown.”

My father accepted the challenge. She fired; and he saw that she was as good as her word. She laughed in her cheery way as she reloaded her revolver. “The Blacks are all afraid of me. They tell each other ‘That fellow white Mary at Eurogan ba'al muskito.’ ” [“The white woman at Eurogan never misses.”]

We stayed a short time with the Lees and then returned to Naraigin, taking three days for our homeward journey, and making a *détour* in order to call at another outside station, as we wished to warn the occupants of danger, and to beg them to “keep an eye upon Eurogan.”

The trip was, at all events, memorable to one of our black boys, “Bean-Tree Dick,” who found his fate in the person of a comely gin—the victim of a misplaced

attachment to a Chinaman, by whom she had been deserted, or more correctly told to “yan.”

Mr. Lee, who affected a knowledge of the classics, had christened her Ariadne. A little half-caste piccaninny trotted by her side. The child had been called Hebe, in fine irony, for she certainly had no claims to favour in the sight of gods or men.

Bean-Tree Dick shook his head over the piccaninny. He was a Black of gentlemanly manners and had imbibed some European prejudices. He had been a pupil of that musical commander of the native police before mentioned, and was the tenor of the camp; often have I heard him trolling forth to the air of “*La donna é mobile*” such doggerel as this:—

“Wheel-barrow break him,
Walla tumble down;
Ba'al Massa give flour,
Black fellow got him none.”⁶

Dick's voice and dramatic capacity would have made his fortune on the operatic stage.

The romance threatened to come to a speedy conclusion; but Ariadne followed us when we rode away, and, with her piccaninny in her arms, stuck up the party in the bed of a creek. She groaned and moaned, and told a piteous story to the effect that the tribe were going to have a corroboree that very night, and meant to kill and eat the luckless Hebe.

The Blacks very frequently disposed of half-castes in this manner, and there was no reason to doubt the gin's tale. My mother was moved to pity; my father had for some time cherished the notion of catching a black lubra young, taming, and training her to be a house-servant. Accordingly, a bargain was struck. Ariadne received a clasp-knife and a fig of tobacco, on the understanding that from henceforth she waived all claim to the child; and Hebe was delivered temporarily into the keeping of Tombo, a large handkerchief tied round her head, and she was put naked into one of the saddle-bags.

It was arranged that Ariadne should make her own way across country to Naraigin. She turned back rejoicing, while we crossed the creek and went on our way.

Arrived that evening at our destination, we found that the native police had been there, and that a fray had already taken place. It was a nightmare-like scene. The station hands had been getting in scrubbers, and the carcasses of wild bulls lay in the stockyard not far from the unburied bodies of dead Blacks. A horrible stench arose from these corpses, which had lain all day festering in the sun; and we were glad to

shut ourselves into the room assigned to us in a detached hut. Here Hebe was soused in a tub of warm water, well scrubbed, her head shaved, and then, wrapped in one of my garments, she was laid to sleep in her blanket, in a far corner of the large earthen-floored chamber. We had reason to congratulate ourselves upon our accommodation as far as space and air were concerned, but there was little or no furniture except a wide bunk placed against the inner wall. The room had two windows, or rather holes, several feet square, without bars or shutters, and covered with a kind of cheese-cloth. In the middle of the night my father, who had lain down dressed on the outer edge of the bunk, started up, and seeing a black fellow peering in at the window, fired at him. He missed his aim, and too weary to pursue the matter further, fell back and slept. Nor for long, however. He was awakened by the sound of stealthy footsteps and of uncertain fumbling about the room. Had the savage obtained an entrance, and was he feeling for the whereabouts of the bed? My father stepped softly on to the floor with his pistol levelled, and called out sharply, "Who's there?" prepared to fire in the direction whence should be hurled the nulla-nulla he momentarily expected.

But a whining voice cried out, "Massa, ba'al mine find him blanket." It was poor little Hebe, who, accustomed to sleep with her mother and the dogs by the camp fire, heaven's blue above her, had risen, and was forlornly groping round the four walls in which she was cabined.

Not many days later, Ariadne put in an appearance at Naraigin, and was welcomed by Bean-Tree Dick. My father performed the marriage ceremony after this fashion. Seeing Dick at Ariadne's camp he went down. "Dick," said he, "you like Ariadne?"

"I believe corbon budgery that fellow," said Dick, stolidly.

"Ariadne, you like Dick?" continued my father. "You marry that fellow?"

"Yes, massa," obediently replied the fair one; "suppose Dick want me."

"Mine want him," said Dick with alacrity.

"Budgery!" said my father. "Ariadne, I give you to Dick. Dick, Ariadne gin belonging to you. Now you are married. Baal camp. You two live along in black boy's humpy."

Ariadne accordingly took up her abode in Dick's quarters, and was an admirable hut-keeper. Her tender experiences in the dwelling of her Chinese lover stood her now in good stead. She made excellent curries out of the salt beef, and her bread was beyond praise. The black boy's humpy became a model of neatness. One corner was roughly partitioned off for the accommodation of the happy pair. All the bunks were kept tidy with coloured blankets, and the fire-arms hung just above them ready for use at a moment's warning.

The moon was again near her full. A large mob of Blacks had been for some time settled at Naraigin, and now announced their intention of shifting camp. They had done us no harm; and though there was a rumour that Donga Billy was in the neighbourhood, he had not as yet made good his challenge. I fancy that it was my father's reputation among them as a "medicine man" which saved Naraigin from being attacked. By impressive assurances and simple drugs he had cured several of the natives of small ailments; and they believed that he had only to pialla [talk to] the debbil-debbil in order to make any or all of them go bong [dead].

One day Ringo informed me that there was to be a corroboree that evening across the river, and that if I were willing, he and Tombo would take me to a spot from which I might look on unseen.

Was I willing? I had listened with bated breath to Ringo's tales of the corroborees, and for months—years—had yearned after the sight. The very idea was full of horrible fascination for me. I trembled, and yet longed; but I dared not ask for permission, which I knew would be refused. Towards dusk I sneaked surreptitiously out of the hut, and Tombo and Ringo conveyed me across the river to a little stony pinnacle, from which we had a good view of the lightly-timbered flat where the Blacks were congregated.

It was a glorious night: the moon and stars were unveiled by a single cloud. Beyond the circle, illuminated by great fires of wood, stretched the wide bush, shadowy and vast. Round this circle, leaving a space in which the fires burned at regular distances apart, the Blacks had gathered in rows three or four deep. The naked forms of the chief warriors, with spears brandished above their heads, pipeplayed and painted in fantastic patterns, and adorned with beads and feathers, stood foremost, glowing lurid in the reflection of the blaze. Behind were the older men, and then the gins, who kept up a monotonous and discordant chorus to the accompaniment of rude wind instruments, tum-tums, and a few jews'-harps. Now the chant died with a wail, now swelled loud in notes of triumph. The chiefs in the midst, lifting their arms, waving their spears, and uttering harsh cries, seemed to direct the performance. A party of braves stepped into the arena, treading softly, looking round, vigilant and cunning, whispering, stooping through imaginary doorways, and representing what was clearly a night attack. There was a dash sideways upon a cluster of unsuspecting sleepers, who, rising drowsily, cried for mercy, and offered a feeble show of resistance. A pantomimic struggle ensued. Spears were pointed, nulla-nullas aimlessly hurled. The chant was broken by infuriated yells. The circle closed in: the old men beat their boomerangs together in time to the music; the gins swayed to and fro in a sort of drunken excitement.

The dance commenced. More logs were thrown upon the bonfires, which blazed

up fierce and high. The black forms threading the flames, and bending to and fro in a kind of rhythmic motion; the outstretched arms and maddened faces with glistening teeth and distended eyeballs, seemed to my fancy to belong to devils rather than to men. The scene realised one's wildest visions of a saturnalia.

Four or five rude effigies of women, made of saplings and clothed in red blankets, were brought forward. Screams of demoniacal laughter echoed among the gum-trees. A series of hideous gestures was gone through. The figures were mocked with yells of derision: they were thrown down, stamped upon, set up again, and at last dragged to the central pyre. The dance went on again, wilder than ever. But I felt faint and sick. I was convinced that a human sacrifice was about to be offered. I turned and fled towards the river. Tombo and Ringo followed, and led me back to the house. I crept into my bed and lay shuddering. I did not dare to go for comfort to my parents, who, believing me asleep, were in the verandah watching the red illumination. Alas! had I described to them the horrible travesty I had witnessed, it is just possible that the Eurogan tragedy might have been averted.

Late one evening we heard that the Grants' station had been attacked two nights before, and the whole household massacred with the exception of one son, a lad of seventeen. A Naraigin "boy" brought the news. He had been an unwilling witness of the murder, and afraid to remain with his tribe, had fled back to his old haunts, and now, panting and trembling, told his gruesome tale.

It was related so circumstantially that there could be no doubt as to its truth; but before the black boy had ended, confirmation came, and the tidings of another disaster.

While we sat listening, still transfixed with the thrill of horror that to this day I remember so well, Gaythorne, Monsieur Jacques' overseer, rode up, dismounted, and hitched his horse to the verandah-post. He too was excited and panic-stricken, and for a minute could hardly speak.

"Mr. Murray, I see that you have heard what has happened," he began. "God have mercy upon the souls of the dead—there's another added to them! Duncan Grant rode to Boompa yesterday. He'd come straight from looking at the bodies of his mother and his four sisters—these things can't be spoken of—and he had vowed that he would neither eat nor sleep till he had tracked those —— niggers. We caught 'em on Dead Finish Flat. They hadn't hurried, believing that all were settled at Eurogan. There were five of us. The sun was close-up down, and we hadn't a fair chance to run straight. Most of 'em got away, and I believe they've doubled back to the Boompa scrub. Six dead bodies are lying on the Flat, and one of them is Mr. Jackson speared through the heart."

That was the end of poor Monsieur Jacques.

The story of the Grants' murder must be told in few words. The details are too sickening.

No special danger was thought of by the family, who had spent a happy evening together. The drays under charge of the eldest brother were expected shortly, and the day before a letter had been received by Miss Grant from her *fiancé* fixing the date for their marriage. They had sat talking over future plans till a late hour; and then, after taking what they considered all necessary precautions in securing doors and windows, had gone peacefully to bed.

The head station at Eurogan was the usual bush hut of slabs and bark, with three main rooms—parlour, store, and sleeping chamber, occupied by Mrs. Grant and her daughters, a verandah and a skillion room opening off it. Duncan Grant and the youngest son had their bunks in the store, and the tutor and an elder brother slept in the verandah room. Two shepherds whose time was up, had come in that day to be settled with, and were at the men's hut some distance off.

The dogs which might have given an alarm were quieted by a black man employed about the place to fetch up wood and water, and who was in league with the Myalls.

Thus, the Myalls made an entrance unheard, and went first to the room in which young Grant and the tutor were sleeping. Grant, disturbed by the noise, got up, and opening the door to see what was the matter, was confronted by Boney—that same Boney of whom Captain Payne had been in search. There was a loaded revolver upon the table within reach, but unfortunately the youth had either forgotten it, or had not presence of mind to take it up. He asked what the Blacks wanted, and Boney replied, “Altogether munkull; altogether marra white Maries.” [“To kill every one; and to take away the white women.”]

Behind Boney there were a hundred or more armed warriors. Young Grant went out to them and pleaded for his own life and for the lives of his kindred. He offered them everything on the station. He would be their brother, their servant henceforth. He implored that at least they would not *marra* the white Maries.

While he poured out his entreaties, a Black stepped behind him and silenced his voice for ever by striking him behind the ears with a waddy. The tutor shared the same fate.

The two boys in the store, Duncan and his little brother, slept heavily. Duncan was aroused by the younger one's cries, and tried in vain to defend him. The boy's skull was battered in, and Duncan was stunned by a blow from a *nulla-nulla*. He fell through the space between the bunk and the wall, and lay all night on the ground—it is to be hoped in a state of unconsciousness.

“Then,” continued the Naraigin Black, “black fellow been yan along a Mary's

room. Corbon ole missus talk. ‘Boney, what for you mumkull? Plenty you been brother belonging to me. Plenty I been give you flour, sugar, blanket. Boney, baàl mumkull! Baàl marra white Mary, piccaninny belonging to me’ . . . I believe Boney baàl want to mumkull ole missus,” went on the narrator, “but black fellow plenty woolla, and that been altogether mumkull. . . .”

All night the Blacks held high and horrible revelry. When “Piggi jump up,” [the sun rose] they saw the two shepherds, who had heard nothing, and were walking towards the water-cask with their *coolimans*.⁷ They also were murdered, and the looting of the station went on. “When Piggi good way up,” the boy concluded, “altogether black fellow yan.”

Then Duncan Grant crept out from his hiding-place, and beheld the work of that terrible night. He vowed the vow which has been recorded, and rode straight to Boompa.

My father and Gaythorne sat up almost till dawn talking over the Eurogan massacre and Mr. Jackson's melancholy fate. Though the former occurrence roused in their minds an intense feeling of horror, I think the latter one affected them both most deeply. Monsieur Jacques had been a good master, and, in spite of his eccentricities, beloved by all who knew him. He had also been a frequent visitor at Naraigin, and many were the tender and pathetically-comic associations which, in our memories, gathered round his image.

Gaythorne had been travelling with cattle, and had much to tell of all that was taking place in the district. It was his conviction that there was a deep-laid plan among the natives to exterminate all the Whites on the Donga; and that not even the boys employed upon the stations could be relied upon. The treachery of the domesticated Black at Eurogan, and several other incidents that he narrated, seemed to confirm his impression. He stoutly maintained that vengeance should be taken not upon guilty individuals, but upon the whole race; and that all the males should be slaughtered. Till then, he declared, there would be neither peace nor safety.

Duncan Grant, not resting in his work or remaining to bury the body of poor Monsieur Jacques, had ridden straight after the Dead Finish fray to seek the aid of Captain Payne and his band. The troopers were scouring the heads of the Donga, and were conducting their operations as secretly as they could. Duncan conjectured that the Blacks, ignorant of the “Marmi's” whereabouts, would make for that broken country, which was one of their favourite places of refuge.

“It's my belief,” said Gaythorne, “that he's wrong. They'll double back through the Boompa scrub; and if we look sharp we shall catch them in the Wild Man's Gorge, biding their time to attack our station. They'll be in no hurry for a night or two, for they are bound to have a corroboree before taking any decisive step. They've

threatened Boompa; and they know we are short of hands. Then setting aside the loot, there's Gritty Macalister; and Donga Billy has been boasting that he is going to have her for his gin."

My father thought of Captain Payne's advice that the squatters should arm a corps of their own. It was agreed that Gaythorne and he should start at daybreak on the best horses in the paddock, should go first to Eurogan and bury the dead, and then, riding in opposite directions along the river, should consult with the other squatters, collect arms and ammunition, and bring back as many recruits as they could to hold a council of war at Naraigin on the next evening but one.

The news of the Grants' murder had spread like wild-fire through the district; and more than one squatter was already bound for Eurogan on the same melancholy errand as my father. They found the corpses lying side by side as they had been left by their murderers; and thus they were buried on a little knoll shadowed by gum-trees, close to the head station.

My father and Gaythorne returned to Naraigin after their work was done; and that same afternoon many men rode through the sliprails and turned out their horses—men grim and determined-looking, well armed, and with their blankets before them.

They all camped that night in the verandah; and preparations were made for an early start in the morning. It was decided that Gaythorne's advice should be taken, and the Blacks tracked along Boompa scrub. Our boys, Bean-Tree Dick and Tombo, were brought to the council of war. My father told them that the Blacks were no longer his brothers, and that the Whites intended to punish their race for the evil deeds they had committed, by shooting every Myall Black except women and children.

Some of the party were for destroying all, and Tombo vehemently urged this course. "Suppose you no kill piccaninnies," he said; "that fellow by and by, jump up kipper and mumkull you. Suppose you shoot black Maries, baal more piccaninnies."

Several applauded this reasoning; but my father held firm to the traditions of English warfare.

They set off at early dawn, a stalwart and picturesque little army, each with carbine slung, and bowie-knife and revolver at his belt, with his roll of red blankets strapped to his saddle-bow, and his puggaree floating in the breeze. The three black boys, alert and keen-eyed, well armed also, were in advance. We watched them from the Naraigin verandah ride down the hill, and disappear among the thickening gums and she-oaks that bordered the river.

Late in the afternoon Tombo passed back the word "mandowie" [tracks]. The riders went warily, and ere long saw from a distance the smoke of camp fires. The Blacks were encamped on a small plain surrounded by scrub. They had not travelled

far, for they were encumbered with plunder, and drunk with success.

The pursuers left their horses and crawled through the scrub to within a few paces of the game. It was now seen that the mob had divided with the loot, and that this was not the party which had been attacked on the Dead Finish Flat.

Believing themselves secure in the shelter of the scrub, the Blacks were eating, smoking, and having high games with each other. Some were going through the same horrible performance which I had witnessed at the corroboree. One, a disbanded trooper, again with his tribe, had a gun, and was in the act of bringing down a crow from a tree near. Gaythorne "covered" him and fired. Each of the squatters selected his man, and the carnage was great. Spears and nulla-nullas were launched at random into the scrub, but did the white men no injury. Several of the Blacks escaped into the bush, but many were slain. The brief twilight became night; all was then silent in the camp, and pursuit was hopeless. The squatters rode on for a time in the direction of Boompa, where they hoped to surprise another mob. At ten o'clock they camped. All, save one, slept profoundly, wrapped in their blankets, under the open sky; and the watcher, my father, stepping unheard over the prostrate bodies, thought how easy it would be for the Blacks to surprise the sleepers and man their arms.

The head station at Boompa was badly situated. Not far from the huts the river ran through a narrow valley, edged on either side by precipitous rocks, along which a horseman might ride for miles without being able to reach the river-bed. Between this fastness and the dwelling-house there was a large Blacks' camp. The natives evidently calculated upon being able to hold the entrance to the valley, and to retire into it after having committed their depredations.

At sight of the camp, the squatters divided. One party cut off the Blacks from retreat to the river, and opened fire; the other rode round to the hut, which was barred and barricaded, and within which Gritty Macalister sat grim and desperate awaiting her fate. When the relieving army appeared she threw open a door behind, and admitted Gaythorne and some of the neighbours; but even as she did so a mob of Blacks which had fled from the camp battered down her barricades and rushed in for shelter. They were met by the guns of the white men. Shrieks and groans echoed through the hut, and blood flowed freely upon the earthen floor of Gritty's kitchen.

"Tak your wull on them; tak your wull on them, gentlemen," she cried out. "Never mind an auld woman; and for the Lord's sake put an end to Donga Billy."

It was my father who earned Gritty's eternal gratitude by delivering her from terror of her would-be abductor. Donga Billy was one of the few Blacks who turned and faced their opponents in open fight. This was perhaps the first, and was the last, opportunity which he had in his life of fairly pitting native courage and native

weapons against the resources of the white man. My father remembered his challenge, and singled him out for combat. He stood forth bravely, and fought like a man. My father's horse was speared, and he himself had a nasty wound from a boomerang; but the *daloopil* gained the day, and Donga Billy was gathered to his fathers.

The account of one skirmish much resembles that of another. Captain Payne and his troopers, with Duncan Grant and the elder brother who had arrived four days after the outrage to find his home desolate, appeared shortly upon the scene, and were joined by the band of squatters. They rode to and fro from one station to another, stalking the camps and slaying every wild Black who came within pistol shot.

This irregular warfare lasted for several months. By that time almost all the fighting Blacks had fallen, and those who remained thought only of pushing northward.

Thus the murders of the Grants and of Monsieur Jacques were amply avenged, and after a time the land was at peace.

Two years later my father sold Naraigin, and we travelled south. Moreton Bay, ashamed of its old convict associations, named itself Queensland, and amid a flourish of trumpets Sir George Bowen, the first Governor, landed at Brisbane. Then began the political life of the colony, and there was a change in the affairs of men. Many of those very squatters who had camped in Naraigin verandah and started forth on that raid against the Blacks became members of the Council and Assembly, and, figuratively speaking, exchanged their swords for reaping-hooks. In an Australian *Hansard* of a few months ago I saw that the Democratic leader of the Opposition—a soft-goods man late of Manchester—had, in a powerful and deeply-affecting speech, held up George Gaythorne, Premier, to the execration of his virtuous countrymen as a murderer against whom the blood of innocent Blacks cried out for vengeance.

6 “The drags are broken. The rain is falling. The master gives no flour. The black fellows have none.”

7 Cooliman; a vessel for carrying water, made out of the bark which covers an excrescence peculiar to a kind of gum-tree. Several coolimans usually hang from the verandah of the men's hut, with a piece of soap on the rafter, and are used for washing in.

Chapter IV.

I OFTEN imagine myself back again in the verandah at Bungroopim. I can so easily fancy that it is spring time, and that I am sitting there enjoying the cool evening breeze which comes rustling through the garden trees, bringing the scent of orange blossoms and heliotrope. The verandah arches are twined with bougainvillea and young grapevines; and I look across the race-course where the Blacks have been clearing the dead gum-trees, to the winding line of creek, the darker bank of scrub, and beyond, to the mountains.

The Blacks have not done their work yet, for there are a few skeleton trunks remaining; but they have gone away to gamble their earnings. On the other side of the creek you may see them surrounded by their dogs and piccaninnies, playing with a greasy, dirty pack of cards by the camp fires. They have left their traces on the plain, however, in the shape of old gunyahs and piled-up heaps of dry timber.

An hour ago the scene was a glaring and busy one. The sun beat fiercely down upon a party of fencers engaged in patching up the garden palisade, and all round there were stir and traffic; but now the sun has dipped behind a distant peak, and, it perchance being Saturday, the men have gone home earlier than usual to their huts. Nature seems very gentle, and the station wonderfully peaceful. The hills look so close, and the world so far away. Roop's Crag, which is indeed but a mile or two distant, stands out grave and majestic against a clear sky. Now it is suffused with a faint pink glow; in a few moments it will have changed from rose to purple, and all the far-off peaks will be glorious. I hear the cracking of a black boy's stock whip, and the milkers lowing as they are driven to the yard, and the sheep's bells are tinkling. And here is Peter the Kanaka, with his soft kind eyes, his ebony face and tow-coloured hair, which has been artificially lightened by lime-wash. "Misee Rachel, me want em rations," he says; and I leave my hammock and go out with him to the store. Or perhaps Peter is in a state of virtuous indignation against an intrusive selector whom he had found a little while ago feeding his sheep in the Bungroopim paddock. "Misee, I tell him 'You spose my master grow grass for your sheep? Round up dog now. Go 'long—quick—cut stick!'" Peter might certainly have convinced a philanthropical denunciator of the so-called slave traffic, that the kidnapped and oppressed Polynesian is quite capable of defending, not only himself, but his master also.

We had several islanders at Bungroopim. No one asked, except in the Legislative Chambers, whether or not they had been forcibly abducted from their homes. They seemed happy and comfortable; and one or two begged that they might remain after

the three years which constituted their term of slavery had expired. They were employed about the head station, never learning to ride, but fetching wood and water, and doing such domestic work as the soul of the Australian aboriginal abhors. I had an affection for each, but Peter was nearest my heart. Every Sunday he used to come to me for a button-hole bouquet. He was particular about the fit of his clothes, and one day brought for my acceptance a photograph of himself done by an itinerant artist, and proudly pointed to a watch and chain which had been lent him for the occasion.

Of his own accord Peter made a little garden round his hut. He dug up the hard soil, and assiduously watered and manured the plot. Great was his delight at being able to supply the house with water-melons. He was fond of animals, and once snared a young dingo, which it was his ambition to bring up as a sheep dog. Needless to say that hereditary propensities frustrated his purpose. The dingo devoured the lambs. Another time he caught a snake alive in a waterhole. He put it in a bottle, and determined that his pet should lack nothing which could make it comfortable, filled the bottle with water, and corked it up tightly. He was greatly disappointed because the reptile died.

On the subject of snakes one might wander indefinitely; but I cannot help making pictures as they rise in my mind. . . .

Scorching sun, and the mountains and forest shrouded in a haze of smoke; the wind burning; a dull yellowish glare upon the huts and gardens; the grass brown; the ground gaping in deep fissures; the creek nearly dry; animals with parched tongues lolling out, dying beside the empty lagoon; the only flowers in bloom, yellow gladioli, pomegranate blossoms, bold brass-coloured bignonias and crimson hibiscus, throwing off heat, and offending eye and soul by their hot coarse colouring.

The heat intensifies. The smoke is stifling. Far off there are red patches where the flames have climbed some dead gum-tree. The fire licks up the withered herbage; it advances swiftly. There is a panic. The men are out on the run—and the blady grass grows high near the paddock, and the fences are precious! Women, islanders, Blacks—we all rush forth, across the race-course, along the creek, and then with green boughs, cut hastily from the young saplings, we beat upon the hungry flames, running from one fiery curve to another, leaving a black and smoking trail, till grimy, perspiring, gasping for breath, we desist—for we have conquered. Oh for a thunderstorm! But it comes not. . . .

At night the haze is lurid. Another greater bush fire is stealing to the fore, from the back of the hills. Roop's Crag is outlined against a glowing sky, which suggests that the moon has made a mistake and is rising here instead of behind the Woorara

Mountains. Along these, great flaming scorpions are racing each other towards the inaccessible precipices; while below are innumerable points of light as though a mighty city had risen up suddenly by enchantment. . . .

Or it is a summer evening after a storm, and the earth is eloquent with the voices of many insects. The curlews are wailing in the scrub, and the swamp pheasant makes his gurgling noise by the lagoon. There is a delicious sense of moisture and refreshment in the atmosphere. The verbena throws off fragrance, and the datura at the end of the house is almost oppressively odorous. I am lying in the hammock. Near my feet is a slab wall, where the stag-horn ferns shoot out their antlers, and from the top of which the frogs flop heavily upon the boards. No one minds frogs in Australia; they are cool, and they are harmless, and chase away terrors of snakes and centipedes. Close to my head a ghostly-looking pillar of *rinka-sporum*, which is a mass of white bloom. There is no moon, but the brilliance of the starlight causes every outline to stand forth clear against the horizon. One star is passing from behind Roop's Crag. I think it is a pointer of the Southern Cross, for the Cross itself lies over the mountain; and nearer me, in central heavens, Orion's belt turned upside down. I always wondered what it looked like in England. Someone is singing within; . . . a plaintive English ballad, in which there is an allusion to Charles's Wain and a winter's eve. The words suggest the unknown—the far-away. Fog, snow — Charles's Wain obscured! What have they to do with this voluptuous southern night, in which the soul cries for something of which it has never experienced the full taste—music, poetry, religion, something subtle yet comprehensive, something glorious yet melancholy—something, the soul knows not what, it is only conscious that it longs and cries.

* * * * *

It was several years after the Naraigin adventures; my father had bought Bungroopim, and we were settled upon the Ubi.

This district is one of the most picturesque in Australia. Several rivers have their rise among the mountains, which here divide New South Wales from Queensland, and branching off in different directions flow in ever-widening streams to the Pacific. The country at their heads is wild and broken into steep ridges, gorges, and barren plateaux, where are huge grey boulders scattered haphazard, as though a company of Titans had been playing at pitch and toss; while on all side curious upheavals and indentations speak of a before-time volcanic convulsion.

The mountains are of no great elevation, but are rugged and grim, and fantastic of outline. Here and there a needle-like peak stands up sharply among rocky or eucalyptus-grown humps, and cloven hills and overhanging crags seem, at a

distance, to take the most grotesque shapes. A grand, wild view is to be had at every turn, and from the shoulders of the range one may look over, as it were, a blue sea, broken by precipitous islets, its land billows stretching to the horizon. The Ubi is remarkable for a greater variety of colouring than the more level districts, in which the eye is wearied by the monotonous grey-blue of the eucalyptus. Here, gum-trees alternate with belts of scrub. The foliage in these is bright green, the flowers and berries manyhued, and there are flame-trees, showing in spring vivid patches of crimson. Cedars, in spring also, violet-plumed, and glossy-leaved; brilliant-blossomed chestnuts line the creek, while occasionally a clump of weather-beaten firs may be found clinging to the barren hill-sides.

The Ubi district has been occupied since the earliest days of Australia, and was at this time comparatively civilised. There were Blacks and there were Bunya feasts, for the tree flourished in these parts, but the Blacks committed no serious depredations, and were, like the Bunya, a picturesque feature, in keeping with the scenery. The head stations were more imposing than those upon the Donga. They were built of sawn wood with stone chimneys, and often lined with cedar. Indeed, many of the squatters prided themselves upon the luxurious manner in which their establishments were conducted. At one station, not very far from us, there was a billiard table. At another, sherry and port were handed round at dinner, and there were gates instead of sliprails to the paddocks. One or two boasted of bachelor's quarters, where passers-by were entertained, and the owners thus enabled to maintain a reputation for exclusiveness, and to get themselves into bad odour with their neighbours. In populous districts the institution is recognised and necessary; but on the Ubi, where roads were bad and the number of travellers not overwhelming, a station with a bachelor's quarters was avoided, and its owner called "stuck up."

It will be noted that in Australia there are varying degrees of civilisation. Nowhere, however, does it embrace connoisseurship in the matter of claret. In the bush most people drink tea. It appears at every meal, and does not seem to impair the digestive organs of those who imbibe it freely. Brandy lives in the cellaret; rum is plentiful in the store. The one is brought out for visitors; the latter is served to the working men. But choice wine is, as Mr. Trollope has explained, a luxury only compatible with cattle in thousands and sheep in tens of thousands.

Hospitality of a hearty, rough and ready description abounds. People in Australia take life very easily. Nothing matters much to a squatter except pleuro, the scab, and a change of ministry, which would probably affect the tenure of his run. One person is almost, if not quite, as good as another, and affectation of superior refinement is resented and ridiculed.

A traveller rides up to a station, and hangs his horse's bridle to the nearest fence. The dogs begin to bark, and the Blacks—if there are any about—set up a hullabaloo. Some one comes out, generally the master or mistress. The stranger, if he is a gentleman, or wishes to be thought one, gives his name, and is immediately received, so to speak, into the bosom of the family. He is asked to “spell” his horse for a day, and should he prove agreeable, pressed to stay longer. If he does not give his name—whether he be or be not a gentleman—he is sent to the kitchen or to the huts. This is the simple law of hospitality in the bush.

We had no “quarters” at Bungroopim; and as our station was on the boundary line between two colonies, and passers-by were fairly frequent, many curious persons found their way within our doors. My father and brothers spent most days upon the run. My mother had died very soon after we left Naraigin, and I lived in a somewhat isolated and independent fashion. Thus it very often happened that I entertained these stray guests alone. Odd types of humanity they were! I have often regretted not having made better use of my opportunities for studying human nature at Bungroopim, and that I did not then realise the value of notes.

All sorts and conditions of men went by. Upon one occasion, a pale-faced, interesting-looking gentleman rode up, and asked if he might rest his horse for an hour. Of course I invited him to luncheon; and we sat for a long time in the verandah afterwards, talking of books, music, and English life, with which he seemed well acquainted, and about which my curiosity was rampant. It was a shock to my nerves when the next day the Superintendent of Police and two troopers halted at the station. They were in pursuit of Gentleman Jones, an escaped criminal, and shortly afterwards brought back my entertaining guest in handcuffs.

Another time, a lean, dark, odd-looking German doctor, with a suspicious gleam in his black eyes, came searching for a petroleum spring, which he declared that he had once discovered in one of the Bungroopim gorges, and had never been able to find again. He trembled with excitement when he spoke of his quest, which seemed to him as full of mystery and fascination as that in Poe's story of the gold-bug.

“Mein Gott, Mees!” he exclaimed, rising with one hand upon his heart, while with the other he received from me his cup of tea. “Dat *sprung*—it is my fate—my El Dorado. I shall what you call strike ile. I shall be rich. Dat is de *vill* of Gott. But oh, mein Gott! in dis mountainious country, de sun is not de sun; and de stars—dey are *ignes fatui*.”

Then he burst into tears and left the table. He looked so wild that I was relieved when he asked me to sell him a bottle of brandy out of the store, and departed upon his bony nag, which was even leaner than himself. But the *sprung*, the “mountainious country,” or the brandy, or all together, were too much for him. He

came back in a state of *delirium tremens*, having drowned his horse and lost his blankets. We were glad to be rid of him at the cost of a new horse and saddle and bridle.

Again, the sojourner was perhaps a cattle drover. There are two kinds of drover, the rough, frank, ready-handed colonial, whose mental horizon is in ordinary life bounded by the stockyard fence, while the wildest flight of imagination never lands him beyond Sydney or Melbourne; and the English gentleman who has come down in the world, through drink or misfortune, and who shuns head stations, the society of ladies, and anything that calls back old associations.

Of the former class, Duncan Campbell was a good specimen. He was long and scraggy, with arms and legs like the sails of a windmill, and a high Roman nose which he had a trick of polishing with his thumb and forefinger till it shone again. He always dressed in a Crimean shirt and riding breeches, and wore—at dinner only—an alpaca coat hastily donned and quickly doffed when the time came for tobacco and grog in the verandah. His voice blended oddly the native drawl and an hereditary Scotch accent.

He often came our way with “stores”—otherwise breeding cattle. Sometimes he yarded his beasts and stayed the night; more often only looked in unceremoniously to buy rations, or to shoe his horses at the forge. Then, having accepted at my hands the customary “nobbler,” he would sit down for half-an-hour, talking after this wise, of what his head was full—overlanding.

“You see, Miss Murray, I'm awful short handed. No, you don't catch me tackling a mob like that again with only two men besides myself and three black boys. They had a stampede the other day just under the Crag. My word! that was a job; I lost every hoof, had to track 'em down Dead Man's Gorge, and then found eight head missing. You see it is such a place for 'possums and wallabis; and 'possums do play old Harry with the beasts.” And then he sighed and stroked his nose.

I suggested that bush cattle ought to be acquainted with the habits of opossums.

“Ah! but you see, Miss Murray, a 'possum will jump down from a gum-tree on the back of one of them, and all the rest, when they see him start will cut off without knowing what is the matter. My word! the way a mob does get up clear when they're frightened is a caution. . . . My word! I *had* a good camp last night—a first-rate corner—a fence on two sides and a gully with fine steep banks on another—you know. Wouldn't I like to come across a camp like that every night. . . . Got many snakes here, Miss Murray? We've been living on 'em for the last week. Couldn't get any meat, you know. Every station we stopped at was just out of meat—going to kill to-morrow or next day—so we had to find carpet snakes. There were plenty in the scrubs and along the creeks. We've eaten ten of 'em in the last

five days. I'll be glad, though, to buy a little meat, Miss Murray, if you've got any."

Then, still discoursing upon his cattle, he would follow me to the meat store; if, as was usually the case, the overseer and my brothers were out, and gallantly plunging his arms into the brine would bring forth what he wanted, and proceed to weigh it. He would cast his eye round the unsavoury place, with its stillyards, its wooden blocks, heaps of coarse salt and pools of brine, would make a technical remark or two upon the "green hides" stretched along the slab walls, and opine sagely that we didn't go in for killing pleuro beasts like so and so. Then fumbling in his leathern pouch he would produce from a chaos of pipes, tobacco, clasp knives, and bits of string, the price of his purchase, enter the transaction into the day-book to save me trouble, and finally ride back to his beasties.

I remember well the first time another drover, very unlike Duncan Campbell, called in—a man not to the manner born; the son of a late magnate of one of the colonies: we saw with self-reproach that he winced under our thoughtless comment upon his name.

He was tall and melancholy-looking, with refined features, large dark eyes, a silky beard, and consumptive stoop. He wore a very old grey coat with half the buttons off, dragged over the chest in a suggestive manner as if to hide deficiencies. He came in to ask for letters which might be awaiting him. Jennie Marsden, a friend then staying with me, heard his sweet voice and was attracted by its mournful *timbre*. We came out—a group of merry girls, led him to the drawing-room, and seconded my father's invitation to luncheon. He looked at Jennie, and his eyes wandered wistfully round the room as though he liked it. It *was* a pretty room, with French windows opening on to the verandah where the grapes were ripening along a trellis, and the floor was a mosaic of shadows and sheen; the unvarnished cedar walls hung with paintings — dear old Time still gazing reprovingly upon more harmonious surroundings than those at Naraigin—a piano open; big squatter's chairs; flowers everywhere; books and magazines, photographs and nick-nacks, the surviving relics of an oriental tea service; kangaroo skins and opossum rugs spread upon the white boards.

He said that he could not stay. He was not fit to go among ladies. But for his letters he would not have come in.

Nevertheless, his eyes looked longingly, and there were old memories in them. We begged him to remain, assured him that bush ways were our ways and that no one thought about clothes at Bungroopim. So he dined with us, gladdened my father's heart by assuring him of the authenticity of a doubtful Teniers, gazed furtively at Jennie Marsden as though she were a being to be worshipped from afar, and ate his roast chicken, arti-chokes, and custard pudding, with a relish which

suggested that he also had been living upon carpet snakes.

After dinner, I played to him, and Jennie sang. He begged for the *adagio* movement in the *sonata pathétique* over again, and there were tears in his eyes when Jennie had finished a little song of her own composition which she had set to the weird air of one of Chopin's mazurkas. He went away at bed-time to camp with his cattle and his black boys. I saw him again several times: once, in a London drawing-room after he had come into his kingdom in England. "Ah!" he said, "I have never forgotten that evening at Bungroopim—the music, the odds and ends that women put about, the sight of yellow-covered *Cornhill* and dear old *Blackwood* on the table. It all took me backwards and forwards in the strangest way. I felt as though I had been let into Paradise for an hour and then sent out again to the dirty blankets, the camp fire, quart pot tea, and the stockmen and their rough ways." . . .

We very often saw our neighbour Captain Claypole, an ex-dragoon, who was more bushman than bushman. He had a knack of seizing upon the dramatic points of a situation, dressed for his part, and lived up to his background. He had bought a wild, picturesque station on the other side of Roop's Crag, and spent a great deal of time in shooting wild ducks and in exploring the country round him. He was very popular, had a keen sense of humour, and told a story better than any one I know. He was equally at home in the men's huts and in the Darings' drawing-room. The Darings were on the Woorara and considered themselves much more refined, cleverer, and altogether superior to their neighbours on the Ubi. Captain Claypole always brought with him a flavour of English culture. He talked about books and art, about the London world and the great actors and singers with a freshness and enthusiasm which imparted a new element into our lives. He awakened in me a thousand aspirations; he helped to educate my taste, taught me to love good music, and faintly aroused in me that faculty which, in a greater or less degree, belongs to all imaginative temperaments, of getting outside one's own actual life, and regarding it as a part of a drama in which there is endless variety of pathos and comedy. A poet said to me the other night, "All artists have two souls —two beings—that which lives, that which observes." I think Captain Claypole first gave me a glimmering of that fact.

There came, too, another neighbour, a young lordling, a free selector on the river, the introducer of polo into the district, and of prize pigs and art pottery as features of bush life. He was variously addressed as "Your Lordship, Lord Barty, and Mr. Lord Barty," professed to be a thorough-going radical and utilitarian, but was in reality as deeply imbued with caste prejudices as any stripling aristocrat could be.

Again, our visitor might be the piano-tuner on his piebald mare, the retailer of Ubi gossip, or perhaps an ex-groom, who, trading upon our confiding reliance upon the

unwritten code, sent in his name, won Robina Daring's favour by judicious admiration of her riding, incited us to dance by his admirable whistling accompaniment to the "Mabel," and went about afterwards boasting that he had waltzed with the exclusive and strong-minded belle of the Woorara. This was his revenge for having been treated with indignity at the Darings' station. Or mad Pat Connor—properly the honourable—an unworthy representative of a long line of ancestors, or a butcher of amorous tendencies, in quest of fat cattle—guest to be consulted and placed at his ease—who would be silent behind a huge album, and cast admiring glances at Robina Daring, or at my pretty sympathetic friend Jennie Marsden.

These two must have a line of description. Robina was the eldest daughter of a squatter on the Woorara. She was handsome, clever, and "bucolic." She knew all about the different breeds on her own river and ours, could expatiate upon the points of a prize bull, and was learned in the matter of horse-flesh. She could sit the worst buck-jumper, and do her day's work on the run like any stockman. She had broken her collar-bone and three of her ribs. She despised weakness—or said so. "Weak-minded women are muffs," was her favourite axiom; but she was not above fondness for dress and admiration, and flirted after a magnificent fashion, which brooked nothing short of absolute subservience on the part of her adorers. Like Lord Barty, she too had her caste prejudices, and being the scion of an old Woorara family, which dated back three generations, and was in the "first set" when it migrated to Sydney, she held up her head accordingly. But for all this she had a winning frankness, and a womanly capacity for affection, which endeared her to us all.

Jennie Marsden was a sweet little creature with big shy eyes, and dark curling hair. She had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and a fund of dry humour of which no one ever suspected her. She was very romantic, and wrote stories and sentimental verses for our *Bungroopim Magazine*. We composed jointly, and courted the muse as we lay among the pumpkins and Indian corn in the cultivation paddock, or while we sat on a log that bridged the river, with the bottle-brush flowers of the ti trees touching our shoulders, and bringing a dangerous swarm of bees about her own ears, with the she-oaks moaning softly above our heads, and our bare feet dabbling in the noisily running water.

The Ubi was not more than a creek here; but what a lovely, mutinous, brawling, sad, merry, musical, changeable creek it was! Its channel was perpetually altering, and fresh islets formed every year. In some places it was deep enough to drown a horse and rider. There were strange pools over-hung with arums, deadly and fathomless, with a suspicious rippling in the centre; and the Blacks told mysterious

tales of treacherous whirlpools, and the never-to-be-seen but much-dreaded Bunyip. The river banks were bordered with mulgam bushes, from which, in November, we gathered the wild raspberries, and mingling them with gee-bongs and scrub berries, set forth a dessert which we thought worthy of Titania and her fairies.

At the crossing, where we loved best to sit, the stream ran fast and clear over a pebbly bed, strewn with rock crystals that had been washed down by floods from the mountains; and here, its gentle purling, dreamy and spiritual, sounded like a chorus of unearthly voices, idealising the scene, and blending harmoniously with the wild sounds of the Australian bush. In the gum-trees behind, the parrots chattered and the crows cawed, telling each other that a pair of mad, unfeathered bipeds were concocting plots against their peace. Cockatoos took up the story and spread it far and wide, the echo growing fainter and fainter across the paddock; while from the scrub the pigeons gave in their tender "*too whee, too whee.*" As we sat on the log in mid-stream, we could shut both our hands and crush the perfumed leaves of an aromatic gum; or we might lean back against an uplifted branch, and let imagination float upward to the wonderful and endless blue. And then, while we were quite silent, a gay kingfisher would dart before us, and rising again circle round our heads, or a satin bird would perch boldly on the log near us, or a magpie trill forth his song from the ti tree. There was an old mossy stump in the middle of the pool, and sometimes a water-snake might be seen gliding among the lily leaves that lay on the surface. Above the green line of scrub lay the crest of Roop's Crag, heavy, rock-bound, strongly resembling the Tête du Chien. Whenever I visit Monaco, it seems to me that I am gazing on the countenance of a dear familiar friend. Perhaps, but rarely, a horseman, some traveller from over the border, or one of our bachelor neighbours from Kandoonbah would ride down the bank to the crossing, start at sight of the two figures perched on the log, and, if not already acquainted with us, give a good day, and enter into conversation as his horse stooped to drink. Could he buy rations? or was there an old paper at the house that he might take away with him to read at the camp? He was probably a gentleman, though his moleskins might be dirty, and his grey "jumper" and old felt hat the worse for wear. Then, maybe, whistling the refrain of a song which the breeze bore softly back, he would mount the bank and canter towards the sliprails.

Jennie had an undeveloped talent for acting, and inoculated me with her taste. We wrote our plays in the corn hut. The wooden bin which held the shelled grain was our table; the great heap of soft husks which had enveloped the cobs furnished us with a delicious couch. When our plays were written we rehearsed them on the race-course to an audience of gum-trees, and afterwards performed them in a queer little verandah room lined with pictures from the *Illustrated News*, and opening into an

harbour that was completely closed in by the wide-spreading vines of the Isabella grape. This was our stage, and here Jennie and I ranted to the great edification of various stockmen, fencers, and black boys, who swelled the company of spectators.

As none of my brothers shared our proclivities, the pieces had to be arranged for two performers only. Jennie took the ladies' parts, I the male ones. Our stage properties were neither varied nor extensive. A corked moustache sufficiently designated the ardent lover; and a wig and a long beard of the grey-green moss which hangs from the apple gum, metamorphosed him into the irate custodian of the lovely heroine. Our plots were of the wildest, sometimes built upon an historical foundation—the oddest jumble of anachronisms and improbabilities, and apt to be sensational, philosophical, sentimental, or melodramatic, according to the course of reading we were at the time pursuing. In this matter we were omnivorous, and I am bound to confess that our mental diet was of the most indigestible description. We devoured everything in the shape of fact or fiction upon which we could lay hands; and I can only hope that we assimilated more of good than of evil.

There were a great many books at Bungroopim — books of all kinds, from Paley's *Evidences* and Thomas à Kempis, to Swedenborg, Rénan, and Harriet Martineau's translation of Comte; from Ossian's poems to *London Lyrics*; from *Pamela* and *Evelina* to Miss Broughton's novels; and, in magazines, from the *Tatler* to *Temple Bar*. No one could accuse us of deadness to literature, though to the march of public affairs we were absolutely indifferent, and the overthrow of a British Cabinet, or the fall of a European dynasty, was to us of far less importance than the *dénoûment* of a serial story, upon which from month to month we had been speculating.

At fourteen, the age at which I was emancipated from the schoolroom, and, so to speak, turned loose into this varied pasture, I had naturally the most confused notions of the outer world—the world beyond the gum-trees and the Ubi Mountains—beyond the Australian shores and the Pacific. Nevertheless, it seemed very real to me, more real perhaps than that in which I lived. It was a wonderful and romantic world—far more beautiful than in fancy than now in fact. To Jennie and me, Europe was a brilliant paradise. There, were gathered together the associations of the past, the glories of the present. It was the land of poetry, history, and drama, in direct contrast to our own big, humdrum, wooded desert, which was without a past and without romantic associations.

Here, the mountains were the only monuments, and there were no traditions, no histories, save such as the legend of Wooraljee the mighty chief whom Wooldanah, the Great Spirit, had turned into a rock at the mouth of the Ubi, and whom the natives pelted with stones when they wanted “*walla* to come up,” that is to say, when they desired rain; of the fights of the tribes; or hard money-grubbing tales of

fortunes that had been amassed, and gold-mines discovered. Here, all the men were too busy in tending cattle and sheep, in buying and selling, in fetching wood and water, to give any thought to art or poetry—with indeed one exception — that of Mr. Kerröuel, my brothers' tutor. Mr. Kerröuel was of French extraction, and strongly resembled the portraits of beautiful brilliant Edgar Allan Poe. He had the same expansive brow, and the same conformation of mouth and chin. His fiery impassioned verses seemed modelled upon those of his prototype, but unlike him Mr. Kerröuel was quiet, taciturn, and only happy when away from the haunts of men, wandering among the mountains with his Xenophon or Homer.

But, there in Europe, troubadours had sung, and prophets had preached. There, monarchs had reigned—kings of men and queens of hearts. There, empires had grown and decayed away, and dead ages had heaped up trophies. Our imaginations took no account of commonplace millions, but peopled that land with godlike beings whom we knew through their works.

Sometimes we wrote to some particular author, giving childish expression to the delight and admiration with which his or her books had inspired us. I wonder that none took any notice of the feeble cry from the wilds. Occasionally I meet in mundane intercourse one of those great ones to whom Jennie and I penned a reverential epistle. It is strange to touch the angel's wings and to find the down rubbed off—a hackneyed experience; yet have not even the most hackneyed experiences pathos and strangeness when they come into the circle of our own lives?

We had our magazine at Bungroopim, suggested of course by the famous Brontë periodical of which Mrs. Gaskell tells. I think that we were all conscious of our defects in the matter of solid education, and had a laudable wish that they should be remedied. We each tried to contribute every month, an essay upon some eminent person or subject necessitating serious study. We did not always succeed, and it must be owned that fiction and poetry were in the ascendant. My brothers, busy all day upon the run, were not energetic contributors, and the burden of the *Bungroopim Monthly* was chiefly sustained by Jennie Marsden, myself, and any girl friend of scribbling tendencies who might happen to be with us. Other interests had usurped its place before Mr. Kerröuel came to us, or his genius might have raised it to a higher level. At any rate, it afforded us a good deal of harmless amusement, and gave us occupation during the long winter evenings, when we were wont to gather round the huge wooden fireplace — so many eager spirits full of activity, which in some fashion or other must have found vent.

On the first of the month, after dinner, the magazine was produced, and each went through the penance of reading aloud his or her own paper.

Often our party was reinforced by Captain Claypole, or one of our bachelor neighbours; and there were always two or three new chums on the station, legitimate butts for practical joking and laboured witticisms. One young man, Van Belmont by name, was a sure draw upon all occasions, for he was very conceited, very self-confident, and excessively stupid. He was small and ugly, with ferret-like eyes and a skin covered with pimples, and a wonderful mop of red hair which always stood on end. He was rough, uncouth, and ill-educated, but believed himself irresistible. As he was constantly falling in love, the rebuffs he encountered were numerous; yet notwithstanding, he was never abashed. His arrival at Bungroopim was heralded by the following letter, written to one of my brothers, whose acquaintance he had made when droving cattle in the north. It is perfectly genuine, and is worthy of preservation if only as exemplifying the free-and-easy manner in which hospitality is dispensed, and taken for granted, in Australia:—

“MY DEAR MURRAY, JUNIOR,

“I have a scheme in my cobra which I am going to unfold to you, strictly in confidence at present.

“The scheme is for me to come down to the Ubi and see if I can get a wife.

“I have lately come into about 200*l.*, so I think that I am quite justified in taking to myself a wife; but I am not altogether satisfied with the young ladies of the north. I have heard that there are lots of nice girls on the Ubi, and think some of them might be glad of a husband. What is your opinion on the matter?

“Then I want to ask if you think that Mr. Murray would let me come and make Bungroopim my head quarters for five or six months, with liberty to come and go at my pleasure, though I should be willing to do something for my grub if required. Also, do you think that in the event of my coming you could let me have the use of a couple of horses for a time, as I want to be as economical as I can? And if so, could they be sent to the township to meet me on my arrival? And also, in case you know any young lady in particular who might be persuaded to cast in her lot with mine, I will just give you an idea of the sort of girl I want.

“Any age from twenty to twenty-six would do. She must be used to the bush, and able to wash and cook for herself if necessary; all the better if she has no relations, and one with a little money preferred. And she must be of the same religion as myself, though that would not be of great consequence, as I mean to settle on the Ubi, and from all I hear, you are not much troubled with parsons there.

“Please write by return of post, and

“Believe me, yours truly,

“HENRY VAN HELMONT.”

My father treated the matter in a good-natured spirit; and Mr. Van Belmont was

made welcome. But he got so unmercifully chaffed about his matrimonial intentions in the pages of the *Bungroopim Monthly* and in other quarters, that for some time he scarcely dared to hint at his projects. He did his best, however, to carry them out, and did not leave us till he had been rejected by almost every young lady on the Ubi and on the Woorara.

Chapter V.

VAN HELMONT was certainly justified in his remark that we were not much troubled with parsons on the Ubi. For four years we lived in a state of spiritual darkness, and the itinerant preacher—described by one of our black boys who had come from a more religious district as “that fellow white man; plenty woolla; been wear him shirt outside of trousers” (an allusion to the surplice)—was a being practically unknown to us. It was therefore quite an unprecedented event when my brother Jim, on a stock-riding beat, met one of these gentlemen in straits about crossing the range, and uncertain as to the direction of the Woorara, whither he was bent. Jim undertook to pilot him on his way, but led him down a steep crossing and into a quicksand instead, whereby the clerical buggy was broken and the horse partially engulfed. Jim came hurrying back to Bungroopim for Peter the Kanaka and the cart mare, and finally brought back the clergyman, who contentedly acquiesced in the arrangement, remarking that it was an indication there were no souls fit to receive salvation “over there;” which, as Jim remarked, was rough upon “over there.”

In the evening the Bibles and prayer-books were mustered, the stockmen, servants, and Kanakas called in, and we all listened to an extemporaneous discourse, which Jim averred was an insult to our souls and to our understandings. The preacher was of the fire-and-brimstone sort, and evidently regarded salvation as a marketable commodity of which the Church had the monopoly.

There had been a young lady of his acquaintance who moved in the 'ighest circles and was endowed with the most elegant traits of mind and body. Van Helmont pricked up his ears at the mention of this fascinating individual; but his countenance fell again—she was named Mary Hann. Mary Hann had been repeatedly warned by her spiritual pastors and masters of the terrible penalties which would follow the course of worldliness and vanity which she pursued. But Mary Hann declined to give up dancing, dress, and dissipation, and the 'ighest circles still held their own. She was seized with typhus fever; and after he had harrowed and convulsed us by a graphic description of her physical sufferings, the narrator brought us to her death-bed.

Having become unconscious, Mary Hann gave vent to the most 'artrending groans. “Mary Hann!” said her faithful adviser “what mean those hunearthly — these hagonising 'owls?” Feeling this to be a telling point, the preacher reiterated his question in tragic tones, fixing the round-eyed Kanakas with a stern and indignant gaze.

Of course Mary Hann was being treated to a preliminary glimpse of the *Inferno* to which she had danced herself. At last her biographer allowed her to go down to an eternity of torment where, as he phrased it with more regard to sound than sense, “weeping weeps for h'aye, and wailing wails for h'ever;” and then the benediction was pronounced.

No wonder that the squatter and his belongings looked upon bush clergymen as a nuisance! After this visitation we were left for some time in peace; and the next occasion upon which I came into contact with a member of the ecclesiastical fraternity was not at Bungroopim but at Targinie, Captain Claypole's station across the border.

The Woorara was more blessed than the Ubi, or perhaps the bishop of our sister colony was happier in his choice of shepherds than our own episcopal head. The dean of that diocese, who every three or four years made the tour of the district, and married or christened as occasion required, was of a different type to the biographer of Mary Hann. He was cultivated, energetic, practical, very popular among the settlers, and a good representative—alas! a rare one—of the Kingsleyan school of muscular Christianity.

That impromptu visit to Targinie, when we made acquaintance with the dean, was rather an amusing episode in our monotonous life. Captain Claypole, who loved nothing better than a camping-out picnic, had long been planning an excursion to Cape Clangour, at the mouth of the Woorara, and to a little cedar-cutting settlement at the promontory's neck. So, one morning in autumn, it being slack time at Bungroopim, four of us, Jennie Marsden, Mr. Kerröuel, the poet tutor, Jim, and myself, determined to ride over to Targinie to see if the scheme could not be carried out.

The ride across the range was most picturesque, the track stony and difficult, winding up steep hills, skirting precipices, and descending broken gullies, but at every turn offering a delicious peep into some ferny ravine, or the view of a mountain pass, or bold stretch of landscape. Roop's Crag on one side, the Woorara Mountains on the other, one peak in especial perfectly inaccessible, and—as we paused upon the highest part of the range—towering before us, scarred and rock-bound, with a forest of white gums standing forth in strong relief against the dull grey wall.

Jim, who was a youth of aspirations, had been lamenting to Mr. Kerröuel the want of those grand sights and inspiring influences for which his soul yearned.

“Now,” he exclaimed, “if I were to go to Europe, and could just get a squint at some of the pictures and the statues, and the old castles, and the Alps—just think of snowy mountains, Mr. Kerröuel, and look at *that!*—why, I bet that if I could have a

trip home, I'd do something yet.”

The tutor reined in his horse, and gazed before him, and then, rebukingly at the young colonial—

“Jim,” said he, “that's the finest thing of its kind I've ever seen. That's worth coming all the way from England to look at.”

Jim stared, and contemplated the ravine below, the sombre forest, the ghostly, white trees, the stern mountain.

“*That!*” cried he. “Why, what's that, Mr. Kerröuel? It's only a bit of scrub and a few gums. And, my word! a rare place to find nuggets!”⁸

We met a pair of policemen at the Targinie crossing.

“You haven't come across a queer-looking cove on foot about the border?” said the chief. “He is a horse-stealer, and a real dangerous *character*. I've been telling the Captain up there to arrest him if he turns up at Targinie. It's pretty clear that he has followed Graeme's Creek, thinking it the river, and he's bound to come back, for he can't get out of *that* country.”

We had not seen anything of the dangerous *character*; and the policemen went on their way. Captain Claypole ran down to the sliprails to meet us, and asked the same question, his handsome eyes bright with excitement.

He presented a most comical appearance; a white apron tied round his waist, his felt hat fastened under his chin, a large brush in one hand, his clothes spattered, and his whiskers plastered. He told us that he was whitewashing his dairy, and on the look-out for the horse-stealer.

“I shall bail him up with my whitewash-brush,” said he. “I've sent the boys to track him. Go up the yard, Jim and Kerröuel; turn out your horses and carry in the ladies' swag. You could not have come at a better time. The Dean will be here to-night—carrying the Gospel to the cedar-cutters at Cape Clangour. He wants me to pilot him, and so we can make our long-talked-of expedition in good company. The missus is making pies. You'll see her in the kitchen. Tell her we shall want a few more.”

There we found Mrs. Claypole—a Juno manipulating a rolling-pin. She was the most refined, cultivated, and dignified of women. We were a little in awe of her because she was so very European. How she contrived to adapt herself to the rough Australian life she led remains still a mystery to me; but she always said that she was very happy.

We went back to Captain Claypole, who was still energetically whitewashing, with one eye upon the crossing. Presently, old King Combo, with the knowing look peculiar to his race, and his finger on his lips, came up from thence.

“S-s-s!” he whispered.

“You been see white man without yarraman?” asked Captain Claypole. “Baal budgery that fellow.”

“Yohi,” replied Combo; “he come up along a humpey.” And almost at the words the individual in question appeared upon the scene.

Captain Claypole approached him, brandishing the whitewash-brush; and a few questions established the fact of his identity with the “dangerous character.” The unfortunate creature, however, looked so lean, woe-begone, and utterly harmless, that moved between pity and laughter we implored aside that he might be allowed to go in peace.

“I must do my duty as a magistrate,” said Captain Claypole, sternly. “My good man, I'm extremely sorry, but I have reason to know that you have stolen a horse. I must therefore arrest you. You had better give in quietly.”

Here the brush was raised with a menacing gesture in such odd contrast with the whitewash-bespattered garments, that Jennie and I laughed unfeelingly.

“You look hungry,” said Captain Claypole. “Oh, you have had no grub for two days! Then come along. I'm going to give you a good tuck-in; but I shall guard you carefully all the time, mind.”

He marched off with his prisoner, and both remained for some time shut up in the dining-room; but by and by, after the police had returned, and had triumphantly borne away the criminal handcuffed, our host came in with the Dean, who had now arrived, and to whom he was narrating the occurrence in his dramatic fashion.

“I took him into the dining-room, and, by Jove! I could not help knocking the top off a bottle of Bass for him.” (Captain Claypole had never become sufficiently colonial to relish tea at every meal; he spent a fortune in bottled ale, which, at great further cost and difficulty, he carted over the range.) “Mr. Dean, you should have seen that man's face when I asked him whether he preferred it to rum. My heart warmed to him. ‘He has been a British workman,’ said I to myself. Poor devil! how he did tuck in! I thought at first that it might be unwise to trust him with a knife; but he did not look the audacious ruffian Macnab had made him out, and I took care he should see that I had put copper caps on my revolver. So I went on with my English letters, and presently he asked if there were a mail going out soon, and would I give him a bit of paper and an envelope, as he wished to write to his wife. I got him what he wanted, and he sat looking at the paper for ever so long, and at last laid his head down upon his arms and blubbered like a child. I had not got any secure place to lock the poor beggar up in, and was seriously considering whether I should place him under your surveillance, Rachel Murray, and leave a fast horse ready saddled in the yard, when Macnab came back and saved me from imperilling my magisterial reputation. But, by Jove! the fellow didn't look like a low colonial horse-stealer. The

moral sensibilities of a man who prefers Bass's ale to rum can't be completely blunted.”

The Dean was burly and unclerical in appearance, with a clean-shaven, humorous face, and eyes that looked in opposite directions. He was extremely jovial, except when in the pulpit (metaphorically speaking); and then an alarming gravity settled upon his blunt features, and his squint became almost aggressive.

When dinner was over, he held an *im promptu* service in the dining-room, after which we adjourned to the verandah, discussed the Cape Clangour expedition, and sang Christy Minstrel melodies, the Dean joining in “Ten Little Niggers” with great gusto.

Our concert was interrupted by discordant yells from the Black's camp, and King Combo and Ubi-Boney, the veterans of the tribe, who had quarrelled over the possession of an elderly gin, rushed towards us—Combo behind, flourishing the boomerang with which he had been belabouring his foe, Boney in advance, blood spirting from shoulder-wounds and running down his naked sides, while he shrieked piteously for protection.

Captain Claypole separated the combatants, and Boney threw himself upon the verandah and began to kick up his legs behind, a sign that the Black considers death imminent. The Dean bound up his wounds, and Captain Claypole administered doses of rum, which had a magical effect in quieting him. Combo, who had been sitting sulkily apart muttering threats of vengeance, as soon as the rum was produced, flung himself down, howled, and kicked up his legs also. No one took any notice of his proceedings, and he called out in aggrieved tones, “I say, Claypole, what for you no come and give me rum, mine close up bong too, I believe.”

The Dean settled the dispute. King Combo magnanimously resigned his pretensions in consideration of receiving a nobbler and two figs of tobacco; and the black gin led Boney back to the camp, not altogether satisfied that he had the best of the bargain.

We started the next morning, and followed down the Woorara to the little settlement of Thylungera. It was built in a clearing surrounded by scrub—a cluster of bark and slab huts sloping down to the river, which here was broad and shallow, and encumbered by the great logs that in flood-time floated down to the port. The men—small farmers and cedar-cutters—were a rude independent set. They worked hard all day, and slept heavily at night. They had no books, and never saw an English newspaper. Of the world they had no knowledge. Rank was a world not in their vocabulary; the prestige of noble birth incomprehensible to them. Lord Barty once rode that way. They were told that he was the son of a peer, and asked Mr. Kerröuel what that meant. Yet it was curious to see how in a dim way they

recognised and admired the tutor's genius. He was not perfectly happy in these expeditions. With his little white hands and white cuffs, and nervous shrinking from exertion, he was unfitted for the sport and rough play at cutting trees which delighted the Dean and Captain Claypole. The latter threw himself with dramatic ardour into the situation; but Mr. Kerröuel preferred to wander alone in the scrub reading Greek or scribbling poetry. I heard one of the men say once, with many expletives, as he watched the Dean, Captain Claypole, and Jim hewing saplings, in order to partition off an unused hut for our accommodation, and then let his eyes rest upon Mr. Kerröuel, who sat in an inspired mood a little way apart under a quantong-tree: "Well, for squatters and parsons—mind you, I says *for* a—squatter and a—parson, you be's the hardest-working coves I ever set eyes on; but it's them big foreheaded, white-handed chaps that's worth a price. They're a deal better nor us."

We stayed two days at Thylungera. The men eyed the Dean with suspicion at first, and the women stared at us as if we had come down from the stars; but as soon as they saw that we could fend for ourselves and knew how to make a damper, they began to look upon us as not so far removed from their comprehension, took us into their huts, and placed all they had at our disposal.

The Dean inquired if it would be agreeable to the community were he to hold a service. The men looked doubtfully at each other, and one, a red-faced, shock-headed fellow, stepped forward and replied not too graciously, "Well, yes; if it pleased the parson. They weren't much used to long-coated gentlemen; hadn't seen one for ten years. Didn't know if there was a prayer-book among 'em; and on the whole, well, he didn't fancy that church was much in their line, and he thought they'd rather not—if it was all equal."

The Dean asked if there were no ceremonies they wished performed: christenings, marryings, or—he was going to say burials, but paused and added: "You don't look as though the death-rate were high hereabouts."

The man laughed. "There aren't no corpses waiting for the prayers to be said over 'em," he answered. "When any of us go off the hooks we bury each other. Most of us are spliced all reg'lar, and most of us has got kids; and nearly all running about. There don't seem to be much use in fixing a name on to a young un that answers to its call already."

Then one of the women came forward. The two held a little consultation, and presently it was given out that there was a baby on the settlement which did not answer to its name, being only two months old; that the mother had a weakness in favour of christenings, and that the father thought this would be a suitable occasion for a spree. But there was no rum at Thylungera, and a spree without a rum plum-

pudding would be an impossibility, therefore the Dean must defer the ceremony till all things were ready; and a man was started for the township, forty miles distant, to buy the plums and the rum. The latter he imbibed freely on the road, evidently having reasoned to himself that the labourer was worthy of his hire, and arrived the next afternoon very red in the face and much muddled in his faculties.

The neighbours congregated in the rough hut of unplanned slabs, through the chinks of which the sun entered, shedding fantastic gleams upon the mud floor. The Dean put on his surplice and took up his position at the head of the rude table, a pie dish serving as the font. I was asked to be one of the sponsors. The father held the baby, the other godfather—he who had gone for the rum—ranged himself beside me, while the mother tended the pudding by the great open fire-place.

The Dean's face assumed its professional expression, and his squint became appalling. One eye was fixed hard upon the rum-fetcher, who shuffled and looked confused. "Hath this child been already baptised?" asked the Dean severely.

"Baptised!" echoed the godfather, scratching his head, for he did not understand the word, or follow the drift of the question, "I'm damned if I know, but I'll ask Bet."

Whereupon Bet turned from the pudding and parenthetically abused the rum-fetcher for being a fool. The Dean called her to order and the ceremony then proceeded to every one's satisfaction. The Dean improved the occasion by an extemporaneous discourse, adapted particularly to the practical needs and spiritual difficulties of the little community, with a spice of dry humour here and there, that fetched the men considerably. It was an admirable sermon, and made us wish that we, froward sheep, on the Ubi, were ministered unto by such a shepherd as the Dean. At its conclusion the women begged him to stay longer and preach again; and the shock-headed cedar-cutter, who had been spokesman in the first instance, said he wished he'd knowed sooner that there would have been such a deal of sense in the parson's gab. We all helped to eat the rum plum-pudding; and then broke up camp and started for Cape Clangour, parting company with the Dean, who was going inland next day to visit another station.

The cedar - cutters had cleared a track through the scrub. It skirted the river; and we rode in single file, making a halt every now and then to gather *chucky-chuckies* — as the blacks name that most delicious of native berries—which drooped temptingly at the river's side, or to stretch vainly after a parasite lily growing high above our heads, or to inhale the fragrance of wild jasmine, or to exclaim at the glory of blossom and greenery that every turn exhibited.

The vegetation here was beautiful and luxuriant. The bright orange of the chestnut's flowers contrasted brilliantly with its glossy leaves; the orchids looked

like curious and many-hued insects, and the sombre creepers twined in serpent-like withes round the trunks of dead trees from which stag-horn ferns extended their antlets, while arums lifted their cowled heads, and spreading tree-ferns gave a tropical appearance to the rocky dells in which they grew.

Then, where the Woorara joined the sea, there came a long stretch of dry, hard sand, over which we cantered, the waves crawling up and breaking at our horses' feet; and at dusk we crossed the neck of the cape over undulating hills, lightly wooded, to a lovely green hollow closed in by palms. Here we camped for the night; but almost before dawn we were on horseback again, for to see the sun rise from Cape Clangour was the end and aim of our expedition.

Seen from afar, the lone old promontory lay stretched upon Ocean's bosom, enshrouded in mist as by a veil of dusky hair. Wind-swept, scarred, and barren, save for a few clumps of weird-looking breadfruit trees with their spiky roots that clung defiantly to the soil, Cape Clangour seemed indeed, the "utmost of the land."

We dismounted and stood upon the bluff headland. The Pacific was spread before us, meeting the horizon line. Its billows heaved and swelled in a never-ending moan. They crashed against the rocks below us, and sobbed more gently upon the curving beach that seemed like a line of silver, and was lost beneath the sombre pine-forests and grey cliffs of a distant range. Far to the right rose a grim and warning peak not touched yet by the sun's rays, which, like love-light from the eyes of a beautiful woman, were softly illumining the face of the sea.

For some time none of us spoke. We all moved apart as though each soul of us longed for full air and space in which to make it bound outward to the Infinite. A great rock sheltered me. I leaned against its embracing hollow; my feet were firmly planted, and I felt alone in the universe. There are moments when aspiration takes such force that physical consciousness becomes deadened, and existence merged in yearning towards the spiritual. We *know* in such rare moments that there is a spiritual world, so vivid and real, that, in comparison, the material world is but as illusion.

It is when I am in some wild solitary place, little trodden by foot of man, when the winds buffet and fan me, when the sun kisses me, when the wide sky is above and around me, the ocean before me, when no barrier intervenes between sea and heaven, and the warm magnetism of the earth vivifies my frame—it is then that I feel borne in upon me that God is in nature, and that through sympathy with nature we come closest to Him. Then all the old myths appeal to me with deep and solemn meaning. Something in my being tingles and throbs. I yearn after purity, after beauty, after might and vastness, with a fervency that is prayer in its highest sense, for it is tinged by no personal desire, or even by the consciousness of voluntary

devotion.

I wish that it were possible to express in words the vague ecstasy which has often seized me when I have been wandering alone in the Bush—an ecstasy due to no other agency than the influence of nature untainted by civilisation. This state—feeling I cannot call it—is rare with me now. The vivid recollection of that morning at Cape Clangour, recalls other hours of the purest happiness. Exaltation blending with delicious melancholy—for those who have analysed emotion, especially the kind experienced under these influences, will know surely, that joy is never so intense as when it is touched with mournfulness.

* * * * *

After the Cape Clangour expedition, Jim and Mr. Kerröuel went back to Bungroopim, and Jennie and I stayed on for several weeks at Targinie.

It appeared that dangerous characters were at this time plentiful along the borders. A little while before the word had been passed down the district that an escaped bushranger named Leeson was wandering about these parts; and Captain Claypole went everywhere with a loaded revolver, and tingled with excitement whenever he espied a stranger approaching the station.

The description of Leeson was meagre, and an ordinary-sized muscular-looking man would have answered to it very fairly. Thus, any harmless traveller crossing the river to Targinie was liable to be detained according to Captain Claypole's discretion.

It was quite usual to see him rush into the parlour with his eyes alight and his voice trembling with eagerness as he exclaimed, “By Jove, I've caught Leeson! I *must* take him;” and then to learn that the “criminal” proved, upon inquiry, to be a perfectly respectable drover, or perhaps a squatter, not personally known to Captain Claypole. Upon one occasion he locked up two men who had roused his suspicions by their anxiety to cross the creeks during a flood, and who were too indignant to give a satisfactory account of themselves. Fortunately the mail man was able to identify them as belonging to the Ubi, and Captain Claypole released his prisoners, making what amends he could for his incivility.

He was so crestfallen after this episode that for a week or so we heard nothing more about Leeson; and finding himself suddenly short-handed, he turned his energies to the construction of a slab fence, which was necessary for the working of the station.

We used to go down to the paddock, and sit on a log while we watched him split the heavy slabs, and, with the languid assistance of Boney, ram in the posts. This he would do to the air of the anvil chorus or the March from *Lohengrin*, and would

occasionally break off to deliver a dissertation upon modern music. He was beginning to get rather tired of this hard labour, when, one afternoon, two strangers walked up and asked for work. They said they were good splitters, and that they had a mate behind, who was first-rate at fencing, and a carpenter into the bargain.

Their looks did not recommend them, and Mrs. Claypole whispered to her husband that here were the bushrangers at last.

“Too small for Leeson,” said he, eyeing them critically; “but you are right: they look like bad hats. However, I am not game for much more of this, and I’ll engage the men, and chance it.”

The next day their mate arrived, Patsy Crabbe by name. He was a powerful, well-built fellow, with a springy step, and a way of meeting one’s eyes with a bold blank stare that nothing could discomfit, unless it were Mrs. Claypole’s steady Junoesque gaze. He was heard to express great admiration for Mrs. Claypole, and executed admirably some carpentering that she wished done in preparation for a new “married-couple.”

They were badly off for servants just then at Targinie. The new “man and wife” had not come up, and the girl in the kitchen was so little desirable that Captain Claypole was glad to give her three months’ wages, and send her off under the escort of a passing couple called Bain who were travelling southwards, with, as they incautiously announced, a cheque for 80*l.* in their swag.

They stayed a day or two to rest their horses. The night before they started, the two fencers and Patsy Crabbe decamped, and there disappeared also Captain Claypole’s favourite horse and his best pair of corduroy breeches.

There was nothing to be done except bear the loss of the pantaloons with resignation. Captain Claypole lamented them far more piteously than he lamented his horse. Patsy Crabbe probably knew the country thoroughly, and would take care to evade pursuit.

The very morning after the Bains had gone on their way, Mills—stockman from the Macalisters’ station, a little higher up the Woorara—came to Targinie in great wrath and perturbation. He had with him Macnab, the policeman, and two black trackers. Mills was what is called in Australia the regular flash sort, a capital rider, full of pluck, but utterly without respect for God or man. He had narrowly escaped transportation, and was ready to help any criminal who came in his way. His one redeeming quality was devotion to his master. He would cheat every one except Angus Macalister; and for him he would have stolen a horse or committed a murder, if necessary.

Mills rode up to the verandah where Captain Claypole was smoking, and we, within, heard the colloquy:—

“Good day, captain. So Patsy Crabbe has stolen a horse of yours!”

“Ay, and my best pants too,” returned the captain.

“I've got a piece of news for you, captain. Where was your nous that you didn't twig what sort of fencer you had hired? You are too innocent, captain, to be a magistrate out here. Your place is among the virtuous swells in England. Why, Patsy Crabbe was an escaped prisoner out of the Queensland gaol. He passed my hut in his prison togs on his way to Targinie.”

“And you helped him out of them,” retorted Captain Claypole. Mills did not deny the impeachment. “Anyhow, I'm just going to assist him into 'em again; for he has been and robbed Mr. Macalister, and he might have been sure I wouldn't stand that. So look sharp, captain; make out a warrant, and let's be after him as quick as Gipsy Girl can go: that is, if Mrs. Claypole will let us have her 'oss. She is the best on the river. Good for the Ubi Cup, and I wouldn't mind riding her at Bungroopim Races.”

“Have a glass of grog, Mills?”

“Thank ye, sir, I'm always good for a nobbler. Now look here, Claypole, I'll tell you what Patsy's plan was. Never you mind how I know it. That girl of yours was a deal too thick with him. She was a bad lot, and those Bains were flats to let on about the cheque. He took your horse because he'd heard her breeding—the wonder to me is that he took her instead of Gipsy Girl, which he must have known could beat yours hollow. Well, he was going to ride to Warwick and buy a revolver—he won't do that now, because he has got old Macalister's gun—then he meant to cut straight across to Dugandine Scrub, wait there for the Bains, stick them up, nab the cheque, tie them both up in the scrub, while he cashed the cheque in Ipswich, and then make off with the girl. He meant to ride his own horse till it dropped, and then save himself on yours.”

It was an extraordinarily daring scheme, involving nearly 200 miles of hard riding across the mountains, and but for Mills would doubtless have been successfully carried out.

The first evening Patsy came across Mr. Macalister—a queer, harmless, old fellow, with the best heart in the world. Patsy made up to him and they joined camp, the old man dividing his food and blankets. In early morning Patsy rode off, first relieving Mr. Macalister of his gun, his watch, and sundry other possessions, then, to use Mills's expression, cheeking the old man freely, who went home and told the tale. Mills, infuriated at an insult to one of his beloved Macalisters, rode straight to Targinie for a warrant, picking up Macnab and the black boys on the way. Gipsy Girl was saddled, Captain Claypole joined the band, and they all left hot for pursuit. The boys tracked Patsy over the border till his traces were lost in the rocky country at the head of the Ubi. But they came upon them later, and stalked the quarry to his

very camping-ground. Patsy had dismounted, and was holding the bridles of his horses.

Mills rode full tilt to him with his pistol cocked, and held it within two yards of Patsy's face. "It's all over with you," said he. "Give yourself up, or you are a dead man. We've got a warrant."

"What for?" asked Patsy, with his stolid stare.

"Oh, you know well enough. How could you go and rob and cheek a poor old man that shared his tucker with you? And if that isn't Claypole's 'oss whose is it? Why didn't you take Gipsy Girl while you were about it?"

"Couldn't steal a lady's horse," said Patsy; "must draw the line somewhere." Patsy gave up, and they took him down to Ipswich, a business of three days or more. Captain Claypole described the journey. "It was a funny party—the magistrate, the policeman, the witness and the prisoner, all messing together, and as jolly as could be with each other. Patsy told capital stories, and, by George! what good songs he sang!—all about bushranging. We used to sit over the camp fire till all hours. When I began to feel sleepy I would look across at Macnab, 'Time for bed, Macnab!' and Patsy would hold out his wrists for the handcuffs as a matter of course. Macnab told me that underneath his outer trousers Patsy wore a pair of corduroy breeches, with brass buttons; so one night I said to him: 'When you are undressed, if you're going to undress, I wish you'd leave out those pants, will you?'

"'Wh—at!' said Patsy, with his open mouth and blank look.

"'It isn't of much consequence, but they happen to be my best pair, and I'd like to have 'em again, and get 'em washed, that's all.' I suppose my mouth twitched, and gradually I could see the corners of his lips go down, and he burst into a fit of laughing."

Patsy Crabbe turned out to be Leeson and Captain Claypole always took to himself the credit of having captured him. He got five years for robbing Mr. Macalister, and three for the horse. He received his sentence very quietly, but afterwards sprang upon the policemen, had two down, and very nearly escaped. He sent a message from the gaol to the effect that when he got free he'd pay out the Macalisters, and he'd track Mills till he could shoot him; but as for that cove Claypole, he needn't be afraid, for he had behaved like a gentleman.

8 Unbranded calves.

Chapter VI.

MRS. CLAYPOLE was quite a heroine in her unpretending way, and bore the domestic trials which are common to Bush life with great fortitude. I used to watch her admiringly, as she went through the most menial occupations with a grace and dignity which nothing could disturb. Occasionally, as she stood cooking at her kitchen table before the open window, a stray passer-by would approach and address her in the free and easy fashion which prevails among a certain class of bushmen. It was amusing to observe how he would retire, awed by her grand gaze and calm reply. She was always gracious and gentle, but I can quite understand why she was not popular among the Bush ladies.

She did not, like her husband, take life from the dramatic point of view. She was nervously strung, yet I have known her face with the greatest serenity the possibility of serious illness (all her children were born at Targinie without any aid from experienced nurse or doctor), and endure hardships that would have appalled many a less delicate woman, not accustomed to the refinements and luxuries among which she had been brought up.

Targinie was servantless for some time after the Leeson incident. The drays were detained by floods, and with them the married couple who had been engaged for the house. On the run they were shorthanded also, for even the stockmen left, attracted by some new diggings on the Woorara; and the Blacks moved their camp lower down the river. We were obliged to help ourselves. Captain Claypole milked the cows, salted the beef, fetched wood and water, and kept the station going. Mrs. Claypole managed the cooking, and Jennie and I did the housework; while a free selector's wife down the Ubi, moved to pity by the postman's account of our forlorn condition, sent over her daughter of fourteen, whom Captain Claypole dubbed "the unbroken filly," to hold the babies, and render such assistance as lay within her capabilities.

This child of nature was a great source of amusement to us. She had never been off her father's selection, and in her eyes Targinie was a sort of Buckingham Palace; if indeed she had ever heard of Buckingham Palace, which is improbable. But she had been reared thriftily, and though her clothes were few and rough, she understood the virtue of cleanliness. Our underlinen awakened her wonder and aspiration. She was given to soliloquising when alone at her work, and on several occasions was heard to exclaim, heaving a deep sigh, "My word! I wish I could lay holt on a set of shimmies." She used to go about in a holland blouse and pinafore and a pair of heavy laced boots, above which there showed five or six inches of red

leg. The boots were a great trial to her at first. She “didn't wear no boots when she was a shepherding the sheep at home,” and was sorely inclined to rebel against the shackles of conventionality. She was a confiding little maid, with an inquiring turn of mind, and loved to get into conversation with her superiors, for whom she had no slavish respect. The mysteries of civilisation filled her with awe, and called forth her constant ejaculation of “Guid save us!” but in matters of which she had some experience, such as cleaning up, setting bread, &c., she had strong opinions of her own; and what “mother and Jane” did on these occasions was undoubtedly the only right thing to do. Her faith in them was fixed.

I was in the parlour when she first entered it. Poor little unbroken filly! she did not know how to contain her admiration. “My word, Miss Rachel! has *you* got a room like this? I never seed plates hanging up afore. And look at them naked boys! What a lot of pictures *she* has got! Is that *her*? (pointing to a photograph of Mrs. Claypole). Oh, I know! I never seed her before now, but I hearn Jane tell of her, and how she came up to help nurse her. Was that took in Ipswich? *I* never was took; Jane and Freddy has been took though. They was little things; and Jane has got her hand on father's shoulder, like this”—putting her hand on mine to illustrate the position.

It was hard to suppress the unbroken filly. She would wander in promiscuously at any of the open doors, and watch us at our occupations, standing in silence for a minute or two while Mrs. Claypole worked the sewing-machine. Then she would nod her head admiringly and click her tongue against her teeth, and remark, “Well, them machines *is* handy things, to be sure.” Spying a photograph of Mrs. Claypole which the latter had just given me, she launched forth: “Have you got *her* too? I seed *her* in the parlour. I'd like to have one of them; and Guid save us! what a host of flowers yer've got. The Captain, he promised me some flower-seeds when I was going away. Don't yer let him forget now, will yer?” Crossing over to Mrs. Claypole, she went on: “What do yer think? Ryan never knowed yer. You know Ryan, don't yer? Him as came over from Macalister's yesterday, and that come into the kitchen when you was there. ‘Well,’ he says to me, ‘who's that?’ imitating a stage whisper; ‘is that Miss Rachel Murray?’ ‘Miss Rachel!’ says I (in a voice of withering scorn). ‘Don't yer know Mrs. Claypole?’ ‘Law!’ says he, ‘is that Mrs. Claypole?’ And then he towed me to tell yer that Jane says she don't mind if she do come down and try her hand at the cooking when mother wants me back.”

The drays arrived, however, before Jane was called upon to carry out her proposal; and the unbroken filly returned to the selection with her mental horizon considerably enlarged by her peep at civilisation.

Soon after this, Jim came to take us home that we might make preparations for the

Ubi races, which this year were to be held at Bungroopim. Jim had been for some time assiduously clearing the racecourse, and we were only waiting till the completion of our new kitchen to send out invitations.

We had chosen April as the most convenient month, for it is then neither too hot nor too cold to live out of doors day and night, and thunderstorms are less to be feared. But now in March the weather was unusually sultry and oppressive. Day after day, leaden clouds gathered on the horizon and dispersed at even, always holding in reserve the wrath which we knew must ere long descend with intensified force. As we crossed the range from Targinie, it became evident that this very day we must run a race with the tempest that was rising slowly but surely behind the Woorara mountains.

Scarcely a leaf stirred. Beasts and birds were silent; but on the stagnant pools there was the life of myriads of insects.

The sweat dripped from our horses' flanks and their limbs dragged heavily. The mountains looked dead and grey; the sky was grey also. Thunder muttered sullenly, and pallid gleams played upon the bank of clouds behind us. We spurred on in a fast trot, up and down the broken ridges, where rocks and fallen trees impeded our progress, and across stony gullies till we reached the more level country that stretched along the banks of the Ubi. It was a wild ride. At four o'clock the storm was close upon us, and there was still an extent of several miles to be covered. We fancied that we could hear the rush of hail in our rear. Then there was a murmuring in the leaves and the grass; animals called to each other, and there sounded the strange cries of affrighted reptiles. A wind rose keen and fresh—that wind which is the sure precursor of a bad storm. But it came like the breath of life to our nostrils, and after the intense heat and brooding stillness, had a most exhilarating effect upon our minds and bodies. We galloped in single file along the narrow track, the blackboy in advance with the packhorse struggling after him, and the pint pots strapped to his saddle rattling against each other. A turn in the creek showed us another flying figure ahead—that of a man, well mounted, his white shirt inflated by the wind, and his puggaree streaming straight. He, too, was enjoying this break-neck race, for the look he turned back upon us was full of pleasurable excitement. He tightened rein and we exchanged a few breathless words.

“Storm close up,” said Jim; “are you for Bungroopim?”

“Yes. Ansdell from Tarooma. Price sent me over.”

“All right! come along. My sister,”—and there was an ineffectual attempt at a bow, and a lifting of the hat—“make for the crossing, and avoid the hole to the right.”

Now we flew over a little plain, the dead leaves and twigs caught up and swirling

round us, the thunder crashing in volleys, and streaks of forked lightning rending the sky; while through all sounded the tree frog's dismal croak, and the weird peal of the laughing jackass.

Mr. Ansdell and I were side by side; we glanced at each other and he jerked out an odd remark:

“Isn't this like the ride in Berlioz' *Faust*?”

“I wish that I'd ever heard it,” I shrieked in return, as we dashed through the sliprails.

The first hailstones were falling when we gained the head station. We flung ourselves from our horses and rushed across the yard to the new kitchen, which offered the nearest refuge. Only just in time. One stone struck me with such force that my arm was bruised, and others, bigger than a pigeon's egg, clattered upon the zinc roof of the “lean to,” under which Jim had hurriedly housed the horses.

The din was terrific, and the ice-balls fell thicker and larger. We had good reason to congratulate ourselves, for had we been still out of doors, it would have been hardly possible to escape serious injury. As it was, we were obliged to run from nook to nook in the empty building, as though we were playing puss in the corner, in order to shelter ourselves from the hail and broken glass that came flying in, and to keep clear of the rain which poured through the ceiling in waterspouts.

We were blinded for an instant by a vivid flash, and simultaneously a tremendous boom shook the earth and rocked the wooden building upon its foundations. Involuntarily we stretched forth hands and cried in terror, “The lightning has struck the house!”

There was a sudden lull in the roar, and the hail ceased. The storm had passed over us, and was rushing swiftly onward. We went into the verandah, and from thence looked out upon a scene of desolation. The house stood uninjured, but a giant eucalyptus which had shaded the water-cask had been struck by a thunderbolt, and was literally torn into shreds — branches, leaves, and splinters strewing the ground for many yards. The meat store and carpenters' sheds were stripped of bark; shrubs and plants lay level with the earth; between the house and stockyard, five large trees lying in a row, showed the narrow track which the storm had taken, while still further, its course could be traced like the clearing of a telegraph avenue. Lumps of ice lay piled in deep drifts against walls and fences; we gathered it up into buckets and carried it at once to the larder to cool the beer and butter; for, of all luxuries, ice is the one most ardently longed for in the Bush.

Then we walked in sad procession round the premises to see what damage had been done. It was a melancholy inspection. Pet animals had been killed, provisions spoilt, windows broken, shingles loosened, rooms flooded, and bedding soaked. In

the garden all was havoc. The ground was carpeted with leaves; the orange-trees stripped naked, and their fine promise of fruit come to nought. Our sorrow was too deep for words. Jim ran to the yards to satisfy himself as to the safety of two imported bulls; Mr. Kerröuel to his own quarters, of which he undertook the responsibility; and Jennie and I stood ruefully contemplating the wreck, while our stranger-guest watched us in mute sympathy.

At last he ventured to suggest that it was late in the afternoon, and that he had better light fires, mop the floors, and dry the bedding, or we should catch our deaths of cold that night.

We laughed; for it was a more practical view of the situation than could have been expected from a new chum. Mr. Ansdell declared that he had a true Englishman's horror of damp, and that the reckless indifference of Australian housekeepers in the matter of airing sheets was a source of keen anxiety to him. He went to the woodshed to pick up such dry logs as might be found under the rest, and came back with his arms full of sticks, and a centipede calmly crawling up his shirt-sleeve. He knocked off the reptile very coolly, killed it, and proceeded to light the fire; but before the logs were ablaze, the sun shone forth again, and the mountains glowed beneath his waning rays. We all set to work with a will. Stretchers were dragged out and placed on end in the verandah, blankets hung up, and floors swabbed. In the course of these operations we made friends with Mr. Ansdell, of whom as yet we knew but very little. He told us that he was staying with Mr. Price, of Tarooma; that he had not been long in Australia; that he was going to buy a cattle-station; that it had been proposed he should settle in the Donga district; and that he had come over to ask my father's advice as to the advisability of purchasing Eurogan, the scene of the Grant murder, that tragedy which still darkened the memory of my childhood.

I told him the story of the raid against the Blacks; and by the time our floors were dry he had made himself acquainted with my short biography. Nightfall came, the moon was at her full, and the star which they called mine rose above Roop's Crag. We sat out in the verandah and watched the distant mountains, their crests now lightly touched with vapour, and now showing clear against the sky. The night was full of sweetness and tranquil joy. The battered flowers and crushed leaves gave forth a rich perfume, and one datura bell left alone on its shrub, gleamed pale in the moonlight, and its heavy fragrance seemed purified by the storm. Grey old Roop's Crag turned towards us his rocky front, like the face of a tried companion, always unchangable through many changing moods, and rejoicing at our joy. The mountains we have known and loved in childhood become, in after life, friends from whom no changes or misconceptions can sever us. In the thought of them there is no mingling of bitterness. They are associated with the pure enthusiasms of

youth, of which the memory lingers with us, like the memory of a mother's kisses; and in times of deep trouble and desolation our hearts, lonely and aching, turn to the old, true hills, with a strange sense of anchorage and relief.

The father was away in town, and Jim pressed Mr. Ansdell to stay till his return. He seemed to have no particular plans, and promised very readily to help us in organising some charades and tableaux with which Jennie and I wished to vary the course of entertainments during the race week. We foresaw difficulties in the matter of scenic arrangements, but our own imaginations being naturally vivid, we hoped that the faculty might be more or less developed in our spectators, and that thus their minds' eyes might behold what we intended to represent, especially if, as Mr. Ansdell suggested, some one were posted at one side of the curtain to announce as occasion required,

“This is a chamber in the marble palace of a Roman emperor.”

“This is the courtyard of a mediaeval ruin.”

“This is a white sheet, but you will please imagine it a grand mythological landscape,” and so forth.

I liked Mr. Ansdell very much, but Jennie did not think him romantic or tragic enough to be really interesting. She had not enjoyed such good opportunities for studying his character, as were afforded me. It generally happened that we rode together, for Jennie preferred the conversation of Mr. Kerröuel or of Jim. Now Jim, though rather colonial in his ways, was very manly and good looking. He was ambitious and full of great aspirations. He had grand political views and believed in the future of Australia. He laughed at us for what he called our Anglomania, and always declared that it was nobler to help in creating a new civilisation, than to hang on to the skirts of an old one. Jim and Jennie used to discuss this question during our rides, or on the verandah after dinner, while Mr. Ansdell and I talked about Europe, about books, music, poetry, and even about religion and philosophy. Mr. Ansdell often said that I was very enthusiastic; but then he would add that enthusiasm was the rarest and most beautiful thing in the world, and would bid me try and keep it as my most precious possession; and so I was never afraid to tell him anything that was in my mind.

But apart from abstract things, Jennie and I had a little scheme which after a time I confided to Mr. Ansdell. It concerned Robina Daring, who was coming to stay at Bungroopim for the Races. We were very fond of Robina, but something hard in her nature grated upon our sensibilities, and it was a favourite theory with us, that could she only love some one with her whole heart, she would become gentle and womanly, instead of being strongminded and unsympathetic. We knew, however, that she disdained the squatters on the Woorara and the Ubi, though she did not

mind breaking their hearts, and that she also was infected with the Anglomania, and would never marry any one but a travelled and cultivated Englishman.

We had only twice seen Mr. Price, the new owner of Tarooma, but we had already made up our minds that he, of all persons, was calculated to captivate Robina Daring. He was clever, handsome, refined. He had seen a great deal of the world, and was moreover a splendid rider, an accomplishment which would count for a great deal with Robina. His manner gave the impression that in his heart he barely tolerated Australia and the Australians, but was too well-bred to show his contempt for them openly. We did not quite like this attitude; however, as he seemed justified in considering himself superior to his surroundings, we did not take umbrage at it, but trusted that Robina would effect a change in his way of thinking.

Mr. Ansdell shook his head when we told him of our plan. "It won't do," he said, "Price has had a great emotion. He is in the stage of reaction and makes a merit of being indifferent to young ladies. There must be a rival in the field to spur his jaded interest. You had better give that part to me."

Thus it was agreed. Robina, escorted by Combo, king of the Woorara, arrived a little before the other people we had asked, and Mr. Ansdell proceeded at once to make himself agreeable to her. With the exception of a week's visit to Tarooma he had been with us all this time, therefore we were now on very intimate terms. His attentions to Robina became a joke between us. Sometimes he would ask us in an aside whether he were playing his part properly. And Jennie would retort, "So perfectly, that we think it has ceased to be a part." But I don't think that Jennie ever quite understood Mr. Ansdell.

Robina, excited by the prospect of the Races, was looking particularly well. She was tall, moved gracefully, and always seemed at her ease. She had cold, clear, grey eyes, with pencilled brows and long dark lashes, and her smile was the sweetest I have ever seen. After having said something startling or flippant, she would look up and smile, and thus disarm criticism. Her moods were very fitful. At one time she was feverishly gay; at another, almost sad. Her manner had gained her the reputation of being very clever; but as a matter of fact she never said anything noticeably original. It was just her way of putting things.

Out on the verandah in the evening, when in the humour, she would sometimes keep us all amused for hours, though it would have been difficult to say at what. Upon those occasions I have observed Mr. Kerröuel, always very quiet in general company, sit and watch her with a bewildered expression upon his dreamy face; and I have heard him ask afterwards, "Is it true that Miss Daring is considered to have talent? It seems to me that she talks more nonsense than any young lady I have ever met."

I saw that Mr. Ansdell was interested in her, and she also attracted Lord Barty—who drove over in a high American buggy with four horses and brand new harness. He brought with him a tennis set—lawn-tennis was at that time practically unknown in the colony; it was only played at Government House and to us was mysteriously connected with the English aristocracy. He brought also a cask of Allsopp's ale, and two cases of champagne in which to drink to the winner of the Ubi cup. This extravagance indicated that Lord Barty had recently received a remittance from England. He told us with delight that “The Gully” was now a freehold, that he was going to make his fortune by breeding Angora goats and prize dogs, that he had a grand-piano and an icemaking machine on the way out, and that he intended to dam the creek, lay on water to the garden, and build a tiled bath-room. He took our breath away; but Lord Barty was always announcing Utopian schemes which never came to anything, and we felt sure that before long he would be reduced to driving one horse, to drinking tea, and to lecturing upon the philosophy of economy and abstinence.

Those who were to take part in the theatricals, or help in the preparations, came straggling up through the sliprails by twos and threes the day but one before that appointed for the general rush of visitors. The Claypoles rode over in company with Sam Bantling and his sister from the Woorara. Sam was a large, red-faced, red-headed, corpulent youth, with a fine but quite uncultivated tenor voice, and a deeply-rooted conviction that he had all the powers of a tragedian. Some of Sam Bantling's Shakespearian impersonations were decidedly original, if as a whole, his *repertoire* lacked variety. Hamlet or Falstaff, King Lear or Benedick, Touchstone or Othello, all were fiercely, monotonously tragic. Sam was always tragic, whether riding or walking, singing or dancing, cracking a stockwhip, tracking up a heifer, or blowing a bush-fire with his hat; but his round flaming face, his fiery hair, uncouth figure, colonial drawl, and eccentricities of pronunciation—for he had a soul above rules—were so excessively comic in contrast, that Sam Bantling's Hamlet was one of the features of the district, and he was much sought after in consequence.

Maria Bantling was phlegmatic, stolid, and utterly unimaginative. But Maria had a face modelled upon the antique type; fine hair that reached below her waist, and fleshy, firmly-curved lips. Therefore Maria was destined to enact the British druidess in our grand tableau from the *Bridal of Triermain*, and Europa in a mythological representation of the four quarters of the globe.

Old Macalister—he whom Leeson had relieved of his watch and carbine—followed, with his nephew Angus, in the Claypoles' wake. Poor old Macalister was very shaky; his nervous system was out of order. This was particularly noticeable when Jim had neglected to put out the grog, and old Mac had to pass an hour or two

without a nip. His head would sink upon his breast, and at intervals he would murmur dejectedly, "A'm a pair old body; A'm not what I wass." But when his system was reinvigorated by a glass of whisky he would brighten up a little, and would tell us pointless anecdotes of the time when "A wass Sergeant-at-Arms in the Legislative Assembly, and the Meenistry and the Speaker put all their dependence on me for presairving the dignity and honour of the colony," and of the various refractory members he had taken into custody. They seemed to have been an unruly set from his account. His stories were interrupted by many guffaws, for he always got wildly excited when reverting to this brilliant period of his career, and his laughter was like the tinkle of a cracked bullock-bell. He also told us with great pride that Angus's sister had lately married a Mr. Campbell, cousin to my friend Duncan, the drover, a free selector who claimed kinship with the Duke of Argyll; and one evening, when Lord Barty had ventured to dispute with Angus concerning the breeding of a particular bull known on the Woorara, Mr. Macalister interposed with dignity, "I'll no be taking a mean advantage of you, Mr. Lord, but ye'll perhaps concede that there's respect due to the opeenion of a connection of her Majesty."

Angus was a shy, raw-boned youth, who knew a great deal about the manners and customs of cattle, but very little about those of ladies. He took up his quarters by the creek, where tents had been erected for the accommodation of our bachelor guests. Here a contingent of Bushmen had already established themselves. They had come from a distance, for the sake of the racing only, and did not trouble us much with their company. As each was supposed to bring his own blankets, and any other little luxuries he might require, and as there was a capital bathing-hole in the creek, we did not concern ourselves about that department.

We got a good deal of amusement out of our preparations, which were mostly crowded into the two days before the Races. Tarpaulins had been borrowed from the stations near, and a levy had been made upon the crockery of our neighbours. Part of the garden had been inclosed for a dining-room, and the back verandah was curtained off into a number of small bed-rooms. It is wonderful how many people an Australian house will hold upon an emergency, and also how easy it is to entertain an unlimited number when deficiencies are turned into a joke, or accounted for by the statement that one of the drays was capsized in a creek on the way up. That dray must indeed have been heavily loaded, if there were any truth in our unblushing assertions as to the delicacies it contained.

Each person took his or her share of work, Captain Claypole assuming the office of Administrator of the Government, and allotting their various duties to his subordinates. Mrs. Claypole was appointed to the kitchen, and two or three of the most impracticable of the Bushmen were told off to beat eggs and stir custards

under her supervision. Angus Macalister, and others of the brigade from the creek, were sent to shoot wild ducks. Patty Leadbitter—a pretty harum-scarum little creature, who sang pert songs from *Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*, and played practical jokes upon any one who would allow her the chance—was given two blackboys, a gin to scrub, and three of her adorers, and commissioned to decorate the new kitchen and prepare the floor for dancing. Jim took charge of the racing department; Mr. Kerröuel was set to the manufacture of Chinese lanterns; and the rest of us were placed under the direction of our stage-manager, Lord Barty, and bidden to make ready for our tableaux, which were to be the feature of the first evening. These, however, presented serious difficulties. Bungroopim had not been built with a view to theatrical performances. The drawing-room was small, and hopelessly unadaptable to our purposes, with a blank wall at one end and a fireplace at the other. As a matter of fact, there seemed no possibility of arranging a stage, and never would have been, had not Mr. Ansdell conceived the brilliant notion of taking out half-a-dozen of the slabs which divided the drawing-room from Jim's bedroom.

No sooner suggested than accomplished, though doubts were expressed as to whether the wall-plate might not give way, or the canvas ceiling fall down. However, nothing more alarming took place than the discovery of a whip-snake coiled upon the wooden sleeper, just above the spot where Miss Bantling was to stand in a condition of “minstrel ecstasy;” and it was covertly regretted that the reptile had not been allowed to remain, in the hope that, by its means, some sort of expression might have been called into Maria's impassive countenance. There is one advantage in Australian houses—they can be pulled to pieces almost as easily as a tower made of children's bricks. The wall-paper and canvas-lining were slit and rolled up; the aperture was framed with green boughs and a crimson creeper from the scrub, which had a very pretty effect; a blanket did duty for a drop-scene, and more blankets and boughs formed a sylvan background, which, if not appropriate, was at least picturesque.

We had got through the charade and the grand scene from *Hamlet*—in which Mr. Macalister insisted upon taking the part of the Ghost—and were rehearsing the *Bridal of Triermain* tableau, when Sir Roland de Vaux himself, in the person of Mr. Price, walked in. Lord Barty was passionately adjuring Miss Bantling to look ecstatic. She was leaning upon a harp that had been made by our station carpenter; it was covered with yellow tissue paper and had twine strings. Robina, Jennie, and I were kneeling to an imaginary De Vaux, profering “sceptre, robe, and crown, liegdom and seigneurie.” The real Sir Roland motioning us to remain in position stepped forward and placed himself in attitude. He looked very handsome, although

a little conceited. His eyes were dark and fiery, and he had that nameless air of ease and distinction which, in Australia at least, seems the attribute of a certain type of Englishman. We had half started from our knees, and our obedience to his mute gesture, notwithstanding the comicality of the reception, showed that the man had considerable power of influencing people.

Sam Bantling read aloud the scene with much gusto, though he pronounced the *i* long in "Triermain," and "De Vaux" as though it were "walks" with a *v*. But we asked Mr. Kerröuel, whom Sam respected as a poet and a man of letters, to correct his little mistakes privately.

"The 'minstrel ecstasy,' Miss Bantling!" cried Lord Barty, in despair; "you forget that you are an inspired British druidess."

"How can I feel ecstatic when I'm not ecstatic and never was such a thing in my life?" rejoined Maria in an injured tone; "and how can I imagine that I am a druidess when I know that I'm nothing of the kind?"

"Throw the head back," directed Lord Barty. "So.—Now! The eye glowing with fervour and enthusiasm—the gaze directed upward—Oh, come! that is not it, you know."

"Nae, nae," interrupted old Mac; "that isna eet."

"Think of something," continued Lord Barty, persuasively; "something fine, like being in love, or poetry, or ghosts; something that'll shake you up and make you squirmy."

"I'm thinking all I can," said Maria, sweetly, "about snakes."

There was a general laugh, and we relaxed somewhat. I had noticed a swift and enigmatic glance start from Mr. Price's eyes towards Robina. I now looked at her, and wondered what impression they were making upon each other. Neither of them were smiling. There was not the ghost of merriment upon Robina's face. It was very pale, her gaze was fixed and far-away, and her lips were pressed tightly together as though she feared they might tremble. I had never seen Robina look quite like that, and it struck me at once that this was not the first time she and Mr. Price had met, though in speaking of him she had never claimed him as an acquaintance.

This impression was confirmed when a few moments later, after we had all risen, they shook hands with one another quite naturally.

"I had no idea you knew Mr. Price," exclaimed Jennie.

"Yes," answered Robina in a hard, cold voice. "We met a long time ago when I was an unsophisticated barbarian, and Mr. Price full of Matthew Arnold—all sweetness and light. I am a barbarian still, but I am not unsophisticated. I didn't think Mr. Price would remember me. I daresay he has forgotten Matthew Arnold by this time."

“No, Miss Daring,” he replied, I haven't forgotten Matthew Arnold; I never forget anything. But sweetness and light are a little out of date in England. It has been discovered that the age is complex, and that the faculty to be cultivated is a sense of psychological harmony. We must suit our sentiments and emotions to our surroundings—one set for green fields and babbling brooks, another for the mephitic atmosphere of cities—and so on.”

“Another set for barbarians and gum trees. In fact you keep your emotions ready bottled fit for use, and when you return to the Bush you take up that particular phial labelled, ‘The mixture as before.’ Now Lord Barty, to business again!”

Robina turned abruptly away, giving Mr. Price no time for rejoinder, and avoiding his look, which was full of inquiry and interest. He drew aside and watched the next tableau in an absent manner, starting as though he had been awakened from a deep reverie, when called upon to take his part from a scene in *The Rape of the Lock*, in which Miss Daring was Belinda.

By seven o'clock that evening, everything was in readiness, and most of our guests—over a hundred in number—had arrived. It was a pretty sight to see them streaming down from the sliprails, the girls showing at their best on horseback, and making their steeds prance and curvet as with tightened rein they cantered across the paddock; the bushmen in spotless moleskins, and with bridles polished and bits gleaming; the black boys, picturesque in their bright-coloured shirts, all eyes and teeth which glistened in contrast with their black faces, cutting capers and shouting to the tribe which had assembled outside the fence; and then the long string of racers and packhorses, while every now and then a heavily freighted buggy would dash up, whip cracking and harness jingling. As shadows lengthened, the mountains became many-hued, melting from rose to violet. The plain lay bathed in mellow light, and the Indian corn in the cultivation paddock was a sheet of gold. Sunset etherealised every feature in the scene—the homely wood-heap, the queer tumbledown sheds, the bark-roofed dairy, and sapling fence covered with pumpkin vines and prickly pears. Bungroopim had never looked more attractive; the garden spick and span as Peter the Kanaka could make it; the bougainvillea and bignonia flaunting their brilliant blossoms, and the waxen stephanotis in bloom twining the verandah posts.

We, the house party, all collected in the verandah of the new kitchen, where Patty Leadbitter dispensed tea to the ladies as they arrived, and the contingent under her orders still twined native creepers and rubbed the floor with wax-candles. Robina and Mr. Ansdell apart were gathering stephanotis and talking earnestly, and Mr. Price languidly made himself agreeable to Jennie. The father and Jim stood on the wooden steps and had a cheery greeting for each new comer as he dismounted and flung his bundle of blankets against the railings. The red and blue heap rose higher

and higher till there were no more to be added; and then there was a rush of bachelors down to the camp. Every one turned out his own horse and hung his saddle and bridle on the wooden palings which surrounded the dairy. The blacks ran to and fro carrying packs and jabbering to each other. Some of the gins ranged themselves in a semicircle, and shouted in chorus "Budgery white Mary," as they admiringly contemplated the group of twenty or thirty girls who crowded round my father, while he gallantly snipped off sprays of stephanotis and presented some to each fair guest for her adornment. Then in a spirit of mischief, he turned to St. Helena, the oldest, ugliest, and most enthusiastic of the gins, and demanded which white Mary was the handsomest.

But a Black will always give a diplomatic reply; and old St. Helena held Mrs. Malaprop's opinion concerning comparisons, and would not commit herself. She leered ecstatically at Robina, whose tall graceful figure was her most striking point, and lifting her lean arm made the sound that in a Black is expressive of admiration. "Tsch! Tsch! budgery long fellow white Mary, hé! budgery!" Then glancing at Jennie she exclaimed, "Tsch! Tsch! budgery mel!" (beautiful eyes), and now towards Maria Bantling, whose hair yet hung *à la Druidess*. "Tsch! my word! budgery grass! all corbon budgery. Everybody budgery!"

The bell clanged, and St. Helena ran whooping down to the camp, made happy by the present of a fig of tobacco.

Chapter VII.

THE *tableaux* gave satisfaction, though I believe several of our Bush neighbours, who had never in their lives heard of anything of the kind, were sorely puzzled as to the drift of the whole proceeding. Mr. Ansdell repeated privately to me a remark which one Free Selector was heard making to another, to the effect that he had always understood Rachel Murray was short of a sheet of a bark—the Australian equivalent of “a tile loose”—but he hadn't known before that madness was a catching complaint, and for his part he thought we had better be taken to Woogaroo Asylum before it spread any further down the river.

Sam Bantling delivered his oration as Hamlet in a costume of his own devising, it being composed chiefly of a pair of checked knickerbockers borrowed from Captain Claypole, a jockey's jacket, and a Glengarry cap with a plume of cock's feathers; while old Mac, wrapped in a sheet and rather tottery about the limbs, presented a remarkable appearance as the Ghost. There was a good deal of amusement over the *Bridal of Triermain* tableau and Miss Bantling's “minstrel ecstasy;” and in the scene from *The Rape of the Lock*, Robina looked very lovely in her old-fashioned dress, which she wore during the remainder of the evening. The charade, however, was rather spiritless. We all seemed to be at cross purposes. Robina appeared to like talking behind the scenes—or rather behind the blankets—to Mr. Ansdell, better than co-quetting on the stage with Mr. Price. She went through her part in a listless, rather scornful fashion, though occasionally there was in her manner a kind of covert satire and bitterness which puzzled me exceedingly, while though her face was set and her voice metallic, her eyes gleamed with a fire that suggested the conflict of hidden passions. Mr. Price, on the contrary, was gentle, a little sad and most assiduous to please. I had never seen him to better advantage, for he had quite thrown off his air of superiority.

Robina was the centre of attraction that evening. Lord Barty, Mr. Ansdell, and Mr. Price were her devoted slaves during the performance, and afterwards she was surrounded by admirers with whom she flirted impartially. It was a lovely moonlight night, and the garden and backyard were illuminated with Chinese lanterns; while up near the stockyard, the Blacks had made a huge bonfire, and were shouting and dancing round it, their dusky, half-naked forms looking very weird in the fitful gleams shed by the burning logs. The racing-men had appropriated the new kitchen, for there was a good deal to arrange about stakes, entrances, &c., for the next day; so that our party was rather divided, the more polished of the gentlemen remaining in the drawing-room where there was music and some languid

dancing, the roughest betaking themselves to the camp or the huts. There the postman, stockmen, and stray loafers had congregated and were having a good time smoking, drinking, telling stories and singing comic songs, of which long-drawn notes floated up occasionally on the breeze from the plain, interspersed with hoarse laughter.

Late in the evening I saw Mr. Price approach Robina, and wait patiently till she had dismissed her partner. "Will you not give me one turn?" he asked pleadingly.

"No," she answered almost with rudeness, "I am tired. I do not mean to dance any more."

"Will you waltz with me to-morrow evening? It will be like old times, and I should be glad to think they might come back again."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I don't think we have either of us had much better times since then." Robina laughed in an unpleasant way. "My emotions don't flow in cycles like yours. The 'mixture as before' wouldn't suit me at all now. Oh, yes, I have had much better times 'since then,' if that means since my giddy head was turned by the wild excitement of a Brisbane season. I have spent a winter or two in Melbourne. I have been very much admired. I am improved—don't you think so? I know my own value, and that is the first thing a woman ought to learn."

"What do you think now of the success of your scheme?" asked Mr. Ansdell a few moments later.

He had followed me to my particular nook in the verandah, whither I had gone to search for a book of waltzes which had been asked for. Jennie and I had fitted up this corner and held it sacred to our muse. It was closed in and divided from the rest of the verandah by a trellis thickly covered with Chinese jasmine, so dense that it looked like a wall, and was a dangerous trap for the unwary, as sounds could be heard equally from either side.

"I'm afraid it won't do at all," I answered. "I don't think he interests her."

"Or perhaps he *has* interested her too much. Price likes to make women feel his power. He ought to be labelled dangerous. That is a contemptible weakness in a man; yet he is not a bad fellow in his way. He has grand impulses, but no steadiness of purpose or feeling; and he has the peculiarity of only caring very much for a thing which is beyond his reach."

"Do you know a great deal about Mr. Price?" I asked.

"Not a great deal; but I know that he was once almost in love with Miss Daring."

"Were they engaged?"

"Oh, no, Price went off suddenly to England, and the critical question was never asked."

“And you never said anything when I told you of my match-making plan?”

“I had no right to bring a lady's feelings under discussion. And I wanted to see how your innocent scheme would prosper.”

“Well, there is an end of it now.”

“I am not so sure of that. It's a curious situation. I should like to work it out, granting my supposition to be correct. Let us imagine that some years ago a man of Price's type *would have loved* a certain woman if only she had been a little more difficult to win. Suppose that having won her affections, he withdrew, and that she, humiliated to the heart's core, becomes hardened and disdainful. Thus changed, they meet again, and he, following the instinct of his nature, falls genuinely in love with her. How will her impulses guide her conduct? Will she finally repulse him, or will she yield to the old fascination? You see it is a nice study of human nature. All sorts of complex motives would be brought into play. Everything depends upon the strength and purity of the woman's love. It might have quite died out. It might be smouldering ready to blaze afresh, bright as ever. Can love, real love, be killed in that way, or would it leap up and crush all that was ignoble? Tell me what you think.”

“I don't know. I'm afraid that I haven't thought much about such things.”

“No?” he said questioningly. “You have lived in your own world—you have had your Bush and your mountains and your enthusiasms about abstract things, and your books and homely character studies, and you haven't wanted exciting romance. But sooner or later, you must be brought face to face with the greatest reality of life.”

“I hope if ever that happens,” I answered a little unsteadily, “that I may not be made the victim of any psychological experiments; but that I may be taught my lesson by a true single-hearted man.”

“I hope so too,” he replied gravely; “I hope so with my whole heart.”

Just then, Sam Bantling's rigorous tenor burst forth filling the air.

“Is it a dream? then waking would be pain.

Oh! do not wake me. Let me dream again,”

sang he after an impassioned style of his own.

A voice sounded from the other side of the partition. It was that of Robina; and it had changed: its tone was sweeter than before, but I did not catch the words.

Then Mr. Price spoke. “Let us go into the garden, anywhere, to escape from that noise. When I hear such singing I am reminded of the Frenchman who, apparently without motive, murdered one of his friends. When asked his reason all he replied was, ‘Pourquoi donc etait-il musicien?’ I should like to murder Sam Bantling.”

Robina and I occupied a tiny verandah room. It was not larger than a ship's cabin,

and there was barely space to move between the beds. Jennie was to have been my companion; but Robina had an odd kind of exclusiveness, and declined to share a room with any one but me. Neither of us seemed that night very much inclined for sleep. We chattered for some time about all that had been happening, criticising everybody, as girls do after parties, and discussing dress and such like trivialities. Then Robina became more serious. She inveighed against the conventional shackles by which women were bound, and the sentimental cant that governed their lives! They were taught duplicity! They were taught to rule by wile and artifice! It was a sin against the traditions of her sex for a woman to have the courage of her feelings and opinions! The whole system was false and degrading! There was no equality between the sexes! A wife must be either slave or governor! In the latter case she must despise her husband! In fact she must either despise or be despised! For her part Robina preferred the first alternative. She was seriously considering whether she would go out with her brother to the Never-never country, take up a new run, fight the Blacks and dress up in man's clothes; or whether she would marry Lord Barty, or some other highborn fool, carry him off to England, and see what was to be got out of civilisation.

In the midst of this reckless tirade, Robina stopped and burst out laughing. I asked what amused her.

“Oh, nothing; only life is such a jumble of the sublime and the ridiculous. There came into my mind at that moment a scene out of an opera I saw in Melbourne—*Aida*, I think. The most glorious death-scene you can imagine; two lovers shut up in a dungeon beneath an Egyptian temple and doomed to perish. She sings in French, ‘Cannot your colossal strength remove this stone?’ He gives a little tap, and then another. ‘*Non, non,*’ he shrieks, in a frenzied manner; and they both tap as though they were knocking with a croquet mallet. Then they calmly resign themselves, and expire, after a magnificent duet which requires an enormous amount of physical exertion. Life is like that scene in a way. I'm rather mixed, I know, but still I see the application of the metaphor. We tap feebly at some big moral obstacle that may be nothing more than lath and brown paper, making a tremendous fuss all the time, and in reality never putting forth our strength. Then after a great deal of theatrical rhodomontade, we give it up as a bad job, and allow ourselves to be overcome by circumstances, another person's will, anything that happens to get the better of our judgment.”

“Are you afraid of some one or some thing getting the better of you, Robina?”

“No,” she answered excitedly; “haven't I always prided myself upon being cool and strongminded, and upon never letting myself be governed by feeling or womanish shrinkings? Why, Rachel child, I've done some plucky things, as you

know. Don't you remember when I got a cropper down by the Bean-Tree crossing, and dragged myself home with a broken leg; and you all wondered. I've never really given in about anything, no matter how hard I was hit."

"Don't you think, Robina," I ventured to say, "that there are some things it might be nobler to give in about?"

"What sort of things, Rachel?"

"If I loved any one, and there had been a sort of battle between us, and I was ashamed to let him know he had conquered me, I'd own to it; against my judgment and pride, I'd be true to my feeling."

"No, Rachel," said she, with a strange kind of smile; "if the man you loved had made you despise him, you wouldn't trust your feeling, you would be guided by your judgment."

I did not know what to reply; Robina sat for some time in silence on the foot of the bed, combing out her long hair. At last she said, "I suppose you thought it odd that I didn't tell you I had known Mr. Price four years ago? I am going to make a clean breast of everything. I think it will be a good thing for me. I've made up my mind; and it will be like burning the ships, don't you know."

I went and sat down on the bed beside her. I was full of sympathy, for I felt sure that she was suffering. But my movement seemed to vex her, for she got up abruptly. "Good gracious!" she exclaimed; "I'm not going to be sentimental if I can help it. It isn't much of a romance after all."

She walked rapidly to and fro in the little space, then halted, and leaning her elbows on the dressing-table, while every now and then she gazed abstractedly at her own face in the looking-glass, began her story. She told it in a very jerky, disconnected fashion, with long pauses which impressed her words upon my memory, and I listened and waited, not daring to hurry or interrupt her. It had a great effect upon my imagination, and I write her own words as nearly as I can recollect them.

"It was when I was first in Brisbane—the year I came out. I went down a raw Bush girl to stay with Agnes Stirling, and go to some Government House balls. You can't think what a new chum I was at it all. I had no more idea of flirting than a baby. When people told me I was pretty, I thought they were making fun of me. I was just as fresh and simple as a sprig of mountain wattle—that was what he used to call me. I loved riding, and I loved dancing; and I believed in everybody. I believed intensely in Mr. Price."

Robina stopped, and looked steadily at herself in the glass. Her eyes seemed to grow larger with unshed tears, and there was a falter in her voice when she went on—

“I don't believe, Rachel, there is anything in the world so beautiful or so sweet as a very young girl's love. If I were a man, I couldn't deliberately set myself to win an innocent girl's heart. I should be afraid. I should feel that I was not worthy. It would seem to me that I was letting loose an angel, seeing it soar forth full of faith and hope and trust, all white as snow, knowing that it must return with broken wings and smirched plumage, to reproach me for its lost purity. I couldn't take the responsibility. I wonder any man dare face it. . . .” She heaved a deep sigh. “Oh, it's very sad; it's very sad! One thinks of the saying, ‘Offences must needs come, but woe to him by whom the offence cometh.’” She laughed again. “I needn't envy Captain Claypole his faculty for seeing himself from the dramatic point of view. I can become truly pathetic over the wrongs of that unfortunate Bush girl. She has quite a distinct individuality. I think that I shall write a story about her; and I'll give it to you, Rachel, for the *Bungroopim Magazine*. You know when once poets and novelists are able to turn their own sorrows into copy, it's a sure sign that they have ceased to suffer.

“Mr. Price was always at the Stirlings. He went with us to our balls, danced with me a great deal and with no one else, rode with us, and devoted himself to us generally. He was quite a noticeable person in Queensland society — English, you know, and a little *blasé* and sad, as if he had a history—in short, a sort of Sir Lancelot. There was in his manner a touch of world weariness and cynicism, and a something at once protective and appealing that was just the thing to stir a romantic child's imagination. He used to draw me out, and make me tell him all that I thought, and then gradually he got into a way of talking about himself in a half-melancholy strain which touched me inexpressibly. He was trying an experiment on me and on himself. There's something very curious about his frank egotism. He's a moral vivisectionist. He would cut out a woman's heart, figuratively speaking, for the sake of giving himself a fresh interest in life; and if the study proved less absorbing than he had hoped, he would lay it aside, and tell her of his disappointment, and explain his motives with the utmost candour. But he would look surprised if she questioned his right to injure her. He has periodical phases of being unhappy, worn out, and in need of a fresh stimulus. Then, he reinvigorates his emotional system by trying an experiment in love-making, just as we might try a patent medicine. Of course it's doubtful in either case what the effect will be, or how long it will last.

“I am sure that he did his best to feel an absorbing interest in me, and almost persuaded himself that he had succeeded. But I can quite see that then, as an experiment, I may have been a little monotonous; I wasn't sufficiently complex. I took everything for granted. I did not analyse my feelings. I hardly knew how much

I cared for him, or in what way. You can't analyse love. It grows unconsciously to yourself till it becomes your very being. You seem to live by turns in sunlight and moonlight with a tender invisible presence always beside you, and you don't know what causes the dreamy sense of happiness that comes over you, so that to live is poetry, and to think is music—you don't want to know; it would break the spell.

“One evening we were alone in the Stirling's verandah—oh, I remember it so well! I thought of it to-night, when we were standing under the datura tree, and it was like the echo of a bitter pain. It seemed terrible that so much that was strong and beautiful should have been taken out of one, and nothing left but bitterness. That's the worst of this kind of misery. You can't dwell upon past joy, even when it was the most intense joy, because the recollection of it has been poisoned, and there's only the taste of gall remaining. . . . Well! the sickly scent brought everything most vividly before me this evening. A datura climbed against that verandah and some red poinsettia-leaves growing near, contrasted strangely with the great white bells. He began to talk of his objectless life, and said in his queer candid way that he knew he had a great many faults, and that instability was one of them. He said that he was an odd mixture of impulsiveness and coolness; he got carried to a certain point, then something within him always made him stop and dissect his own feelings. He often wished that he could go beyond that point; but it was no use wishing, and certainly the power of analysing himself gave zest to a situation. It seemed cold-blooded perhaps, but in reality it was only a question of temperament, and he was fortunate in knowing his own nature; at all events he was honest. He was certain that the only straight road through life was to be true to one's own nature—and so on. Then he told me that he intended going to England in the spring, and asked me if I had ever thought much of England, and if I should like to live there; and without waiting for me to reply, he added that he was very sorry to leave Australia. Do you know the dreary aching that creeps into one at the bare suggestion of some terrible possibility? It came upon me like a shock that I had rather die than lose him. I think that I cried out. I don't know what I did. And then my one longing was to get away from him and hide my face. But when I moved, he made me look at him, and he put his arms round me—and kissed me—and then I did not care about any thing, or feel afraid any more—I was so happy.”

Robina's voice had faltered once or twice; and now she broke down altogether, and laid her head upon the high dressing-table; and a sob, which she tried hard to suppress, shook her all over. Presently she went on:—

“It was the first time in my life that any one had made love to me in that way. It seemed to me like a leap into another world. I had all the most romantic and innocent notions that a girl can have about the sacredness of a caress, and I've tried

to keep them. I've never let any one kiss me like that since, and I"—Robina stopped suddenly; her tone changed. "Never mind, you understand what I mean; . . . I don't know what he said to me. I have often tried to recall it, and I cannot. It was all very sweet and dreamy and indefinite; and in a minute or two Agnes called to me, and there was the sound of an arrival, and my father's voice in the drawing-room. He had come down unexpectedly. There was something wrong with his eyes, and he was going to see an oculist in Sydney, and wanted to take me with him. He had arranged that we should start by a steamer that was leaving early next morning; and there was no time to be lost in making preparations. Mr. Price said good-night and went away. I had no opportunity of speaking to him alone, and I felt too dazed to make one. All he said was, 'You will let me know how your father goes on, and if I can be of any use to you here.' I packed up and made ready that night. It was uncertain how long we were to be away, but I promised Agnes Stirling that if we returned by Brisbane, I would finish my visit to her on the way home.

"I thought that Mr. Price would be at the wharf to see us off, but he was not there. I felt sure, however, that he would write to me in Sydney. Yet no letter came, nor did he follow me as I had half hoped, for a few weeks later Agnes told me that he had gone away from Brisbane. Oh, what slow agony it is, waiting for a letter that never comes! Night after night to lie down in hope; morning after morning to wake and watch with every pulse throbbing—and for nothing! Yet always trusting, always fighting against the gnawing sense of injury that will creep up close and eat one's heart. I read in a book the other day that to love is to give some one the power of torturing you. It's quite true; and there's the mockery of the whole thing—that there should be such an affinity between two human beings, and yet that one, who is all the world to you, should be able to hurt you more cruelly than your bitterest enemy! You get to know the difference between active and slow pain. There are as many phases in mental sufferings as in physical. The most terrible time is at first, when you are quite bewildered and don't know what to think, where to turn, or how to deal with this new disease that has taken possession of you. That is how I felt in Sydney. We had to stay there nearly two months, for Papa's eyes did not get well as soon as he hoped. I wrote once to Mr. Price and told him that we were detained, and why, and directed the letter to his address in Brisbane. I never got any answer; and even still I grow hot when I think of what I wrote. But I couldn't help writing. It was the cry of my heart: it was just wrung from me.

"At last we were able to leave Sydney. It was late one evening when we steamed into the bay at the mouth of the Brisbane river. A member of the Queensland Government was on board, and he had been very anxious that we should arrive in time to catch the Torres Straits' boat which was lying outside the bar. He wanted to

say good-bye to one of his colleagues who was a passenger in her to Singapore. There was to be a grand semi-political banquet on board the *Chang-foo*, to which the minister invited us, offering to take us back with him in the Government steam-tug. At dark we were hailed, and we pulled over to the *Chang-foo*, which looked very inviting with rockets going off on deck, and a cheery assemblage of people—many of whom we knew. The Stirlings were there; but it was not till we were all seated at table, that I saw, a little lower down on the opposite side, Mr. Price.

“O Rachel! that banquet is still a night-mare to me; the long speeches, the dreary chaffing of the ministers, the slow movements of the Chinese waiters, the interminable number of the dishes—and all the time I was wondering—longing—dreading to meet his eyes, and counting every moment till release should come.

“Then, as I was going up the companion-ladder, knowing that he was following me, I heard some one at the foot say: ‘You will have fine weather for your voyage, Price. How shall you go on from Singapore—by the *Messengeries* or the P and O?’

“ ‘The *Messengeries*, I think,’ he answered. ‘My people will be on the Riviera this winter, and will probably meet me at Marseilles.’

“I managed to get on to the deck, and hid myself as well as I could near the helm, till the queer feeling of faintness that came over me had passed off a little. The girls who were trooping up from the saloon routed me out of my nook, and plied me with questions about Sydney. It seemed such maddening mockery, but happily it did not last long. The tug was getting up her steam, and the great screw of the mail boat began to revolve. I knew that in a very short time we should have left the *Chang-foo*, and she would be on her way to Singapore. It was like waiting for the end of the world—like watching the life-blood ebb away. Presently he came to me. We looked straight into each other's faces, but I could not speak. There were people passing to and fro, and he took my hand and led me high up to the stern, where we were alone, and it was quite dark, except for the lantern at the wheel; we could hear the water splashing below us.

“ ‘I am leaving Australia,’ he said; ‘I have made up my mind that it is best for me to go to England. I don't know whether I shall ever come back again.’

“I could not answer him. I felt so giddy and stupid.

“ ‘I am restless,’ he said, ‘my partners and the people in Australia who have been good enough to be interested in me, ought to feel glad that I am going. I'm an unsatisfactory person to deal with. I know it; it is my fault or my misfortune, and I own it; my one merit is candour. I want too much out of life, I am discontented, and I should make anybody I lived with discontented too.’

“At last I said, ‘I have come back just in time to bid you good-bye.’

“ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘you have come too late.’

“And then I cried out, ‘Why too late? It is never too late when people can be face to face with each other.’

“ ‘It is always too late or too soon with me,’ he said. ‘I wish that it were not so. I wish that I were different. I am either over-impulsive or over-calculating, and I get shipwrecked on one or the other extreme. I know that you are sorry for me, Miss Daring. I’ve often told you the faults in my character. You have always been full of sympathy and kindness. I shall value the remembrance of your friendship. If you had left Sydney a day later you would have received a letter from me. I got yours, and I am glad to be able to thank you for it; it was very sweet and good—like yourself. I’m glad to see you once more.’

“That was all. He had sufficient nice feeling to make no allusion to that evening. He spared me the worst humiliation. We shook hands with each other when the time came, and I wished him a pleasant voyage. I think my voice must have sounded strangely; but I kept from breaking down or saying anything frantic. In fact I didn’t feel much just then, I was only cold and numb and dazed.

“There was a great deal of confusion on board; speeches and cheering, and parting bumpers of champagne drunk. Then we were put into the tug, and I watched the *Chang-foo* glide slowly away between the lightships till there was nothing but the faint red trail of her smoke, while we steamed back to Leichardt’s Town.

“It was a queer trip home. Our little steamer throbbing and groaning up the broad river; white houses and banana-plantations and grey fields of pine-apples stretching along the sides; here and there a mud-bank with a skeleton-like beacon or white buoy, and the cold starlight making everything look most ghost-like and melancholy. There was dancing on the deck, and the band played waltzes—the *Soldaten Lieder* and the *Faust*. I never hear them without fancying myself back on that river, and feeling the chill. Somebody put a great-coat round me, and the Minister for Works who had asked us to the *Chang-foo* patted me on the shoulder rather unsteadily, saying, “That’s right! she’s a nice little girl and wants keeping warm.” People made a great noise. Several of the gentlemen, particularly the leading senators, had drunk too many toasts, and there was an undignified ministerial chorus, in which the members of the Government stood in a row, and sang to a hymn tune—

‘There is a land of pure delight,’

I forget the next line—

‘Where roasted pigs run singing out,
“Come eat me if you can.” ’

“There! that's the beginning and middle of my story, Rachel. I promise you that you shall hear the end in good time.”

“What will the end be, Robina?”

“Ah! I can't tell you. It will not be that they lived happily ever afterwards. I think that I could make him care for me now if I were to try; I saw it in his face and manner to-night. He is very impressionable, and I puzzled him a little. I'm not mean enough to try for the sake of revenge, and I couldn't hurt him as he has hurt me; he is not capable of suffering so. And I don't want to hurt him. In spite of the hardness and bitterness and badness of it, there's something tender and beautiful in a real feeling of that sort, which will keep welling up. It's like a child that has brought grief and disgrace, but is not to be put away from its mother's heart. I'm sorry for him to-night, because I know that he is sorry—he *must* be sorry when he thinks of that poor little Bush girl and the letter she wrote. I'd like to make it easier for him, and lift the burden of his regret.”

“O Robina!” I cried, “if you feel like this, you will forgive him and trust him again.”

Robina smiled in a strange, pathetic way. She moved from the dressing-table, and began thoughtfully to twist up her hair, looking at me all the time; then she shook her head slowly.

“The Bush girl might, but she's dead; she died in the little steamer that went back from the *Chang-foo* that night. If I had wanted that, I wouldn't have told you my story. I've told you—perhaps because I wished to make sure that I didn't want it. Rachel,” she added, abruptly, “do you hear the dingoes? They're wondering what's up with all the quiet Bungroopim hands. And just listen to them at the camp—hard at it still! Well, we don't want to look like two sheets of stringy bark to-morrow. Goodnight! I shall need all my pluck, for I am going to ride Folorn Hope myself for the Ubi cup.”

She would not talk any more, or let me say another word, and we both lay down, but I am almost sure that Robina cried for some time before she went to sleep; and I kept awake wondering if other Englishmen were as heartless as Mr. Price.

Chapter VIII.

JENNIE awoke me in the morning by thrusting under my nose a most lovely breast-knot of heliotrope and stephanotis, which, she said, Mr. Ansdell had arranged for me. He sent one to Robina also. Both the bouquets were fixed with wires in a manner that is not usual in Australia. Robina said that it savoured of English fastidiousness, and was a delicate reminder to us that we fell short of the European standard, and she brought forth her worst Australian slang by way of asserting her independence.

All the ladies appeared in their habits, and while we were breakfasting in the tent the blackboys caught and saddled our horses, every now and then poking in a woolly head, and inquiring "which fellow, white Mary,' owned this or that bit, saddle-cloth, or crupper?"

There was a perfect Babel within the tent, and the long table was quite full. The British druidess at one end dispensed tea from a monstrous tin tea-pot that might have served at a Gargantuan feast; while Jennie at the other presided over a coffee-pot of equally large dimensions, which necessitated the attendance of Jim and half-a-dozen strong-armed cavaliers. But, as a rule, the Bushmen kept their gallantry in reserve till the evening; and just now were hacking busily at cold rounds and gigantic loaves, talking all the time about horses and cattle. They all looked sleek and fresh after a morning swim in the creek. Several had already donned their jockey-suits, and two or three had forgotten their coats altogether, and so kept in the background.

By half-past ten we were all in our saddles and cantering down the paddock to the race-course. The plain looked very gay with flags floating here and there from the dead gum-trees, and strings of horsemen careering across it in all directions. The river, with the dark line of scrub beyond, bounded it on one side, and at the other some steep little hills rose abruptly, forming a sort of amphitheatre. One knoll jutted out on to the flat, and here, under a spreading applegum, seats had been placed and a bowery luncheon-shed erected.

From the crest of the ridge might be had our show-view of the dear old Crag and the Woorara range. Some of us cantered up there and carved our initials on a monumental tree, which recorded in almost illegible hieroglyphics the great events which had taken place in our time at Bungroopim—the big flood, the Bush fire, the father's return for the electorate of Ubi, the visit of his Excellency the Governor to the district, a huge kangaroo *battue*, the birthday of Jim's prize bull, and many other striking incidents.

We started an old man kangaroo on the ridge. The dogs gave chase, and Robina Daring heading the field, we galloped down the incline on the other side and over an iron bark flat, startling the wallabis and bandicoots, and making them scuttle away to their hollow logs. There was a roll over mid a cloud of dust and twigs. The big grey thing bounded on again, followed more languidly by the yelping hounds, while we, reminded by the starting-bell that the day's sport was beginning, turned back and reached the racecourse in time to see the postman's bay filly fly past the winning post.

Young Macalister won the next race, and Sam Bantling and Lord Barty came in a dead heat for the third, the latter heavily handicapped as his horse had won the last Ubi cup. Lord Barty was light and lithe, and rode with judgment, so that when not interested in the race himself, he was usually riding for some one else. In spite of Robina's manly declaration that she would be her own jockey, it was Lord Barty who won the cup for her on Forlorn Hope. A curious little scene took place in the saddling paddock when the horses were led out. Robina, ready to mount, was strenuously resisting Lord Barty's pleading and our urgent entreaties that she would let him take her place. Forlorn Hope was a lean long-legged chestnut, a vicious beast and given to bolting; Robina liked to display her courage and, though he had caused her one or two serious accidents, she clung obstinately to Forlorn Hope. She said his temper suited her own. Upon this occasion Captain Claypole provoked her ire by telling her that the horse was not safe, and that he should be sorry to risk his own neck by riding him for the first time in a Bush steeplechase. There had been a good deal of consultation among the gentlemen on the subject. All were nervous on Robina's account, but all had as yet failed to dissuade her.

At the last moment Mr. Price stepped up and rapidly spoke a few words to her in a low tone. Robina turned pale and looked at him with a shade of defiance while he continued more insistently. Involuntarily, I had moved a few paces back, and could not hear the colloquy. It was short and decisive. Mr. Price was speaking with great earnestness; Robina's face softened, her eyes had a far-off look, and from his shot a gleam of triumph. She turned away and motioned Lord Barty to her side. "Very well!" I heard her say, "since you appeal to my honour; but I thought women were privileged to have no honour. That is the prerogative of man."

"Caught in your own trap, Miss Daring," said Captain Claypole; "you disdain the privileges of your sex."

Robina laughed unsteadily. I felt sure that her wakeful night had shaken her nerve.

"Lord Barty," said she, "you may risk your neck if you choose. I'm obliged to give in, not because I am in a funk, but because Mr. Price has taken advantage of a promise I made him long ago, and I don't think I have ever broken my word."

Lord Barty mounted delightedly. She gave him a few directions, and then walked back to the knoll, resolutely avoiding Mr. Price. I never heard what her promise had been. She did not again allude to the subject.

I never liked Lord Barty so much as when he cantered past on Forlorn Hope, his round English face set with such grim determination, that we were sure he had set himself no easy task. "He's a plucky little fellow!" said Robina to me with her odd laugh. "I think that I could manage him; I am not sure that it wouldn't suit me better to marry Lord Barty, than to take up country in the Never-Never Land."

It happened just as had been expected. At the first hurdle Forlorn Hope bolted straight in among the gum-trees, and I shuddered to think of what might have happened had Robina been on his back. I distrusted the strength of her wrists on that morning, and the timber was thick in the middle of the flat. The Blacks had left tall stumps and loose spiky branches dangerous to a lady's habit. But Lord Barty could ride like a Bushman if he could do nothing else in Australian fashion. Perhaps sympathy with Robina had inspired him in the management of her horse. At any rate Forlorn Hope found his master, and was put back at the hurdle. He was a splendid jumper, and before the first round, had caught up his competitors. In the second they were distanced, and notwithstanding the mishap at the beginning, Lord Barty won the race easily. Had Mrs. Claypole's mare, Gipsy Girl, been running, the stake might have been better contested; but at the last moment she was disqualified on account of her age. Lord Barty was, however, very triumphant, and seemed to think he had earned the right to monopolise Robina during the rest of the day.

The other races were run, but of course, that for the Ubi cup was the event of the programme, and was recorded in the annals of the district, alas! with a commentary of more melancholy import than we then dreamed.

The Bungroopim purse, the consolation stakes, and the blackboy's race, were less exciting, but we lingered till the end—loitering under the shadow of the ridge, or riding slowly along through the long-bladed grass by the side of the creek, while low down on the banks the mulgam and the maidenhair grew thick, and the yellow flowers of a cactus-like plant gave forth their aromatic perfume.

Lord Barty's champagne flowed freely in the tent that evening. The health of every winner was drunk, and finally the Ubi cup was filled and handed round after the fashion of the loving cup at a Mansion House dinner, and everybody looked towards Robina Daring, and wished long life and many successes on the turf to Forlorn Hope.

After that we all adjourned to the new kitchen whither the piano had been carried, and the professional tuner of the district, who had a knack of turning up promiscuously at race-meetings, broke forth into a strain so seductive, that the most

savage of the Bushmen was wooed thereby.

The approach of Sam Bantling, tragically intent upon securing a partner, was the signal for a general pairing off—Lord Barty and Robina, Jennie and Jim, Captain Claypole and the British druidess, and the rest in due order, concluding with Mr. Ansdell and myself. The Bushmen who could not get partners danced with each other; but after a little while voted this dull work, and as the number of ladies was limited and the suggestion that a few lubras should be got up from the camp energetically vetoed, they drew off into the garden and amused themselves there.

Robina danced, smiled, and was more than usually merry. There was a bright flush upon her cheeks, and she seemed determined not to be still for an instant. She was a charming vision in her white dress, with the stephanotis wreathing her head; but in her eyes there was a look which contradicted the laughter upon her lips. I observed that Mr. Price stood rather moodily apart and watched her. I don't think that he danced with any one till Mrs. Claypole claimed him as her partner in the Swedish country dance, which Captain Claypole was trying to introduce upon the Ubi. We all stood in two rows, ladies on one side, and gentlemen on the other. It was pretty to see the lissome figures of Robina and Jennie threading the couples. These two girls entered with great spirit into the performance. If they had not been so graceful, one would have said that they romped. That certainly did the others, young and old. Only one matron trod the floor with dignity; and it might have been a court minuet when the turn came to Mrs. Claypole and Mr. Macalister. Her stateliness awed the old man into an almost preternatural solemnity. They bowed and curtsied, took each other's hands by the finger-tips, and glided down the boards with magnificent composure, old Mac dressed in the official costume of the sergeant-at-arms, which he still cherished, and donned at any important function; she in a black satin train and antique lace, and with an old-fashioned diamond cross gleaming upon her Juno-like neck.

But my impressions of that evening are confused and dreamy—two or three scenes and persons standing out vividly in my imagination, the rest all shadowy. I was weary in body, and my mind was full of troubled and joyous thoughts curiously blended. The day had been momentous to several of us. It was not only that the curtain had been lifted from that sad little drama of which Robina was the central and pathetic figure; Jennie and I had in our turn become heroines, and were living our own stories. We had dreamed very sweetly, and had woven many romances, sitting upon our log in mid-stream, with the ti-tree waving its blossoms above our heads, and the parrots and cockatoos telling their love-tales in the gum-trees round us; and all the time Jennie's hero—kind, homely Jim—was waiting his opportunity, and mine also was waiting, to gallop across this very river, in our mad race, when

the hailstorm pursued us from the Woorara mountains. I had never thought that Jennie, with all her poetic fancies and her aspirations, would be satisfied with Jim; but sisters are not good judges of their brothers' powers of attraction: and I remembered that at first Mr. Ansdell had fallen short of her ideal. So I congratulated her warmly when she told me that she had accepted Jim, but did not just then confide the secret of my own happiness. I knew now that Mr. Ansdell cared for me, and was quite content that my enthusiasm should expend itself upon definite as well as abstract objects; but it was a little bewildering at first, and not ripe for discussion. That was why the dancers that evening, seemed like the moving, grotesque figures on a magic-lantern slide—all except Robina and one or two others; and the little scraps of conversation which reached me while the promenaders passed to and fro in the verandahs were unreal as fantastic echoes from dreamland.

Now, Lord Barty and Robina, he bending earnestly towards her—

“I prefer to wait for my master, or to emancipate myself altogether in the Never-Never country,” she was saying.

“That's a Jane Eyre-ish idea—no, you're not heartless. Robina, I'll prove. . . .” And then the British Druidess announcing stolidly, “Pleuro is very bad our way. I don't believe much in inoculation—do you?”

“My word, yes!” The tone of cheerful conviction was Angus Macalister's. “You wouldn't say that, Miss Bantling, if you had gone through our last muster at Bingewogarie. Any amount of beasts without tails; but we didn't lose a hundred head from pleuro.”

And now a stout Hibernian lady from a sheep-station down the river—

“Forty miles yesterday afternoon, captain! Sure, and we think nothing of it. Nora—that's me sister—led the pack. If I hadn't told her that we must have some dacent clothes she'd have danced in her habit. Sure, and she's never happy but on the back of a horse.”

“Oh, this won't do—this won't do at all!” exclaimed Mr. Ansdell. “Let us go across to the other house, and hide ourselves in your corner of the verandah. No one will disturb us there.” We went; but by and by Lord Barty, shouting “Ansdell! Ansdell! where are you?” pounced upon us. Robina was still upon his arm. Now, she dismissed him. The race-committee was settling up, as the judge, who was also manager of the great meat-preserving establishment, was combining business with pleasure, and had to take delivery of a mob of cattle upon the morrow. They wanted Mr. Ansdell immediately to decide a mooted question concerning the age of one of his horses which had been a winner that day. The two gentlemen left us. Robina sank wearily into a squatter's chair. Her eyes followed Lord Barty's stripling figure as it disappeared under the covered passage which led to the kitchen, and which was

decorated with Mr. Kerröuel's paper lanterns. "I like him," said she. "Now, I wonder how I should pass muster in England! He's a good little boy. He deserves—to be married or left alone?"

"Left alone," I replied emphatically.

"Oh no, Rachel!" answered she. "I can't leave any one alone. It isn't my nature to. Oh, how tired I am! I am just kept up by the excitement of scenes. I am bent upon being melodramatic to-night."

"Then here's your opportunity," said I, grimly. "Look!"

We both watched Mr. Price emerge from the lantern-lit passage and make straight for our retreat. He must have watched Robina go in, and probably imagined that she was there alone. There was no light except that thrown by the lanterns outside—not sufficient to enable him to distinguish me, for I was dressed in black. Robina's white gown stood out grey against the dark background. Except where an archway gave entrance to the arbour, it was closed in on three sides by a thickly-covered trellis; the slab wall of the house formed the other side. It had once been a shillion-room, and was irregular in shape, a great wooden chimney abutting into it. Beside the chimney was a recess screened still more effectually by a high stand of calladiums. As Mr. Price's step sounded on the gravel, Robina seized me by the hand and forced me back into the angle.

"Stay here," she said; "you shall hear what he has to say."

I expostulated: "No, no, Robina, it would not be honourable."

"Nonsense! Don't you understand that I look upon you as a safeguard? I can't make a fool of myself if I know that you are there listening to every word I am saying. Hush! Now stir or speak at your peril!"

She moved forward, leaving me planted against the wall. I could see the outline of her head and shoulders as she placed herself upon a bench near the opening. Mr. Price entered and seated himself also, with a deliberate air, as though he had a definite purpose.

"I saw that Lord Barty had left you. May I stay here for a little while? I have got something to say to you."

"Say on," answered she, laconically.

"Robina, why are you so hard to me?"

"She seemed thrown off her guard. *"I hard!"* she repeated, with the tremor in her tone; *"I hard to you!"*

"Yes, you are hard to me. You won't give me credit for any sincerity. You say biting things to me. You will not allow me an opportunity of showing you that I am not so despicable as you suppose—that I am capable of genuine feeling. Tell me honestly. Are you going to accept Lord Barty?"

“Perhaps. I have not made up my mind. Don't you think it would be a good thing for me? You used to say that I ought to marry an Englishman.”

“No,” he answered fiercely, stooping towards her. “How should I think it a good thing when I want to marry you myself?”

“Ah!” she gave a long sigh. “Is that true? But you did not wish it four years ago. You could not make up your mind.”

He drew back as though he winced at her words. “You understood the position,” he exclaimed. “I always felt so. You knew even then that my worst self was struggling against my better nature.”

“Ah!” she repeated. “You should not tell me this if you wish me to think the best of you. I might sympathise with you if you were a woman. Such a struggle might be natural in a woman; it is weakness in a man.”

“And the one thing you can't pardon is weakness. Do you never allow any grace to yourself?”

“Certainly, I have needed it,” she replied gravely.

“Well,” he said, after a little pause, “you observe that I still make the most of my one redeeming virtue—candour. Will you in your turn be frank? Will you admit that you loved me then?”

Robina did not answer at once. At length she said, “Yes, I will admit that I loved you then.”

“And now?” She was silent.

He got up and stood before her; he spoke very earnestly—

“I am not going to be weak, since you despise weakness. It would be weak to try and explain or excuse my indecision—my unmanliness—my utter folly. You are great enough to forgive all that has to be forgiven—if you care for me still, and I hope that I am not such a poor creature as to be unworthy of your trust—if you will trust me. I love you with my whole heart and soul. I found it out I fancy upon that wretched night when the sea was widening between us. I have had four years during which I have tried hard to think differently; and I haven't succeeded. It's once for all with me now.”

Robina sat still silent.

“Don't you believe in my sincerity?” he asked. “Tell me.”

“I think that you are almost always sincere—at the time,” she answered slowly; “but your moods vary.”

“Is your doubt of me the only drawback?” he said. “If you were certain that my feeling for you is as strong and sustained as I wish you to think it, would you give me a chance then?”

“There are a great many drawbacks,” she said. “But there is no use in talking

about them.”

“Very well.” He folded his arms and stood back, looking at her. “There may be a hundred. It does not matter as long as you love me. I can wait, I am not afraid. You will believe in me in time. I shall wait till you are married—to Lord Barty, or some one else; and then, I shall give you up. Not before.”

Robina rose. I could see her head bent, and her eyes drooped as if she dared not let her gaze meet his, when, in the half light, the gleam of love must shine forth and betray her. She seemed struggling within herself; and uncertain what to say, or how to act. I thought for a minute that she was going to yield. I wished fervently that she could be rid of the embarrassing consciousness which I knew that my presence must cause. I felt that had there been no listening ear, her heart might have spoken.

She began a sentence wildly, “Why did you——?” then stopped. “I can't, I can't,” she said feebly. “I am sorry that you should be unhappy, but there's no use in digging up what is dead. It was too late when the *Chang-foo* steamed out of the Bay. It was all over. You had carried your experiment too far. My love was killed that night.”

“Robina,” he said passionately, “it would come to life again if you would let it. Don't trample it down. That's all I ask. Don't go and engage yourself rashly to Lord Barty. Don't thrust me from you. Don't harden yourself against me. You're not a woman to change. True love doesn't change or wither up. I would stake everything that there's a root alive in your heart still.”

Robina moved back a little as though she were bracing herself together, and spoke more determinedly. “You are wrong. Do you imagine that I'd ever have owned I loved you once, if I could feel for you in that way now? It's all too late. It was too late when we parted on board the *Chang-foo*.”

“Oh, no!” he interrupted, smiling. “That was too soon.”

“For you perhaps—not for me. At any rate, it is ended. Don't let us talk of it any more. We have just got to take things as they are now, and not to hark back upon what might have been. I'm changed in every way from the girl you knew then. I should not be happy as your wife. I don't know whether I shall marry Lord Barty or not—most probably not; but if I were to do so, I think he would suit me better than you. I should know at least what I was undertaking, and how to get my own way. He would not be always wanting to adjust himself to his background; whereas unless I were to chain you to one place, I could never be sure of you.”

“Try me,” he said, with most beseeching tenderness. “Give me a chance of proving to you that my love is worth having.”

Robina laughed very sadly, and quoted—

“For Stephanie sprained last night her wrist,
Ankle or something. ‘Pooh,’ cry you?
At any rate she danced all say
Vilely; her vogue has had its day.”

“The gods have willed it otherwise. Goodbye. I am going to finish my dances now.” She paused in the doorway and looked back. “Good-bye,” she repeated. “Don't be sorry.” There was a world of yearning in her voice. A little more, I fancied, and the barriers might be broken down. But she steeled herself again. “It seems my turn now to hurt you,” she said. “But you hurt me a great deal more that night. And just to think that this should happen between you and me—now! How strange it is! What a mockery! It is utterly sad. The saddest and strangest part of the whole thing is feeling that all that pain was suffered to no end—but this—What was the good of it?”

“You would know the good,” he said brokenly, after a pause, “if you would let me try and atone for that pain.”

But she did not hear these words. She was gone. He gave a queer kind of groan, and sat down in the seat from which she had risen a few minutes before. He leaned back, his handsome profile turned upwards. I wondered how long he would stay there, and trembled lest he should discover that I was so near him. My heart ached for him, though at the same time I despised him for his selfishness and vacillation. I had an almost uncontrollable impulse to rush out and tell him that Robina loved him. I never quite knew afterwards whether I was glad or sorry that I had not done so. Presently there were steps upon the gravel; and I shuddered in agony lest they should be those of Mr. Ansdell in pursuit of me. Mr. Price got up. I heard him repeat softly to himself a line or two of the poem Robina had quoted:

“Schumann's our music-maker now;
Has his march-movement, youth, and mouth,
Ingres's the modern man that paints.
. . . . Heine for songs; for kisses, how?”

It was evidently a favourite with both of them. Then, to my intense relief, he left the arbour; and I was able to make my escape. Robina did not return to the new kitchen. I saw her no more that evening till the dance was over and I had gone to our little room. She was in bed with her face to the wall, so that I could not tell whether or not she were asleep. In the morning when I awoke late, she was already dressed in her riding habit, and sitting at the foot of her bed. Her elbows rested upon her knees, her palms supported her chin, and her eyes were wide open, forlorn and brooding, while her finery lay strewn on the floor, half in, and half out, of the

gaping saddle-bags.

She laughed at the bewildered look with which I confronted her.

“Marius among the ruins of Carthage, Rachel! Here have I been sitting for the last half hour surrounded by my tattered illusions, and thinking what a fool I have been to waste my substance upon a shadow.”

“What does it mean, Robina? You are not packing up to go away?”

“Yes, I am, Rachel. There's no safety for me except in flight, and I'm off this morning with the Claypoles and the Macalisters, and the rest of the Woorara mob. Don't look so flabbergasted. I'm certain that you don't want me at present; and I'll ride over again in a week or two and carry my congratulations with me. You'd better not have them now; they'll bring you bad luck.”

I remonstrated and entreated, but without avail. Robina only shook her head and smiled in her tragi-comic way.

“It's no use, Rachel. Twenty bullocks yoked together wouldn't keep me a day longer on the Ubi. The fact is, that though as a rule I'm not particularly superstitious, I believe in presentiments. A queer uncanny feeling has come over me that something tremendous is going to happen to me. I'm excited and frightened and creepy, all at the same time. Well, I can't imagine anything more dreadful than another scene like that I went through last night, so I'm going to ‘up waddy and yan,’ as the Blacks say. Combo has had his orders to fetch up the horses, and his Majesty will escort me safe on from Targinie.”

Robina set vigorously to work over her saddle-bags, cramming in last, with vicious energy, the ball dress she had worn the evening before. By breakfast-time she had finished her packing and had informed the Father and Jim of her determination. Both were disappointed, for Robina was a favourite at Bungroopim; but, as Jim phrased it, “you might as well attempt to head a Targinie bull when he was making straight for a brigalow scrub, as try to turn the mind of Robina Daring.”

Our party had already begun to disperse, the meat-preserver and one or two more having departed at daybreak. The Woorara set were equipped for a start, and several of the gentlemen appeared booted and spurred, Mr. Price among them.

He came in late, and listened to the reproaches which had hailed Robina's announcement without a word. Afterwards, as we were standing in the verandah watching the horses being saddled, he approached her, and said in a low voice: “You are shortening your visit on my account. You don't suppose I'm cad enough to let you do that? If I had been a little earlier I should have anticipated you. I'm going home this morning.”

Robina was caressing Forlorn Hope over the railings. She gave some instructions to Combo about shortening his curb-chain, before answering Mr. Price. Then she

said composedly, "Very well. Our ways lie together as far as the foot of the Crag."

"You are not going to ride that brute?" he exclaimed.

"Most certainly. I came over on him, why shouldn't I ride him back?"

"Because I beg you not to expose yourself to the chance of an accident."

"That is no reason."

"It was a reason yesterday."

"You mistake me," she replied. "I was foolish enough a long time ago to make you a silly promise; you called upon me to keep it yesterday. I did so, that is all."

"The horse is not safe," continued Mr. Price. "He would have thrown a worse rider than Lord Barty. He has a vicious temper. He is a bolter."

"He can't bolt with me up the range," said Robina. "And besides, he is always like a lamb on a journey. It is only when we're after scrubbers or racing, or hunting kangaroo, that we lose our heads a little. We understand each other—don't we, old fellow?"

And she kissed the white spot on the chestnut's forehead, and put her fingers in her ears when Lord Barty and Captain Clay-pole seriously recommended her to have the side-saddle removed. Though the latter added aside to Mr. Price, "It's all right. The animal is safe enough when he is not excited. There's a great difference between jogging home on a bad-tempered colt thirty miles across the range, and letting a girl ride him in a race with a set of roughs round the worst and the most dangerous course on the Ubi."

My father was a little offended at Captain Claypole's abuse of our flat, to clear which had required the labour of so many lazy Blacks, and the free distribution of so much grog and tobacco; and Lord Barty made a tactful diversion by proposing that we should all have our horses saddled, and should speed the parting guests by accompanying them three or four miles down the river. It was a happy suggestion. We felt limp after our gaieties. The house was in confusion; and we were glad of an excuse to be out of doors; consequently, a large party of us rode forth through the slip-rails. The morning was quite glorious: the sky a deep blue, and a soft, exhilarating breeze sweeping down from the mountains and sighing through the she-oak trees. The parrots and cockatoos were very noisy, and almost drowned with their chatter the sweet notes of the magpies and the liquid call of the bower satin birds. Every bird and insect seemed joyful; and in the air there was a touch of freshness unlike the languor of spring. Down by the creek the white cedar-trees were laden with berries, the native cherries and *chuckie-chuckies* had ripened in the scrub, and the parasites on the dead gum-trees showed bulbous fruits. Our way lay through flat country, between the river and brigalow jungle, where the grass had a tinge of brown; high ant-beds rose amid sparse herbage, and a few gaunt grass trees

mingled with the warra-warra or red gum. Every mile was bringing us nearer to Roop's Crag, and to the point where the road branched off towards the Woorara. The blackboy and King Combo rode ahead with their packhorses; and the rest of us followed in twos, till the Three-mile Camp was reached, and there stretched before us a round plain covered with long-bladed grass and almost untimbered. Here we came abreast of each other, a merry party, to outward appearance at least; and indeed upon such a morning, it would have been difficult to cherish gloomy forebodings. Even Robina seemed to have partly shaken them off. As we drew up in line at the border of the flat she said to me, in a tone half sad, half bantering:

“I have almost made up my mind to the Never-never country, Rachel, in preference to Lord Barty. But I shall miss our mountains when I get to those big treeless plains. After all there is a great deal of pleasure to be got from beautiful scenery; and I'm glad that the best part of my life has been spent in a district like this. I am the richer for a great many bright and beautiful days. Taking it altogether, ups and downs, good times and bad, my girlhood has been a very happy one. I won't let myself imagine that the sunshine has been taken out of my youth. There's brightness and joy ahead for me.”

As she spoke, she shook the reins upon her horse's neck, for several of the party had set themselves to canter across the flat, and were making erratic curves to avoid the many paddy-melon holes which the blady grass half concealed. Patty Leadbitter, humming an air from *The Pirates of Penzance*, ploughed forward on a fiery, short-winded cob, and Mrs. Claypole's Gipsy Girl chafed at her restraining curb. We were all excited by the keen air and the sunshine. We wanted the stimulus of a stretching gallop. There was a smile of almost childlike glee on Robina's face as in several long strides Forlorn Hope distanced his companions. He held his own more and more in advance, now clearing a fallen log or treacherous hole, swerving neither to right nor to left, and always lancing on, but with such graceful ease that we never questioned whether or not Robina held him in perfect command.

Though we were cantering fast, the space perceptibly widened between ourselves and that flying figure, which seemed to fly on ever more rapidly. “The brute has bolted again,” I heard Lord Barty say; and he and Mr. Price spurred their horses. As well attempt to head the wind. Not even Gipsy Girl could touch Forlorn Hope in speed. Robina was sitting well back, firmly poised on the saddle, her hands lowered to the pommel. I could not see her face, but I knew that even if her strength failed her, she would not lose her presence of mind. And there was time for the pace to flag. The plain was wide, and the timbered ridge some distance off.

One huge iron-bark gum stood up in the middle of the flat. It was in a line with the horse and rider. The chestnut was speeding madly towards it. Now, the tree was

only a yard or two distant. We saw a frantic effort, a wild strain at the bridle; but we never heard a cry. Then we saw Robina throw the reins loose and fling herself back. An instant of agonised dread—I closed my eyes, and Robina's beautiful face, with its last smile, seemed to flash before me. But still there was no cry—only a dull horrible sound borne by the wind across the plain.

Lord Barty and Mr. Price were the first to reach the spot. It was they who tried to raise Robina's mangled form. She was breathing yet, but as they moved her she died. Her head and chest had been beaten in; her thigh was crushed, and the skin had been torn from her poor hands. The ground was wet with her blood. Not many of us looked on Robina then. Those who went near cannot speak of the scene. They turn faint at the recollection of what they saw. Mrs. Claypole, very white but composed, as she is in all terrors, rode forward, authoritatively bidding us stay where we were. She and her husband covered over the dead girl. Then they two, with Lord Barty and Mr. Price, kept watch till my father came with the cart, and bore back to Bungroopim all that remained of Robina.

I cannot bear to dwell upon the details of Robina's sudden death. I like best to think of the smile upon her face as she rode to her doom, and of her last words, "There's brightness and joy ahead for me." I like to fancy that life is a dream into which only clouded and imperfect images fall from the divine world of Ideas, which is the one true reality. I like to believe that, with her glorious awakening, Robina has gained knowledge of an eternal affinity between the spirits of men and women, of which the faulty and unsatisfying love of their earthly natures is no more than a distorted reflection.

Chapter IX.

ROBINA DARING'S mournful fate cast a great gloom over the districts of Ubi and Woorara. No one ever liked to make allusion to the Bungroopim Races, and indeed it was a long time before another meeting took place on the river. We at Bungroopim found it most difficult to shake off the sad impression. For months, none of us could pass over the Three-mile Camp. If possible, we avoided that track by the river, and in riding to Targinie or Tarooma, chose a longer and rougher road on the other side of the scrub. Later on, when the horror had worn off a little, it became the custom with us to walk up to Robina's grave on Sunday afternoons. Sitting there, we would watch the sunset over the mountains; and at such times our talk would always become sweeter and sadder. We buried her on the ridge-side, a little beyond our monumental tree, in a quiet dell embosomed by gentle hills. A mountain wattle grew above her tombstone, and in spring shed its golden blossoms upon the mound. It was I who, remembering her words, had chosen this spot beneath its shade. My father made a little garden within the inclosure, and at every season of the year, there were flowers blooming. In summer, the rich-hued tropical bignonias and allamandas; when March returned, an arch of waxen stephanotis; in winter, violets and snowy camellias; and with October came feathery deutzia, great-hearted roses, the wild clematis, and white muntein from the scrub.

Mr. Price rode over in spring, six months after Robina had been laid there. He walked with me to the graveyard, and gathered a spray of the wattle which was then in bloom. "This is like her," he said, "strong and sweet. If she had lived, she would have shed much fragrance on the world." He turned away, and walked on by himself alone. I did not follow him for several minutes. When I rejoined him, he began to talk cheerfully, and did not again allude to Robina.

That was the last time I saw him. He was on his way south then; and when he returned to the Ubi, I had married and gone to our northern station. He too married, within a year of Robina's death, a pretty Tasmanian girl, whom he took for a wedding trip to England.

It had been settled that Jim and Jennie were to live at the Twelve-mile Selection, which my father had taken up on the other side of Roop's Crag. This was to be a fattening station to Bungroopim, and the Land Act required that there should be a homestead upon it. Jim built a pretty cottage of cedar with a wide verandah and stone chimneys, in the bend of the creek, which here widened out into a succession of little water-holes, and was fringed with Moreton Bay chestnuts and Geebong trees. The dear old Crag rose close upon the opposite bank. On this side, near the

summit, there was a cleft in the precipice, which was broken into the form of a rampart, and a great boulder resembling a turret stood apart, giving a fortress-like appearance to the mountain; while dense scrub grew up to the bald rocks that formed, as it were, a gigantic staircase. Jennie said she liked this view of the Crag best; but seen from Wangaroo, as they called the selection, he never seemed to me the friend I love still to watch in imagination from the Bungroopim verandah.

Jim's house was finished by the end of the summer; and when the melancholy anniversary of the races came round, we all migrated thither, and spent that three days in hemming chintz and muslin, in covering tables and ottomans, and in making the little home cosy; while Jim put up shelves and manufactured armchairs out of old barrels (try this plan, reader, if you are ever on a poorly-furnished Australian station); and the Father planted out our favourite shrubs and creepers from the Bungroopim garden.

During this year Mr. Ansdell's preparations were also in progress. He had bought a station up north—not the scene of the Grant tragedy—had mustered and taken delivery, and added to and improved the house; and by May my new home was in readiness. There was no reason, therefore, why there should not be a double wedding; and thus it was arranged.

The Dean came over and married us, although, properly speaking, he had no business to be officiating out of his own colony. He was making a tour on the Woorara that month, and in kindly recollection of our trip together to Thylungera, crossed the border at our urgent request, and performed the ceremony in the drawing-room at Bungroopim.

Our party was a small one. Beyond our own people, only the Claypoles, Patty Leadbitter and Maria Bantling our bridesmaids, Sam, the Macalisters, Mr. Kerröuel, and one or two near neighbours.

Though it was May, early winter with us, the day was like one in October, and the westeria had put forth its second bloom. The windows stood wide open; honeysuckle and jessamine turned round the verandah posts; and great Maréchal Niel roses hung down like clots of butter from the back eaves, while the sun, glinting in through the creepers, made a mosaic of shadow and sheen upon the white boards. Our pretty cedar-lined parlour was a bower to-day. Patty Leadbitter, who was famous for her taste in decoration, had placed flowers everywhere. In front of the fireplace stood a pyramid of maidenhair fern, snowy azaleas, camellias, and magnificent Gloire de Dijon roses; bunches of violets lurked in corners; the piano was a mass of narcissus and mignonette; magnolias gave their rich perfume, and there was a wonderful spray of eight beautiful cloth-of-gold roses on one stem, drooping over the mantelpiece. She had wreathed some of the paintings with ferns

and berries and lavender statice from the scrub, and Old Time, of Naraigin memory, looked benignantly down upon us from a frame of camellias and crimson geranium.

At the upper end of the room stood the Dean in his white surplice, with one eye fixed warningly on Jim and his bride, and the other roving unsteadily in our direction.

Jim observed afterwards that a squint was convenient upon the occasion of a double wedding, for both the married couples might fairly consider that they had received an equal amount of attention! But if the Dean looked severe when he pronounced the blessing, he made up for it by his smiles and joviality at breakfast, and the number of clerical jokes he launched at the bridegrooms and brides.

Then, it being a true Bush wedding, we set forth on horseback with the blackboys and packs in front of us, and a further advance guard of King Combo and Boney, the reconciled rivals, who flourished tomahawks to "mak'em road budgery."

Jim and Jennie were bound straight for their new home, and we were going to spend our honeymoon at Tarooma which—Mr. Price being still absent—had been placed at our disposal. The whole party escorted us to where the tracks diverge and the Wangaroo Creek runs into the Ubi, at this point deepening into a pool, surrounded by ferns and arums and overshadowed by ti-trees. A little below the junction, is the Flag Stone Crossing, and here we parted company, Jennie and Jim followed the creek towards Wangaroo, and we two riding eastward along the river bank. Our escort watched us over the crossing, remaining in a line on the other side; the Dean and my father a little in advance; next, Mrs. Claypole and her husband, and then the pretty girls and stalwart Bush youths. A peal of cheers rang out through the gum trees; and the cattle, which had been quietly browsing by the water's edge, lifted their heads with a startled cry and made a wild rush up a gulley near. Then at last there floated across the Delta in call and reply, two long farewell Coo-ëes, which died away in the vast silence of the Bush.
