

# Windabyne

## **A Record of By-gone Times in Australia**

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**Windabyne**  
**A Record of By-gone Times in Australia** Related by in 1880, edited  
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## Dedication.

To Our Friends at Home, this Volume is inscribed as a record of Australian life, written at the birth-place of Southern Colonisation, by one who has done his share in the work of the pioneer. It tells of actual occurrences, under a thin veil of fiction.

Beginning with the history of a "Station," or pastoral holding, the narrative traces the fortunes of the characters introduced through various scenes, and ends with a description of the old homestead, Windabyne, revisited, after an interval of twenty-five years.

It may not be out of place to point out to Home readers that the topics which rise to the surface in carrying out the work of colonisation, are very different from the "parish jobs and parish politics," to which Colonial questions have been at times likened, by a portion of the English Press.

In these Colonies, we are dealing with a territory, measuring two-thirds of the size of Europe, the outskirts of which are sparsely settled by a population of almost purely British origin, numbering four millions. The foundations of a great Dominion in the South Seas are being laid. In less than three generations, this Dominion will be occupied by a people as strong in numbers as many first-class powers, and the mark of to-day's work will be seen then for good or evil, deeply imprinted in inherited customs and institutions. That which is now in the germ will then be seen in the fruit. The writer will be well pleased if his little work should aid in interesting the British people as to what their kinsmen are doing at the Antipodes.

SYDNEY, 1894.

## **Letters about Windabyne.**

### **NO. I. — From the Honourable W. B. Dalley.**

ROCKMORE — SUTTON FOREST, April 25th. 1882,  
MY DEAR MR. RANKEN.

I shall have great pleasure in doing what you desire. I always regarded your story as one of the most thoroughly characteristic stories of Australian Bush life that had been written. I can hardly imagine anything more thoroughly descriptive of Station life as it was in this country than your tale, and your persons of the drama were real. I like your gins as well as your gentlemen, and relished your humour in depicting the doubtful characters of your story, as much as your genuine pathos in telling of the gallant struggles of refined people, and of the success of scheming vulgarity.

In haste, yours always very truly,  
WILLIAM B. DALLEY.

### **No. II. — Also from the Honourable W. B. Dalley.**

ROCKMORE — SUTTON FOREST, May 11th, 1882.  
MY DEAR SIR,

When your story of Windabyne was in course of publication in the Magazine in which it originally appeared, I felt, and in many quarters expressed the conviction that it was a thoroughly Australian tale, perfectly preserving throughout a local colouring, and manifestly the work of a man who well knew, and had the capacity of vigorously describing the condition of this colony forty years ago, and the changes in its fortunes so far as they had been identified with the occupation of the soil for pastoral purposes, which have since taken place. I have now had the opportunity and the gratification of reading it again under the altered and improved form, in which you propose to give it to the public. In thanking you for the pleasure which its re-perusal has given me, I may be pardoned for saying that I am more than ever convinced that your tale is by far the most truthful, as it is, as far as I know, the most deeply interesting narrative of the experiences of an Australian squatter that I

have yet seen. No man of average acquaintance with the history and vicissitudes of pastoral enterprise in this colony can fail to remember abundant instances precisely resembling those which you have with much literary skill grouped among the circumstances, which influenced the fortunes of the gentle family whose story you tell with so much grace and pathos. And I think I am indulging in no immoderate or undeserved language of eulogy when I say of your story, that it gives in a most attractive form the real history of one of the most precious and refining influences of our colonization, the planting of the family life of persons of culture and gentleness in the far interior in the olden times.

In this country your book should be received with favour, because it is life-like in its portraiture; elsewhere its merits rest entirely upon the power and grace of its author as a writer, which I think are amply sufficient to secure for it a fair share of public approval.

I am, my dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,

WILLIAM B. DALLEY.

### **No. III. — From Julian Thomas — “The Vagabond.”**

October, 1878.

MY DEAR RANKEN,

I reckon that I belong to the *nil admirari* school — at least, as regards the works of others, all my veneration being required for home consumption.

But I know a good thing when I see it. I have before expressed to you my liking for Windabyne. The perusal of the portion of that tale in this month's “Australian” — which I have just finished — has given me great pleasure. I am proud to know and to be associated in literary work with a man who has the head and heart to write as you have done. Enough said.

Windabyne is too good to lie buried in the “Australian.” When finished, I think you should re-write it, put in more plot and incident, and publish here and in London. As the true story of the squatting phase of colonial life, it will rank with “His Natural Life,” as depicting the what-has-been in Australia.

Listen to the words of wisdom from the first critic in the Colonies.

Yours,

JULIAN THOMAS.

N.B. — The story appeared first in Sydney, in a monthly magazine, called, “The Australian,” published in 1878 and 1879.

# Windabyne a Record of By-gone Times in Australia

## Chapter I. The History of a Station.

On one of our Western rivers — once many days' ride beyond the blue ranges to be seen on a clear day from the flag-staff — now twelve miles only from a railway station, at a point where the mountain slopes begin to melt into the great basin of the interior, is to be seen Windabyne Homestead.

The Yarombil is the Southern boundary of the Run. That watercourse shows at the road-crossing in ordinary times, as little more than a huge stretch of gravel within high, precipitous banks, saving its title to the name of "river" by the slender stream trickling through the pebbles to the great pool lower down, called the "Big Waterhole."

At one time, when the sun fell low, and the oak-tops\* swayed in the whispering breeze, the pelican and the black swan might be seen opening their wings and drifting slowly along the rippling surface of this mimic lake, then shaded in woodland verdure, while the blue crane would float overhead from the shelter of the casuarina to the high naked top of the white gum-tree.

But these denizens of the woods and waters have now gone; the water-hole is made subservient to various hydraulic, industrial and domestic uses; and the gums and oaks have been converted into fencing-stuff and shingles. There comes first in view, as you cross the plain, the dark line of dwarf scrub rising above the bank, and then the homestead appears with its clear-cut fences and bright green garden, a pleasant change to the eye, after thirty miles of brown pasture or gaunt eucalyptus.

On the Southern, or Girrah, side of the river, there lie a succession of wooded flats and box ridges, and on the opposite, or Windabyne, side, there stretch away, North and West, in dim perspective, the open vistas that mark the spot to be on the borders of the great salt-bush country.

Of Windabyne in the last century we know nothing; but the stone tomahawks turned up often by the fencers' picks, and the draywheels of the carriers, tell of a race that once filled the valley with their hunts, their love-makings, their tribal feasts and feuds. The story of the big "Condôles" that came from beyond the salt water, bearing men with shining faces, armed with "thunder-sticks," no doubt reached them through rumours from the coast, — but mutilated and distorted beyond recognition from repeated tellings.

Sometimes, even now, strange fables are picked up on our frontiers,

which are only narrations of our own doings, in disguise, brought back to us as news, after being passed on from mouth to mouth at hundreds of camp fires.

But it was long before these strange white men met the Yarombil tribes face to face. It took place, at length, shortly before the drought of 1839.

Only one water-hole held out that season. To lose that would be death to the blacks; but the sheep of the great John Shoddy, Esq., of Darling Harbour, were on the country.

The tale is too nauseous to repeat, like many others of the same kind, and there are different ways of telling it.

Six white men, two women, and three children were hacked into small pieces, and thrown into the disputed water-hole.

The tribe, mid blood and fire, took to the back plains, tracked by the border police, and they were “bailed up” on a treeless waste. A few cripples crawled back to the pinescrubs and broken ridges at the source of the Yarombil, but the community, as such, was rubbed out.

Modern civilization, in its contact with nature's children, appears not as a tender guide or nursing mother. Her gifts and smiles are all for the future — often for races yet unborn. The pioneer does a work he hardly understands, for the good, as often as not, of somebody unknown to him; while the savage, overpowered and dazed at the unheard-of forces that close around him, vainly gnashes his teeth against the manacle, and dies under the sentence of “vae victis” — the law of the survival of the fittest.

No advocate has yet taken up the “Yarombil” brief. We suspect that a much better case might be made out in justification of the “reprisals” of the savage heathen than is commonly admitted.

After the Run had been occupied for two years, it was abandoned. All the slaughter and grief alike to Christian and Heathen, had been unavailing. The water-hole was shrunk to a pool — a liquid oasis in a basin of mud — round the margin of which Mr. Shoddy's sheep and cattle stuck, two and three deep, without strength enough to get out.

The proprietor, in wrath, ordered Maclagan, his manager, to bring the remnant in. The men were paid off, or turned into Government, according as they were free or bond; the sheep were sold to a new arrival, and Maclagan was sent to Whale Bay to take possession of an estate got there through one of those happy financial operations that cost nothing. He was a faithful, hardworking man, the Super. He got only a small salary indeed, but he felt himself amply recompensed by the handsome share he held in this Whale Bay property.

However, when Mr. Shoddy died, some years after, at Croydon, worth half-a-million, he must have taken the Super's share with him, for Mac never got it. But all this is neither here nor there in our story.

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, then, some years after, that is to say, in 1844, the Smiths started for the "New Country," from their little farm near Pumpkintown, Myrtle Creek, where they had lived for two years — indeed, since they came to the colony.

The Major was a veteran, who had gone through some rough work at the Cape, among the Burmese, and elsewhere, and he could show both scars and medals. His last military duty had been to bring out a detachment of the gallant Fortieth to Sydney. Finding that the climate was to his mind, and that Australia offered a better chance for his young ones than the old country, he decided to move his household gods. So he went home by the *General Hewitt*, the passage lasting 149 days — sold his commission, realised all his odds and ends, and, in two years more, found himself at Myrtle Creek, on a two-hundred-acre farm, with Mrs. Smith, Jack, Willie, Fred, and, lastly, Miss Mary, aged six years.

We must not forget to add that the Major lodged his ready cash, £4,000, in the Waratah Bank, and for many years he was treated with great respect by the officers of that institution.

At Myrtle Creek, the young ones learned their lessons, and also acquired the accomplishments proper to the bush; and stock-whips cracked, and puppies yelped, and boys shouted and galloped at least half of each day, while little Mary became a dab at finding eggs in the grass.

The Major, meantime, like a cautious, sensible man, took his rides through the country, read the papers, heard what everybody said and believed nobody; and, finally, made up his mind, when the boys were two years older, to go out and take up a station in the Western Country.

As his money was at good interest, and these were cheap times for living, he did not feel in any great hurry.

He had brought letters of introduction to the Governor, to the Waratah Bank, and to the Bishop, and he naturally looked to these authorities for advice as to making a start. "Go squatting — breed stock; there must be money to be made by that. I have tried all I could to burke it, and I have failed," — said the stout Sir George. The Bank said, "Go squatting — we have a large capital to lay out, and we are always glad to lend to good marks like you." The Bishop said, "If you are a sound Churchman, your influence in the interior will be most beneficial, and you cannot but succeed if you put everything you have on four legs, *and buy Marsden's bulls*. The occupation of squatting is patriarchal, and approved in the canon."

The Bar and the Press were then only in their infancy, or, no doubt, their views would have been the same. This advice confirmed the conclusion to which his own thoughts tended, but after some time vainly spent in looking about, our old friend was thwarted in carrying the same into effect, by a difficulty of which he had not been warned, and which

he never could have anticipated.

This same obstacle meets new-comers at the present day, in various shapes, whether they come here as moneyed men or not, and it does look like a monstrous anomaly that in a continent nearly two thousand miles in measurement each way, there is not, in spite of masses of printed laws and regulations, any simple method by which a man can get the use without difficulty, of a corner of the soil.

It is curious how, under a totally different form of Government, muddles and abuses, kindred in their nature, though arising from different causes, have grown and thriven, and it is queer, too, that then, as now, the point where all redress was sought was the same, namely, the back stairs of the Secretary's office. We are told that "in those days public business was conducted with much official mystery and secrecy, and the functions of Government were understood as having nothing in common with the wants and wishes of people outside. Of course there were back stairs open to friends, and private intimacies flourished all the more that access was allowed only to a set." \* \* \* \* \*

But the Major's introductions opened this charmed official circle to him at once, and he was received with overwhelming cordiality. He was repeatedly assured that the officials "were all gentlemen, and that they knew how to treat a gentleman" — but beyond this asseveration, though he was welcomed at several interviews and assured of every assistance, things got no farther. There was some unseen hitch. It came out at last.

"You want unstocked country. Of course, you can have unstocked country. Most happy, I'm sure — whatever tender you put in shall be dealt with at once." "Have no particular country in view. Awkward." "All likely country seems to be applied for. Strange, isn't it, that the list of runs seems to repeat the same names?"

"Ah! yes, I see. Some of our fellows in the Department. They do take up a good deal."

"With stock?"

"I believe not always. The truth is, the country being open to anyone, they may as well have it as anyone else. In fact, it is a great advantage to Government that they should have it. If it were not so managed, every piece of country would go out of the hands of the Crown, and be owned by Dick, Tom, and Harry, and all sorts of cads, and we feel, as you must feel, that it is much better to be kept among gentlemen. I fancy your best plan is to get some of our fellows to act for you. There is such a run on these grazing estates, and one is so apt to be jockeyed by fellows outside."

The drift of all this was, that if Smith would give £1,000 to one of the "gentlemen" of the Lands Department, he would be put on a run.

They had among them, cooked and pirated tenders from official reports, explorers' journals, and other material, to an extent that covered more country than had ever yet been seen or ridden over by anyone, and

the officials were selling these runs exactly as if they were modern Stock and Station agents.

The Major, however, was an old-fashioned character. He was an honest man, and had held his Majesty's commission, and so he walked, for the last time, out of the Lands Department.

The *élite*, as he closed the door, remarked that "he was a boor, quite without the tact and delicacy necessary to negotiate such matters." "In fact, he is *not* a gentleman," said the senior of the office.

That's how our old friend fared in the official world. He then took to the back country himself, tried Liverpool Plains and the Lachlan, subsidised stockmen, went out with black-boys, and sent in hosts of tenders. But one invariable official answer came from the Department, always reporting a previous application; and the old gentleman, wearied out at length, sat down one day in Petty's to consult his pipe as to what was to be done next.

At this juncture, he was called upon by a commercial gentleman, round-faced, well-shaved, beaming, and fluent. Mr. Bogus surmised Major Smith's disappointment, and deplored the state of the Public Service. The solid interests of the country were sacrificed to fill the pockets of nominees and protégés of the Home Government. He was happy that he could supply what Major Smith wanted, as he had just received instructions to offer for sale Windabyne Run, a splendid property. The Run had been stocked, but was now offered bare. The price was only £600, and he would put it under offer for two months if Major Smith wished to examine it. There was a gentleman now in town who had been on the country.

The Major had an old-fashioned, hospitable way of doing business, so he asked Mr. Bogus to bring the gentleman to lunch to-morrow.

The next day settled it. Maclagan got a good feed and earned a £10 note from Bogus; and the money was to be paid for the Run on getting possession. Smith made only one condition — the water in the river. That was all right, as the last two years had been wet.

So this was how the Smiths came to start for the New Country.

These were the days of slow travelling. Two hundred miles could not then be done by 8 p.m., as it can now; but the two bullock teams and the out-rigger dog-cart crawled on fifteen miles a day. At length the range was topped whence could be seen the Yarombil, with two big rough huts on the top of the high bank, just built by the Major's foresight, and Mrs. Smith said, "Oh, Willy! we're home at last, and it will be so nice for the boys and Mary!"

No man who buys a run need want stock long. The Major's business friend Bogus literally overwhelmed him with offers of sheep and cattle. If there were six letters in the postman's bag, three of them were from that indefatigable agent; so it was not long before there were three flocks

of ewes in the hands of shepherds, all veterans of the old régime, and showing the varied idiosyncracies of that interesting but now nearly extinct race. One was "Skrammy," or one-armed; another was "Bothered," or deaf, and he was by far the most troublesome of the lot; the third was a one-eyed sailor with a stick leg, who kept the station in a state of horror by reporting a case of scab at least once a week. At last it became a joke among the boys to ask Jack about the sheep; when he would make a dive among the flock, and appear, grappling a woolly victim. To see him open the fleece, and point out, with fearful imprecations on his eyes and vitals, the marks of the disorder, was always a great source of entertainment. Jack was crazy on this topic, it turned out. Windabyne never had disease in its stock. The men were all more or less crazy. Each of them swore that he would stick to so good a master as the Major through thick and thin, and each of them, in due season, took "cranky," had to get his cheque, and knock it down; then, after spending six months or a year on the "wallaby" track, he would turn up again to repeat the same process.

There were, moreover, three hundred cattle that the boys were to look after when they were fairly broken in to the run. Meantime, one of the drovers who brought them, was hired for a year to steady them fairly on the country.

A good cottage was in time built, and a garden planted. The lambings were good, and the shearers came in due time and left a well-filled shed. The bales, marked W over diamond, got well known, and wanted a good many more drays than the Major's own to take them down, and all was going merry as a marriage bell, when one memorable day in 1847, a horseman appeared coming down the track. He dismounted at the handsome white rustic gate, the last ornament of the place, and entering, presented the rubicund visage of Bogus. His features, beneath the florid and somewhat animal good-nature, which they usually presented, seemed to show certain lines now that betokened meaning and purpose, so after being refreshed, his host drew him into a little sanctum at the end of the verandah, that he called his office. "I came off at once to tell you, Major Smith. We have letters from London. Fixity of Tenure is passed into law by the Privy Council, and the Orders are gazetted, Your station, Windabyne, is a freehold to you and yours for ever, as long as you pay the squatting fee. There's no doubt about it. You have a magnificent estate, and pardon me, but it will be your own fault if you do not leave your family worth millions. Who could have thought that our apathetic, dozy Home authorities could have had the sense and pluck to do anything so wise and so handsome!"

Our veteran shook his head. "There's something wrong about that, Bogus. I can quite believe that the Government has passed an order to secure us squatters against being kicked about and bullied by his little

Excellency here, but as to giving us the lands — whew!” — and the Major blew out his cigar smoke.

“Well then, Major, read the Orders — fourteen years' lease, right of renewal, pre-emptive — and there's been a meeting at the Club. Boyd says, ‘as long as I pay the fee, these lands are to me and mine a freehold for ever,’ and if he does not understand the force of Parliamentary and Official documents, who does? Everybody down the country says the same. There's a stir among the business people, some talk of a new bank, and the Waratah is prepared to — — I'll not say to do what — until you look as if you put more faith in me.”

The old soldier thawed. No man loved money less, but the “*res angusta domi*” had pressed upon him. He thought of his patient wife darning and patching, forgetting in her fond toil the luxurious home of her girlhood; the education of his boys, snatched as it were by chance, and only half completed; his little daughter, unless money came, likely to grow a woman without seeing much congenial society or refinement; and here he was told, certainly by a man in whom he had no great belief, but still, who had shown himself friendly, that the gates of fortune were open to him. Smith took a long breath, looked straight at Bogus, and said, “Well — then?”

“Major Smith, I candidly tell you that your position in connexion with this news has been discussed between the Directors of the Waratah and myself, and I hope, in no unfriendly spirit to you. Of course, they want to get a good return for their money — as bankers should — and, in like manner, I, as a business man, want to earn my quota of profit. You see, we disguise nothing; but if we did not believe that this could be done consistently with your advantage, you would not see me here now. The Bank has added to its capital largely, and is prepared to lay out its money in strengthening the position of station-owners. Of course, the character of the proprietor, as well as the value of the property, will need to be carefully considered in negotiating such advances. Your case occurred to me at once as one where capital could be advantageously invested — advantageously I mean to both borrower and lender. Still, these terms by no means represent correctly the connexion which would subsist between the Waratah and such a client as yourself. The chairman, Admiral Baggs, with Whitewash on his right, and Shoddy on his left, said to me, ‘Bogus,’ said he, ‘if you enter upon this subject with Major Smith, assure him that if he negotiates a station advance through you, the Bank will be too pleased to leave the money permanently on the station — in fact, we wish to identify ourselves entirely with such properties as Windabyne, and our motto is, “live and let live.” ’

“ ‘I will assure him of that, Admiral,’ I said.”

“ ‘Thank ye kindly — thank ye kindly,’ said the bluff old seaman, whose word, he always said, was as good as his bond.”

Our veteran had seen life. Cotton and indigo speculations in Calcutta, railway staggings in Capel Court, with its sham credit and bubble profits, had passed before his eyes, and had made him distrustful of commercialism when it took a florid hue. But Bogus' yarn seemed to hang together; still he would not be rash, he would go down to Sydney and see for himself.

It is said that Dentists, Father Confessors, Test Mediums, and Bankers can thrill the nerves, and set the hair on end better than any other men. They all cultivate the mysterious, the oracular, and the bland.

A smiling gentleman stands by a comfortable arm-chair — he approaches a delicate hand to your mug — “allow me” — and, with a gentle pressure, your cervical vertebrae seem to give way as if to the garotte — there is a crash like the crack of doom — stars and meteors flash across your vision, and a three-pronged molar strikes the cornice.

The other professors are said to do their work as effectively, especially the Bankers — so the Major's professional valour may not be impugned if he felt the magnetic influence of the manager's room in the Waratah, to which he was ushered a week after by Bogus.

There was nothing very alarming to be seen. A solemn, stately, ecclesiastical-looking gentleman sat at a ponderous table with a shovel hat on, trying to look like a sphinx; in reality he was mentally debating whether he would order in lunch from the Cafè or go home to a shrill washing-day welcome and a cold scrag of mutton, but he was bound to put on “side” whatever he did; for, when you combine finance and episcopacy, the unities must be maintained in a pompous solemn way: grinning, swinging your legs over the chair back, whittling the Board pens, or other frivolities that I have seen practised by other Bankers, would have been quite out of place here.

The Board was not sitting; the Admiral was courting the breezes of the Pacific at Manly, and his confrères were under their family vines and fig trees; but the Windabyne advance had been already discussed, and had been determined favourably.

Speech is said to be silver — silence golden; but deliverances such as those of the Delphic Oracle, possess the advantage of saying what may mean a great deal and yet may mean nothing whatever.

“I have told Major Smith,” said Bogus, “that if he avails himself of the advance, the Bank will consider it a permanent investment” — the Oracle here waved his hands magnificently — “that the security is ample in all conceivable circumstances, and that the value is considered enhanced from our client's position and character.”

A gleam of benignant sunshine lightened the countenance of the sphinx, accompanied with a deep inclination of the head, and followed by a severe frown and the two hands slapped heavily on the table.

This pantomime meant that the Bank liked doing a noble action, when

the right man turned up, and that the tortures of the Holy Office might be applied to the Board and the manager, before they would deviate one iota from the spirit of their pledge.

“You see,” said Bogus, “I run no risk in guaranteeing you against the money being called up.” There were but some unimportant matters to arrange in Bogus' office, and then the Major was told that he could at once buy cattle to the value of £3,000, and that there was a first-rate lot at Lake Bredalbane at 25s. per head ready to inspect.

That was all that passed. The Major declared to the last that the Bank representative pledged himself that the money would never be called up while the security remained unimpaired. The banker, on the other hand, when the question arose, a-hemmed, pooh-poohed, and smiled pity and contempt; while not a man of the Board knew anything about it! As for Bogus, in these latter days, he had other fish to fry.

\* The casuarina is generally called “oak” in Australia — for reasons unknown — sometimes she-oak, sometimes river-oak.

## Chapter II. Major Smith's Financial Experiences.

In 1847, Her Majesty's Mail left King Street at four p.m. The vehicle in use was of a sort that, luckily for our bones, has not survived to the present day; for it was all heavy hard-wood and solid iron. Leather, steel, and hickory had not then been adapted in their modern form to soften the asperities of travel; but four half-broken, sturdy horses wheeled the coach, such as it was, along the track that did duty for a road, bumping the passengers' heads together, making their teeth chatter, and appalling the very souls of the timid.

The horses scrambled up pinches, and along "sidelings," like cats; and in going down-hill they either sat down in their breeching and strained against the momentum of gravitation as long as the pole chain stood, or else they ran away. The latter result was not uncommon. Capsizes took place at times, and "jibs" were frequent. You were always requested to walk up the hills. You had to lend the coachman and guard a hand in all kinds of scrapes; and on the whole, the journey was full of interest and passed quickly, though it left you at your destination black and blue, and dead beat for want of sleep.

Ah, wretched moderns! what have you not missed? You have nought to struggle with now but the crumpling of the roses, and life has become tame. You get into your train at ten o'clock. You recline on luxurious cushions. Your only doubt or difficulty is which book you will read first, or when you will eat your first sandwich, and the day is barely spent when you are at the foot of Bowning Hill. A commercial gentleman, who might have left Brummagem that morning, from his appearance, takes out his watch, and bellows, with his head out of the window, to the guard — "Ten minutes late. I shall *repawt* you." Only imagine ten minutes at Bowning! A couple of days did not use to matter there in our time!

The Major's journey was before those days of progress, and he was well pleased to find himself in bed at the "Salutation," where he snored the sleep of the just, till eleven o'clock next day. Then he arose and looked out. The grey, unfenced plain lay before him, backed by the limestone ridge. The willows in the creek were in the vivid green of early spring. Under his window was the street of a village, since become an Episcopal city, but the sounds that reached his ears were not such as are wont to arise in the precincts of cloisters and cathedrals.

The cattle to be looked at were twenty miles away, so he had to get a horse to carry him to Bredalbane, and then the three or four days' ride that would take him back to Windabyne; so he dressed, hurried over breakfast, and then made for the inn yard, from which some significant echoes had reached his ears.

Yelling, on a cart, stood a fiendish-looking old auctioneer, selling horses, and among the audience stood one of his fellow-passengers by the mail, Thomas Dodd, Esq., five feet nothing, in high boots and spurs, going to Monaro to take delivery of a station on behalf of his firm.

"Good morning, Major Smith," cordially said Mr. Dodd, "I fear you're late if you want a nag; I've got the only thing fit to ride," and he pointed, with some elation, to a tall, fat, brown animal, with a straight shoulder, lop ears, and knock knees.

"A man wants blood, bone, and height for these roads — I can't bear ponies like that — won't keep a man's legs off the ground," and he poised himself on his toes to his magnificent altitude of sixty inches.

But the "pony" led past had caught the Major's eye. He was a dark chestnut, with a fine, clean head, and hard, black hoofs, poor, and saddle-galled, but, to a horseman, showing unmistakable signs of blood and mettle.

"I need another horse," said Mr. Dodd, "but he is not my stamp, so I won't bid against you if you want him; but he's only a cat."

However, the Major knew better. He had seen the Mahratta robbers do their sixty miles a day on worse horses, and he had galloped down the Bolan Pass, hunted for his life by Lall Singh's troopers, on just such another. So he bought the chestnut for a ten pound note, and he called him Akhbar, and never was man better carried — and no wonder — for his grand-dam was a little Timor mare, bred on Baebuk; his dam was a daughter of Legislator; and his sire was old Satellite.

"Daylight to dark, and carries his tail like a peacock! Go — going — gone!" shouted old Didlums; and for once he told no lie, for the little horse, just 14.2, carried his fourteen stone an honest seventy miles, and had a bolt in him then.

He was the gamest, the hardiest, the kindest, and most friendly of horses. In a few days, he whinnied when he heard the Major's voice, and every morning he came up to the fence to be petted by Mary.

Mr. Tommy Dodd acted after his kind, and bought a second horse, "something up to weight," a gaunt coacher, that churned his inside till he reached the verge of delirium, and knocked up in a bog on the third day.

Oh, gentlemen of the Jockey Club! read Curr's Book,\* and then you will find out what a saddle-horse should be. Curr will show you the real wind-drinker of the desert — the Steed of the Sahara — Akhbar's blood relations — and you will lose conceit of your leggy gallopers at monkey weights.

The cattle were accepted, subject to certain provisions readily conceded, and they were soon on the Yarombil flats. Good yards were built; a good stud of horses was gradually gathered, and under the recent financial stimulus, the concern steadily assumed greater dimensions. The property received permanent value from such improvements, and Bogus heartily assented to everything that so judiciously added to his security. "Why think of my balance," he wrote, "I am well pleased to be accumulating a small commission account against you — it pays you, and it pays me — and as for the Bank, don't I guarantee you against any pressure? Moreover, are bankers buccaneers or maniacs? Do you think they wish to kill the bird that lays such golden eggs? Disabuse your mind, my dear sir, of any misgivings on that score. Our commercial authorities know better than to commit deliberate suicide."

Such was the tone of his correspondence, and no doubt, in meaning, it was all genuine and bona fide; that is, so far as Bogus could be said to have *any* fixed principles or intentions whatever.

Since then, his detractors have hinted, that his glib loquacity was merely the echo of a shallow, brisk, commercial soul, trained to look upon "business" as the main end of all effort, and on pledges and promises simply as needful formulae in the day's work, no more binding on honour and conscience than the promissory notes that can be so easily made waste paper of by the authorised legal elixir.

Be that as it may, the Smiths had some peaceful, happy years. All home beauties grew around them. They could thoroughly appreciate the genial upland climate and their luxurious home — not, indeed, at all like the ostentation and apishness of the city swell mansion; but that much more enjoyable, and greatly more economical, dwelling, that takes its stamp from educated culture and household gladness enframed in the invigorating forest life.

Even to this day, Mary, now in middle life, looks back to "dear old Windabyne" as the paradise of her youth — the one green spot in the desert.

The pinch of money matters, so often threatened, seemed to be removed for good. Even Mrs. Smith, habitually anxious, breathed freely, and little luxuries, long dispensed with, were used again.

"Why should she grudge her children enjoyments that now could be easily afforded? The Major was so well pleased with the way the station was going on."

The old soldier, too, enjoyed the sunshine. For the first and only time wealth and independence seemed within reach; but his chief pride and pleasure was in seeing his boys becoming true sons of the wilderness.

No dandy dilettante squatters were they. They did a great deal of their work themselves — mustering, droving, drafting, and so on; their only help being lads bred on the place, and black boys, those forms of ready,

serviceable labour that a large, liberally-managed establishment draws around it.

But though the Major had almost ceased to worry about the advance account, assured again and again of the satisfaction the bank felt with the security and buoyed up by Bogus' repeated pledge of support, still the balance grew no less.

Each step in advance seemed to involve another; the success of certain improvements necessarily justified their further application, and — provided the ground were sound under his feet — there could be no question that he was spending money, if freely, still judiciously.

Such land on the run as could be bought, he purchased; he imported a few head of highly-bred shorthorns, and put up in substantial and durable form the fencing and buildings necessary to manage, to advantage, a stock of 30,000 sheep, and 6,000 cattle, with their prospective increase.

According to Bogus' argument, if the advance did come to £10,000, what difference did it make in his position? If he paid twelve-and-a-half per cent. for the accommodation, did not the return from the stock, at the very lowest, equal twenty per cent.?

Had he not sent down 200 bales of wool worth £20 each? Then look at the increase!

By next year, to keep a margin of spare country, he would need to cull out everything that would sell or boil; and did not that mean working into a more valuable stock, quick returns, sure profits, and ready money?

And so things went on till 1850.

In that year, the periodical drought scorched the pastures of Eastern Australia.

The rain came only with the gold discovery in May of the following year; but up to that time, from the coast — usually green with the moist breezes of the Pacific — to the heart of the Darling Basin, the herbage was either scorched and shrivelled to dust, or dried into sapless hay.

It threatened to be 1839 over again. The water-holes stood well, indeed, but what would they be after two such seasons?

Still, no harm came to Windabyne yet. The thick grassy banks and reed-beds of the Yarombil held rough feed for the herd of cattle for one year at least; and there was no risk of the sheep starving on the plains so long as the water held out. The tanks and wells that had cost so much money now promised to give a good return for the outlay.

But of late, the banks, especially the Waratah, had been dealing largely in station accounts, and the financial gauge had become peculiarly sympathetic to all influences that touched pastoral matters. A sensitiveness, not amounting to panic, showed itself in cautionary hints, — and restriction in some cases — in avoidance of fresh business — and in the careful scrutiny of some of the larger discount accounts, such as that of our friend Bogus.

That gentleman had followed his natural bent — pushing — talkative — superficially smart — shallow and ignorant as only such men can be, he had buzzed and gabbled himself into a huge sham business — hollow as a drum — indeed that instrument is not a bad image both for the business and the man. Importer, auctioneer, a speculator in town lots, whaling ventures, station accounts, country stores, there was nothing he had not his hand in, and he was so busy and so expert in kite-flying and other paper manipulations, that all attempts to unravel his transactions by an onlooker were baffled through their variety and rapidity.

The wide awake used to remark that it was impossible to say whether he was making money or not. He lived in Adelaide Bay, in a house that he had built at a cost of many thousand pounds. His credit was unquestioned. He had a large bank account; his paper was put through, and his engagements were duly met; and all Sydney would have raised the hands of astonishment if a hint of his unsoundness had reached them! See his advertisements! See his directorships in Public Companies!

The Waratah took care of him: they swore by him to the outside business world — and did not allow his name to be breathed on while they could use him as a funnel to fill the bank coffers.

But a scrutiny, conducted in the Board Room, was based on entirely different considerations.

There was an over-draft of goodly dimensions — here were renewals in scores! Were these or any of them represented by good security?

Careful dissection shortly shewed that the business which had been a mine of wealth to both the bank and Bogus for years, was insolvent.

It had been carried on by paying one man with another man's money, and it was manifest that the bank ran the risk of incurring a heavy loss, unless great care were exercised.

The greater then was the necessity that their client's credit should be maintained, and his business nursed in every direct and indirect way. As soon as funds enough came in to recoup the bank — no matter to what confiding creditor they might belong — the business would be suppressed and obliterated.

Bogus, of course, would be opening a fresh account with the bank immediately, for to such a Phoenix there was no such possibility as absolute ruin.

But this prudent scheme was somewhat hurried by kindred perils incidental to the times.

Other banks, and other speculators besides Bogus, were involved in the same complications, and, perhaps owing to some want of tact or delicacy in the touch of the operator, or the withholding of support at a critical moment, the strain tightened in certain quarters, and the firm of Gilpin and Bubb, much connected with Bogus, and doing the same kind of

business, stopped payment.

The course of the bank was now inevitable. They had to wind up Bogus, and realise his securities before worse happened.

After all, the bank lost nothing — in fact, made money — and Bogus never moved out of his Adelaide Bay house. The disaster fell, with crushing ruin, elsewhere.

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One of these days, our old friend at Windabyne, on opening the postman's bag, found a letter from the Waratah Bank, drawing his attention to some bills falling due at early dates, and requesting him to make arrangements to meet them.

The Major assumed that Mr. Bogus had omitted some technicality connected with the advance account, and was on the point of enclosing a letter to him, so that the needful might be done, when a note, separate from the formal letter of the bank, fell from the envelope.

It was a line from the manager, requesting his attendance in Sydney, with reference to urgent business.

“What on earth could they want?”

“His cheques had been tolerably heavy, to be sure — making dams on the back blocks — buying rams, and so on — and he had spent more in less productive outlay, in furniture and odds and ends, than he ever thought to do — but, after all, what did it matter about a few hundred pounds, while things were going on so well? The wool now at sea would bring £4,000, and there was an excellent increase. Store stock was a drug in the market to be sure, but it could not always be so. He would go down and see the Homebush Races, and if he found Bogus or the bank troublesome, he would move his account elsewhere. Many Sydney firms would jump at an account like Windabyne. So he would make a trip of it. He would ride Akhbar down, and leave him in Brown's paddock on the Hawkesbury, doing the last thirty miles by coach, and he would be back in a month. And what was wanted in town?” “Oh, lots of things — saddlery — library books, to be sent quarterly — music — cuttings and flower seeds — a screw for the press — Willy would fix it up; he was a bit of a mechanic — a new bellows for the forge — Jack was a crack shoer.”

“And, to be sure, if the Johnstone girls came from the Paterson to pay their visit, he would buy a light trap and two horses, and drive up, and he could fetch a boy on Akhbar.”

“And does Mary need a new piano?”

“Oh, no, papa — Mary is only fifteen; when she is three years older, it will be time enough.”

Alas! — in three years — such gifts were not for poor Mary!

The Directors of the Waratah were nearly all new men. The Admiral had retired from the cares of the Board, and, indeed, his own doings were undergoing the same analysis as those of his protégé, Bogus; but he was too hard a nut for cracking. They might obliterate Bogus when they chose, but old Baggs was too formidable. The top hamper and spars might be cut away to ease the craft, but they dare not break up the solid timbers of the hull.

The impersonality of a Corporation has been for long a trite subject of comment.

The Dean of St Paul's has, perhaps, put this characteristic as concisely as it can well be, when he says that such an institution has neither a soul to be saved, nor a body to be kicked. Our good old friend was shortly to realise the fact to his prejudice.

He had hardly reached the town when he was startled with hearing of Bogus' failure for £60,000, and he lost no time in going to the bank.

The manager found speech this time to tell him, in a few curt phrases — without any elaborate courtesy or laboured gesticulation — “that the Directors had decided to call up his advance, and they requested him to take the necessary steps, as they had no wish to realise upon his security.”

“What do you mean, sir?” asked Smith, in great surprise. “Am I to understand, that unless I repay your advance forthwith, you will sell my property?”

“Ah — hem — the necessity may not arise — no doubt, sir — you can make arrangements elsewhere for accommodation.”

“But, sir, I must remind you that I accepted this advance originally through the intervention of Mr. Bogus, and that, in my subsequent dealings, I have received his reiterated guarantee that I would not be called on for repayment while my security remained valid. Moreover, your President, Admiral Baggs, himself suggested the advance on my station, first to Mr. Bogus — — ”

“Excuse me, Major Smith, Mr. Bogus is not now in a position to render his guarantee effective, and as to Admiral Baggs, his views, no doubt, may have been such as you describe, but he may have been mistaken as to your means and resources. In any case, any conversations that may have passed when the account was opened, can have no weight with the existing Board of Directors.”

“Still, sir,” rejoined the Major, “do you not recollect an interview I had with you along with Mr. Bogus in this very room, barely four years ago, when it was plainly put, that the advance was only accepted by me on the condition that the money was not to be called up while the stock and station remained unimpaired; and I have letters now, barely six months old, from you, expressing complete satisfaction with the position of my account.”

“A-hem — pooh-pooh — my good sir,” patronised this ecclesiastical financier; “you hardly comprehend — circumstances altered — first duty of bank to shareholders. The interpretation which you would put on such a pledge — supposing it could be given — would be destructive of bank interests, and would make our position invalid in law.”

“Enough, sir,” said the veteran. “I shall see Admiral Baggs, and demand his version of this transaction; but I see already that I have been cajoled and deluded.”

The manager laid his hand on the bell. “Ah — hum — Major Smith — I shall feel obliged if you will communicate with the bank in future in writing.”

The interview with the Admiral must have been a hot one, if we might judge by the soliloquy of that naval hero while he walked up and down his wharf mopping himself after the Major left.

“ — — — — bless my immortal soul! What do you think of that? Here's a man, has the assurance to tell me that I promised to let him have, for good and all, ten thousand pounds of the bank's money. And that's what one gets for trying to help people. Here's Dick, Tom, and Harry, come from — — knows where, and give themselves out to be men of means, and — — me if they don't borrow the bank money and want to stick to it. What the — — 's the use of a lot of paupers going into large properties? Blast me if this Major's the right stamp of man! Major be hanged — something in the soda-water or billiard-making line would suit him better. It's the greatest charity to these kind of people to wind them up, and have done with them — the greatest possible charity” — and the philanthropist heaved a sigh like the snort of an eighty-barrel whale, and sat down to dry himself.

That afternoon, for the first time, did Major Smith see clearly the gulf that yawned at his feet — he had still foot-hold, but he had found accommodation much less easy to get, in the reaction that had set in, and it was offered mainly by houses that had the credit of working their business on the wrecking or slaughtering principle.

He had already ascertained that he could get the account taken over by Sharp and Co., but the expense would be heavy, and the risks and chances would be all cruelly against him. With the ransom that he would be bound to pay, in interest and commission, the debt would speedily assume crushing proportions, while Sharp might exercise his power of foreclosure at any moment. A rise in stock or wool might help him through, but present prices for store stock were nominal only, and wool was low, and fat stock about boiling figures.

He spent hours wandering through the Domain, facing the facts, and trying to see his way through them, but he could see little ahead — except with extraordinary luck — but a broken-up home, and a penniless old age.

When a business man comes to grief, he simply opens another set of books and another office, pays his creditors with a clean schedule, and drops for a week or two a few of his most ostentatious expenses — but he lives as well as ever — has money in his pocket — and never knows either privation or loss of position. With a broken-down squatter it is otherwise. When foreclosure falls on his station, he loses home, means, food, and everything but the clothes his family wear. If he is left his writing-desk, and given the use of a vehicle to go off the station, it is entirely by the good-will of the creditor's agent.

He, in fact, becomes an outcast — and the buzz of gossip, which attends his downfall — raised to justify his creditor's action — fixes upon him all the sins and errors of his tribe and generation. Extravagance, uselessness, drunkenness, dishonesty, ring the changes on the event, and are passed from mouth to mouth among the shallow, servile herd, who have fawned and fattened on him whose career is broken.

“Thank Heaven, the boys were well able and willing to face the world,” but he feared for his poor wife and little Mary, and it was hard to think that the home to which they had got attached, should pass from them.

Even yet, he could hardly realise how his position had changed, merely from a sudden tremor in the money-market. A few months ago he was paraded as a wealthy man, by the same business authorities that were now pressing him to ruin. And where had the value gone? All had, apparently, been shrivelled up, and whirled into dust, like the grass of the parched plains. After all, the intrinsic value *was* there — but the vice of his position was that his grasp on it had gone. His was the case of the man who built his house upon the sand.

Still there were chances. He must fight against misfortune, and stave off the evil day to the last. There was no use in anticipating ruin.

So he turned about to retrace his steps to Sharp's office, and close with that firm on their own terms.

\* “Pure Saddle-Horses, by E. M. Curr, Melbourne.”

## Chapter III. Homeward Bound.

Dull and dejected, did Major Smith take his way back to his station.

That he was now next thing to a ruined man his sound sense told him; but the reverse of fortune that he had met with he could not yet fully realise, and in searching for a cause for the same in his own conduct, he met only with an enigma.

On looking carefully through his past career he could see few steps which he had taken that he would not repeat under the same circumstances.

His course had been marked by prudence and economy. Every movement had been made under the influence of opinions and advice generally held to be sound; but even now, before he left town, he became aware that the gossip of mercantile circles accused him of reckless extravagance, want of judgment, and wanton carelessness in dealing with borrowed money. The very improvements that now enabled Windabyne to resist the drought were cited as expensive and useless follies.

In vain he came back to the question, "What else could he have done?" Supposing that he had refrained from entering upon squatting, what other pursuit would have been open to him? He might certainly have applied for a Government post, or he might have opened a public-house; or, if he had a head for *business*, he might have joined the scores who, even then, like Mr. Bogus, lived by their wits and paid their creditors by going through a simple pen-and-ink formula.

But, for a soldier, a gentleman possessing a small capital, and with the ambition natural to a high-minded man, to do real work and take a worthy position in the land of his adoption, he could not see that there was any other course open to him than the one he had taken.

He might, indeed, have declined to avail himself of the advance which had been tendered him through the business importunity of Bogus and the Directors of the Waratah; but, if he had done so, he would have gone against the most strongly expressed opinions of his friends and neighbours. Hawthorne, of Girrah, his nearest neighbour, had worked into possession of a good property entirely on borrowed money — a rise of prices while he was heavily encumbered with debt had made him all at once a wealthy man — and he did not see how Major Smith could run any risk, starting, as he did, from so much stronger a position, so he advised the Major to take the money. And such had been the general

voice of other acquaintances with whom he had talked the matter over.

Still, he had felt certain misgivings, which appeared now to be amply justified by what had taken place. He felt as if from the time he was debtor to the bank he had been drifting into unknown depths, as if his affairs had become too cumbrous for his grasp, and as if new elements had entered into the surroundings of his position. If he had worked out and expressed the ideas that haunted him, he would probably have said that there was something defective in the squatting system; he would have been better pleased with a method that gave him more grasp on the soil, and involved less liability to incur debt. "In what a very different position he would be now, with one-fourth of the stock upon an unmortgaged freehold that he and his boys could give their whole time to improving."

But these reflections were futile. There was, practically, no other method open to him than the one he had taken, and universal use and wont fully justified the course which now seemed to point to irretrievable ruin.

So, like many men in like straits, he found little comfort either in theorising about systems, or in mourning over spilled milk. There was only one thing to do, to brace his heart up and keep his head clear for the desperate hand-to-hand struggle that must come before long. If he had not been the upright, pure-minded man he was, he would likely have smoked and drunk himself into a partial stupor, as many do under similar depression; but from the day the blow fell upon him, his habits never varied: he faced the enemy manfully, and shortly his mind became habituated to the change in his prospects, and he began to feel that even monetary ruin would not deprive him of all enjoyment of life. For a healthy-minded man is not long prostrated by any temporal misfortune, and, moreover, the very effort to meet what fate sends, brings its own balm and solace.

The very best cure, or, at least, anodyne, for any grief, is good hard work, either physical exercise or mental application, or, perhaps, best of all, both together. Many a man has been saved from death, insanity, or drunkenness, by devoting himself to some engrossing pursuit; and, on the other hand, there can be no more certain way of going — we will say "to the deuce" — than by lying down on one's back and doing nothing.

There is another curative power, to which some minds are peculiarly sensitive — what some old writer calls the "*vis medicatrix naturee*." Sensibility to this influence seems to run in breeds, like magnetism, music, and other subtle properties. To the Major, nature was a living influence. To him there were voices in the rustling leaves, in the sighing breezes, in the wild bird's note rising from the wooded dell; there was meaning and sympathy in the craig-built peak, piercing the blue empyrean, with the eagle wheeling in the mighty circles far above. The

fresh earth, the dewy morn, the vivifying odours of the wild bush, were not merely enjoyed by him, they thrilled through every nerve, and tingled in his blood. These sights, sounds, and other influences, intangible, though real, flowed into his mind, and became blended with his innerself.

The cant phrase, often unmeaningly used, "communion with nature," might be truthfully applied to our old friend's vivid enjoyment of our desert solitudes. He often spent hours musing among these sylvan depths, and the contact always acted in clearing his mind and calming his spirits.

For a good bracing tonic, commend me to dawn of day on one of our mountain roads — the pure, dry air, the flavour of earth and tree, the sounds of waking life, the shades of the light — from steel colour to orange — as its beams strike athwart the forest scene, bringing out every tint of the gum-tree foliage — from russet to dark green and silver. One can imagine how the first pioneers must have enjoyed the change from the sand-hills and swamps of the coast, when their lungs first inhaled the fragrant, resin-charged atmosphere of the table-land.

Apropos of these mountain tracts, there is one purpose for which our vast areas of poor country, on the Dividing Range, are well fitted; namely, for living on. Such silurian and sand-stone ranges may not be able to rear bullocks, or grow wheat, but for human life, health, and enjoyment, for fruit and flowers, for wood, water, and building-stone, these wildernesses are unmatched.

We have been guilty of no digression in following these reflections. We have merely been pursuing the train of the Major's thoughts, as he left Camden in the morning, mounted on his good horse, Akhbar, and made his way up the long slope of Razorback.

When he reached the top he had begun to shake off the lethargy that had weighed on him since he left Sydney, and he found himself gazing with keen interest on the great expanse of view that lay open before him to the South and West. What would the coming years tell of these wastes? Did the future shadow before him the flood of golden wealth soon to be poured from those sterile Western uplands? Did it point to the coming multitudes who were shortly to swarm on the coasts of Australia? Did it shew the iron-horse, ere many years to snort through these quiet valleys of the Cow Pastures? Did it tell him of a young nation working through its infantine disorders of folly and chaos, up to a manhood of power, wisdom, and beneficence? And while seer-like he gazed and dreamed, did formless mist-like images of the things to come pass before his mind's eye?

A laughing jackass skimmed over his head, took possession of a naked branch, the only remaining limb of a decayed giant of the woods, and raised his testimony against him. His dream was over, and this was the interpretation, and the Major could not but laugh; he was beginning to pick up.

A native bear on another tree near looked on with grave sympathy, he seemed to think that the jackass was rather frivolous, but still, no doubt, he meant well. The gentle beast never moved away from the Major, though he was almost within reach of his whip; he seemed to know that he was not of the sort he need fear.

So our veteran said “good morning” to these denizens of the mountain, and pursued his way, hitting out in the early hours, stopping long at noon, sometimes meeting an acquaintance in a cool roadside verandah, or chancing on a cheery companion as he ambled through shady Bargo; and then, when the evening came, he would put Akhbar on his mettle; so that ere many days the snow-capped Southern peaks appeared as he crossed the Gap, whence he turned to the right and followed the track which led to the Bogarralong Ranges, the source of the Yarombil.

And now he neared home, but as he got nearer, the shadow covered his spirit, and at length, as he crossed the well-known ford and entered the white gate, he was burdened down with weighty misgivings as to how the change in their prospects would be borne by those dearest to him, especially the gentle wife and happy young daughter, whom he had left under circumstances so different barely a month ago.

Simple, stupid man — little did he know of female intuition and female resource. His twenty-five years of married life had not yet shown him what a strong reserve of courage and wit rests deep in the gentlest bosoms.

He was barely in the garden when Mrs. Smith was upon him. One glance showed her that things were not right, but she beamed upon him with smiling face, and made a joke of his desponding explanation. “It was all nonsense — it would be right yet. Mary, Mary, here's papa!” And Miss Mary burst upon him like a young hurricane, rubbed her button of a nose against his waistcoat, and clutched him with her warm little hands.

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A few weeks after the Major's return, while the drought still continued, adding daily to the perils of his position, and giving growing cause for care and thought, an event of importance occurred at Windabyne.

It was the arrival of me, Reginald Crawford, the present writer, on the station.

My uncle, Captain John Kirkland, Laird of Gowandale, Strathclyde, and formerly, for a dozen years, Major Smith's brother officer in the gallant Fortieth, in every scene and clime, from the snows of Cashmere to the kloofs of Griqualand, had consigned me in due form to his old chum.

I had a box of clothes, one hundred pounds cash, a letter of introduction, and I was to go to Windabyne, make myself known, and do

what I was bid. If I did well, I might, after a term of probation, get some further aid from the authorities at home; if I did not do well, I was much better left alone to shift for myself.

Such were the brief and Spartan-like marching orders with which the Captain started his sister's son in the world; and my experience can vouch for their wisdom, for I never got the chance to make a mull of it till I was near thirty.

I need not say that my uncle's draft on the Major's friendship was duly honoured. For nearly two years Windabyne was my home, and a happy home it was.

I was now approaching the mature age of twenty years. I had lived all my life in my native Strathclyde, saving and excepting the intervals occupied by the customary education to which my father, uncles, and progenitors had been subjected for some generations — namely, I had spent five years at the County Academy, and two years at Edinburgh University.

And now, here was I, packed off to the new continent of the nineteenth century — Australia.

I don't think that a more egregious young donkey ever reached these shores.

Endowed by Nature with a vigorous appetite and a cheerful disposition, and lots of fag-ends of undigested miscellaneous knowledge simmering in my noddle, I was keen to go everywhere, and have a hand in everything. My other qualities gave full proof that I was bred true to the family type. I had plenty of imagination, some humour, and very little practical common sense. I was sometimes as vain as a peacock, and yet laughed at myself for the same. I would amuse myself by posing and posturing as a combination of Quentin Durward and the Admirable Crichton, and though I was quite conscious I was making a fool of myself, and took a saturnine pleasure in grinning at myself, I was still perfectly happy.

At the same time, my obstinacy was quite on a par with my disregard of common sense and my happy temperament. Neither the arguments of my friends nor yet Solomon's proverbial mortar and pestle could have brayed out of me any idiotic opinion or fancy that it was my pleasure to adopt.

“Very fine boy,” remarked one kind senior.

“Young fool wants kicking,” was the amendment frequently passed by sarcastic middle-age.

Still and anon, I think that the youngsters of those times, such as I was — and there were plenty more of the same sort — made, ultimately, as good men, and quite as good colonists, as numbers of more recent importations, more especially as compared with a type that used to come in shoals during the late Northern rush, generally dragged at the chariot-

wheels of some successful dealer in back blocks and new chums.

These used to arrive in a condition of vacuous dandyism, with piles of the latest and most useless equipment that London shop-keepers could devise, draped in calm, self-satisfied ignorance, and often skull-proof against the influx of all ideas.

How these poor fellows used to disappear — how the birds of prey lay in wait for them, and yet how many of them might not have been saved and taught something; perhaps, even learned to work if they had gone to such homes as Windabyne? After all, I need not plume myself; they never had the chance of such a start as I had.

I enjoyed the voyage immensely; delighted in the sea, the society, male and female, the sailors, and everything else. I read every book on board, beginning, usually, at the middle, skipping to the end, and then working from the beginning.

I fell in love once, if not oftener, and have some recollection of a moon-light meeting near the man at the wheel, who must have been greatly tickled — with a tearful damsel of seventeen, who sobbed out, so far as I could gather, that she was engaged to somebody else, and was sorry that she could not be engaged to me, too.

The carpenter came from Dunure, and I used to sit in his dingy den, in an atmosphere of rum and tobacco, conferring with him of Clyde matters generally; we did not know then of the iron fleets that were yet to be built on that famous estuary.

The second-mate was from Greenock, and he enticed me aloft; and I took to this branch of exploration with my usual ardour, till I daubed half my available clothing with tar and grease. At length I was “kidded on” to attempt the main-truck, when the after-watch pursued me, and tied me up in the cross-trees, whence I was released only under the stipulations of a solemn treaty, honourably fulfilled. I was taught to play whist, too, and with such success that my partner nearly went off in a fit of apoplexy at my blunders.

How pleasant that voyage was, it seems incomprehensible to me now. Middle age, however healthful and cheerful, has lost the zest of youth. The most ordinary and every-day of sights and sounds had music in them then, while novelty, change, incident, meant to me intense enjoyment.

Three weeks after the *Dunbar* cast anchor, I reached Windabyne. I had pushed on with my usual impatience, leaving my baggage to follow, and I was dressed in the soiled remnants of my board-ship clothes, supplemented by some of the eccentricities of costume which the traditional new chum has always favoured. I could not well avoid shewing this trait, because it chimed in so completely with my favourite practice of acting a part, consequently I studied to appear the hardy daring bush-man to the life; such a masquerade was great fun to me. The reader may, therefore, guess how I was rigged out. Moreover, my

northern skin was blistered and scorched by the tropical sun, and gnawed by mosquitoes; my features, sufficiently aquiline, were swollen so as to approach the grotesque, my lips and chin carried a growth of what was neither beard nor down — it was like the fluff of young pigeons called by our schoolboys “puddock-hair;” and my cracked and serrated countenance was picturesquely tinted with the indurated dust of the Sydney road, which no application of soap and hot water could remove. So when I presented myself in a high state of delight with my journey, my new friends and everything else, declaring that I had never enjoyed myself so much in my life, and that the country was splendid, there is no wonder that my queer appearance put a severe strain on the good-breeding of my entertainers.

Mrs. Smith smiled gently; the Major composed his countenance; Mary giggled, and Jack, Willy, and Fred, after a futile effort at gravity, gave one conjoined shout, threw good manners to the winds, and rolled on the sofas and the floor.

What were they laughing at? I was speaking the simple truth. I had been living in a fairy land of my own. What did my swollen nose, my mosquito bites, my rags, and other eccentricities matter? The bare, parched earth, and the gaunt gum trees that I had seen in endless sameness on my way over the mountains, had told me that I had come to a new world, a world where all the shreds of old conventionalism would be cast to the winds, and imagination aided by hope had been busy grouping before me the wonders and delights of this new region.

Mrs. Smith patted my shoulder kindly, and the tears came into my eyes. “Come, Mary; and boys stop that nonsense, and welcome our friend Reginald; how the mosquitoes have bitten you, poor fellow?” and the Major shook me warmly by the hand; “and how is your uncle? Did he ever tell you of Nepaul and of the Mahrattas? We were young when we met first, nearly as young as you.” Then the boys composed themselves, greeted me heartily, and the Major dived into the postman's bag in the verandah, while Mrs. Smith went off jingling her key-basket.

Jack, a tall, straight fellow of twenty-three, very like a gentleman, seemed to be anxious to offer amends for their levity. “You must forgive us, Crawford; we are awful laughers, but we do not meet fellows like you every day; and, pardon me, you are a rum 'un. What with your thorough enjoyment of everything, your fine complexion, and your mosquito bites, I don't think I ever — — ”

Fortunately, little Mary came in, quite grave and dignified now. “Mr. Crawford, lunch is in, and I will show you the way.” I offered my arm, of course.

“Do you know we have been wearying for your coming, and wondering what you would be like?”

“And I hope you are not disappointed, Miss Smith,” said I, like a true

Crawford. She looked at me, with a demure twinkle in her eye.

“Oh, by no — — ” and a little gurgle gave token of some suppressed emotion.

“Now, young people, sit down and behave yourselves,” said Mrs. Smith. And this is how I was inducted at Windabyne.

These were jolly times. We boys all camped in the barracks, a long cottage forming a portion of the quadrangle, made by the back of the house and the offices.

When the first magpie\* piped in the cool, dewy dawn of summer, we were off, helter-skelter, down the river-bank to the big waterhole.

Where is there such enjoyment to be got as a swim in such cool, dark brown depths? — to shoot under the surface, finding it cooler and darker the deeper you go, and then to rise, with a bob like a cork, to the surface, and flounder, and splash, and shout!

Oh, you *blasé* men of the clubs, who try to keep up the tone of life with blue pill and brandy, why do you not rather rejuvenate? — take again to your boyish sports, and you will save both your livers and your cheque-books.

The first day, after breakfast, the Major took me out with him over the Run. I had a nag allotted to me, a grey mare called Becky. Fred recommended her, because, he said (confound his impudence!), if I fell off she would stand still and let me on again.

I fall off! I did not mean to fall off. I knew more of that presently.

How I remember that ride — my old friend's kindly speech, his seasoned wisdom, his thoughtful observation of all that passed before us.

We went down the river. How I was amazed at the great reed-beds, undulating with the strings of cattle moving through them — those great meadows still retaining moisture and vegetable life while the grass of the forest and plains was being whirled away in dry dust. Far did we make our way through the long rushes and canebrakes, following the well-beaten tracks of the herd, and ever and anon coming on the quiet, sleek shorthorns in groups, their white, roan, and red colours dotting the waving sea of verdure.

Then we entered the mouth of a tributary creek, and up this we rode, the Major looking carefully and long at the huge piles of drift that were clustered at intervals round the groups of oaks and gum-trees.

These masses of grass, leaves, and wood, brought down by former floods, were now fermenting under the fierce sun.

Carefully he looked up and down and examined the ground. Once he spoke of trying to burn some of the smaller patches of the blady grass and reeds, but he shook his head, at length, and decided not, I noticed that, though the leaves were green, the stalks were dry, and rattled like old wheat straw.

Then we went back through the plains, over the bare, parched soil, the

result of a year's drought, and home by the Big Dam and the Two-mile Creek to dinner.

At times I noticed the Major's saddened, thoughtful look; but whatever anxieties burdened him did not affect the group round the table, and, after a merry evening, I went happily to bed, delighted with my new home.

\* *Gymorhina Tibicen*.

## Chapter IV. Drought.

February, 1851, came, showing everywhere over Eastern Australia the soil baked, and vegetation withered under a clear and cloudless sky. The air hardly stirred; the prolonged chirp of the cicada alone broke the stillness of the woodlands, while far up, like a speck in the heavens, the eagle-hawk was ever seen wheeling and poising over the scorched plains and parched mountain slopes; he had not far to look for carcasses or dying beasts that summer.

Then there would come the north-westerly breeze, hot and scorching as from the mouth of an oven, but on its skirts there would be brought at times the semblance of relief, for, behind, rushing into the heated void, floated great sheets of vapour from the distant Indian Ocean.

They stretched to the horizon, they clouded the sky, they sailed over the tree-tops, they even condensed in black masses, but after shedding a few drops of rain on the burning ground as if in mockery, like the torture of Tantalus, they swept on and away, to waste their treasures of millions of tons of life-giving fluid on the storm-swept Southern coast, or to pour uselessly on the ice-vexed Antarctic seas, those waters, that might, if arrested, have cheered man and beast.

The next day the sky would be clear, not a speck of vapour would be seen, and again, betimes, the north-westerly would set in with its false breath, feeding the drought, and wearying out hope.

The Major whistled for an easterly or a southerly; the cool southerly wind would burst the spell that was fastened on the fainting earth, and would bring down the rain in cataracts; but still it came not.

And thus the drought went on; one day with a clear, cloudless sky, the next showing moisture-bearing masses drifting away, almost within reach, as if in derision of the woes of fainting Nature.

Let me ask, do such facts as these convey no hint? Do they suggest no lesson? Is it man's province to guide, direct, and utilise the forces of Nature, or is he to bend in superstitious awe before natural phenomena?

That is a queer question to put in this nineteenth century, after so much has been done already by human will and energy; but still, it is likely enough that anyone who suggested that the rainfall might be controlled by mechanical appliances, would run great risk of being accused of profanity.

There is one force that we have already domesticated, harnessed, and

turned into an errand-boy; and day by day we hear of some new marvel achieved through its agency. Is it wild to suppose that by the aid of electricity we may some day be able to arrest these volumes of evaporated fluid drifting away wastefully seaward, and discharge the same in columns of living water over our baked plains and thirsty water-courses?

While this state of things continued, there was nothing to be done at Windabyne but watch and wait. The sheep were fifteen miles back, where there was still a faint show of grass. This back country was naturally waterless, but had been made available by a large dam, an excavated tank, and several wells, and in constructing these, Major Smith had exercised great forethought and skill, and spent much money. They now saved the lives of 30,000 sheep.

The cattle were in the reed-beds, they were better there than anywhere else. In fact, the best plan was to leave all the stock alone. But, still, Major Smith knew too well the terrible risk inseparable from this *laissez faire* method. Everything inflammable was dried to the consistency of tinder, the roots of the grass, the bark of the trees, the leaves that shedding fast, were whirled away and piled in every rut and dry water-channel; and then — those piles of heated half-rotten drift in the Six-mile Creek, so near the edge of the reeds. Without reckoning other formidable, though unacknowledged, risks, how readily a spark of fire, carelessly lighted, might cause a conflagration, — a swagman taking a short cut with a pipe in his mouth, some poor black, gin creeping about on the hunting-grounds of her fathers, and carrying the fire-stick that no gin was ever without.

All such relics of the first inhabitants daily received Major Smith's kindness, and none of them would willingly injure him; but how could they understand or estimate what was involved in the risk of fire?

Old Kerella, whose two grandsons were daily following the young fellows on the cattle camp and the sheep run, had, indeed, said, with some meaning, that when a picaninny she had seen the reeds burn, and these two boys, Walbaligo and Bineberra, it had been noticed, had never gone out for long with lighted pipes. Such instances of care, good feeling, and consideration are by no means rare amongst domesticated blacks kindly treated; but there were others of the race, poor waifs and strays, coming and going about the station, whose ideas were less quickened, not being in daily contact with the family, and how could they know that they were doing wrong, following their inherited instincts.

The work of the station was suspended as much as possible, so as not to harass the stock: the principal daily duty was the patrol round the fences and along the river, watching against the dreaded enemy, and this was often done by the Major himself.

But still some job or other was always turning up — Jack said that a beast would need to be killed; the beef-cask was two-thirds empty, and it was a shame to bring in any more wethers, they were so poor; and Fred declared that there was a whole mob of big calves in the South Bend that should be branded, so we sallied forth, tired of a week of inaction.

Since these days, the management of cattle in Australia has undergone a complete change. A large part of the herds then were half-wild, or little better. Wherever scrub or mountain offered cover, the fastnesses were full of stragglers, which increased in numbers as long as they could get grass and water; and each generation became wilder, fleeter, and more worthless than the one before. The descendants of sleek, quiet Shorthorns, after a few generations in the Bulgas or the brigalow, gave strong token of a deterioration in the direction of some remote worthless type, or rather types, for the strange contrasts of colours that they presented, and their coarse, stunted forms, hinted rather of an ancestry of aggravated mongrelism, than of descent from well-marked primitive or wild races. Devons, Highland cattle, Galloways, and also Herefords in a degree, breed true to the type in the same way as wild animals — wallaby, quail, deer, and grouse, and in like manner to the Arab horse — probably in consequence of the development of these races within themselves for uncounted ages; but the Shorthorn, being bred artificially from alien strains of blood, and quite within recent times, has not attained any permanence of type, and he seems, on the first chance, to revert by a short cut to the only form in which he can attain the hardihood fitting him to rough it and lead a desert life — but thereby inevitably sacrificing all the qualities for which he is valued.

Moreover, there was a marked strain of mongrelism in the original cattle of the Colony, which must have told also in the results mentioned. The following quotation tells the history of the first cattle in

\* “For some time after the arrival of the First Fleet, it does not seem to have occurred to any one that the thin, patchy grass found growing under the turpentines, oaks, and banksias, near Botany Bay, could be turned to any use; but by the year 1795, when the settlement was seven years old, things had taken a step forward. The Government had come into possession of live stock, the original animals being chiefly chance cattle, brought from the Cape and India, and left by the shipping. These cattle were at first herded on the present site of Newton and Cook's River, by men, wearing Government livery. These primitive stockmen had no horses. The writer of this paper saw, over thirty years ago, a wiry old exile, who, it was said, at middle age, could give many a runner a distance and beat him, and who, for half a pound of tobacco, in fair race, had run clean out of sight of a mob of blacks — and he got his training and wind following the Government cows at Grose Farm in his youth. But the cross-bred offspring of Cape bulls and hump-backed Bengal

cows proved intractable, wild, and fleet-footed; and one fine morning, in spite of their keepers' best, they broke camp, scattered, and were lost, like a burst bag of peas. The herdsmen came in nightly, broken down and weary; even their black allies could not make out a straight trail from a stampede that seemed to go in every direction, and, after following perplexing tracks day by day till time was up, they turned in to muster, without having seen a tail. Discipline was exacting, and, at times, proof against explanation or excuse, and no man dared to stay out beyond hours. But a month or two later, a youth, who had the bushman and hunter bred in him — most likely he was paying the penalty for night-poaching in 'famous Soomer-setsheere,' or elsewhere — got beyond bounds and dropped on a tea-tree gully, now called Haslem's Creek, and there he came on the cattle tracks, all coming together till they trended in one direction — straight south-west. 'A southerly wind, a cloudy sky,' and a pack on a good lying scent, will put life and pluck at times even into a seedy city man, and a good cattle track, leading to the gods know where, through unknown grass and forest, is a bait for any man whether on horse or foot, who may have the blood of Nimrod in his veins. Ahead, no doubt, there was the unknown bush, no food, perhaps no water; as likely as not, the wild blacks prowling about, and our rambler, on foot, unarmed. 'Bosh! Who's afraid? Follow the track, and chance the ducks.' And so our poacher did — through the Dog Trap scrub — skirting George's River — over many an undulation of iron-bark and grass, out of the sandstone and into red volcanic soil, with open forest, and there at his feet, was a broad stream, running fresh and silvery northward, mid hedges of emerald casuarina; and on the sloping banks were the lost cattle, if not fat, sleek and contented, stretching along the river from right to left, while from under many a myrtle bush a tottering calf staggered up, and ba'ad for his parent. A shocking lot they were — colours magpie and tiger-streaked, with every intermediate shade of rusty black and yellow, narrow as greyhounds, with hocks like deer and shoulders like giraffes. Yet, though a dozen of them would hardly have filled a cask with tallow, they were still the ancestors of the cattle we see every year at Redfern, and they had what many of the last have not — they had foot and hardihood. So our poacher came back with his news, his absence was condoned, and he was most likely ordered a pint of rum from the Ordnance Stores as a recompense for eminent services. The rambling herd was kept on the new feeding ground, but was by degrees broken up and distributed. Cows were lent to the farmers at Seven Hills. The almanac tells of names familiar to us yet, being charged in 1805 at the rate of £28 per head, to be paid in case of loss, for heifers of the third cross, perhaps coming a little nearer the cow of to-day in figure, but still with the hump on the shoulder and the lithe legginess of their Eastern progenitors; and very well pleased all the good folks at Seven Hills were

to get them. And this was the way grazing began in Australia.”

Government cattle stations were formed inland after the days of Grose Farm were ended. There was one at King's Plains, now called Blayney, on the Western Railway — a bullock station, that supplied working teams and fat beasts for the road gangs and the garrison. It is said that as many as 16,000 old bullocks have been seen there at one time. After a while, all those establishments were broken up, and the cattle were distributed, sold or given under certain agreements, among the settlers; and about that time the horse had been bred up to some considerable number and mounted men began to ride round their cattle. Then arose the method of grazing that was maintained until the squatting system was fairly established.

In those old districts the farms and estates of the settlers were all laid out on the low and more fertile lands adjoining the chief rivers and creeks; but all behind, up towards the ranges and the heads of the water-courses, was unsold, unsurveyed, consequently unfenced, and practically under no supervision; and over this waste, “at the back,” as they used to say, the stock of all and sundry ran promiscuously.

This method, though, like other systems, it bore a large crop of abuses, still possessed many advantages; it favoured the multiplication of country family life in a degree unknown in any country occupied since, while it kept the population concentrated within manageable limits; and one immense advantage the settlers possessed, in their secure tenure of the freehold grants which formed the backbone of the system.

But stock kept in this scrambling fashion, necessarily became wild, while their breeding was always worse than doubtful.

As the grass cost nothing, and the only thing needed to get on the main road to wealth was to secure plenty of increase, it was natural that the “smart,” the bold, and the unscrupulous should soon own large numbers of cattle, while the confiding, the soft, and the conscientious, if their neighbours were of a different sort, found it was all they could do to keep their own.

And more than stock was often got in these days by resolute, intrepid bounce and bullying. A grog seller would often stick up his shanty by the road-side, turn out his bullocks, brand up carefully all their followers and “increase,” sell bad liquor for clean-skin calves, buy one lot of land, jump another, shift a fence half a mile or so, eat up all the grass in the neighbourhood, claim all the country round; and at length, by these laudable practices, found a huge family estate, and take his place with proper conservative dignity among the magnates of the land.

It is needless to say that, with the possibility of such prizes being got, the men of “the right sort” — those most valued — were not such as one would naturally trust in any honest undertaking. The qualities appreciated were not practical technical knowledge, methodical care, and

honest industry; but hard riding, boldness, cunning, and unflinching mendacity were in great request. The man who could run in a mob of clean skins, whip the brand on them by daylight, and then be ready to swear anything in defence of his employer, or his mate, that was the man in request; and every boy took as his model some Jack Mooney or Ruggy Ned, thundering down the side of a stony range, and laying a fifteen foot stock-whip into a black or brindled bull (there was a bull in every range that nobody could yard), consequently, the great ambition of each youth of the day was to do likewise, to keep a mob of "wild cattle," and ride after them "like a man."

Windabyne was situated quite beyond the country which had been the scene of these doings, and was formed long after the adoption of the squatting system, and many years before free selection became law, consequently, Major Smith had full scope for carrying out his own ideas of stock management.

A practised observer of Nature, as we have remarked him to be, and used in his boyhood to every phase of country life and industry, it was not surprising that his trained intellect, not being cowed by that bumptious form of authority called "colonial experience," hit, long ahead of the day, on that method of management, which we colonists have at length taken to, after suffering for half-a-century from cattle-stealing, mongrelism, disease, starvation, and other evils of promiscuous origin, too numerous to detail.

He bred his cattle carefully, he kept them quiet, and he prevented them rambling and mixing with other herds by making the most of the capabilities of the run by fencing.

On the Southern side, beyond the reed-beds, and coming close under the Girrah bank, was the main channel of the Yarombil. This took the form of a narrow, deep canal, horse-shoe shape, about four miles from point to point, and made a boundary that few of the cattle ever attempted to cross. Meeting this was a stout, capped fence of round stuff, that ran back some miles into the plain, and thus a considerable area of country, with all the reed-beds, was enclosed.

This was the cattle-run proper. Smaller paddocks were made lower down the river for weaners, heifers, and fattening stock, and the experiment — for it was then an experiment — though costly, had fully justified itself in the quality and number of the stock. And yet, soon after, this very outlay on the cattle-paddocks was cited by Sharp and Co. as an item of indictment, a charge of extravagant management against their debtor. Nowadays, no station that is managed at all is managed in any other way, and Sharp and Co., with their congeners, who have served themselves heirs to enormous quantities of station property, crack up fencing runs as if they had invented the system themselves.

But, in these days, Windabyne was quite an exception in management.

On the largest and best stations, the method was as rough as could be; indeed, much the same as that of a Mexican ranche. Cattle-stealing, with all its attendant evils, flourished on large unfenced, undefined runs, and was often prompted by giving the stockman a right of brand and run for stock. Absentee station-owners, by granting this permission, readily got stockmen for nominal wages; and the result was, that such stations became centres of theft and rascality.

But, on that Wednesday morning, recking little of such considerations, we set out to get a beast to kill, and to look for the mob of calves that Fred spoke of as being in the South Bend. We reached the camp at the angle of the Bend, and there, on both sides of us stretched away to right and left the sea of reeds, dotted here and there with little knolls half covered with dwarf scrub; and on these lay groups of cattle. Willy pulled out a glass. "No calves there."

"I could tell that without the help of that double-barrelled thing," said Fred.

"And I can see better than either of you," said Jack. They had all a mild way of "blowing;" but the faculty was not nearly so fully developed in those days as it has been since.

"And I could not tell for the life of me what were there — cows, or calves, or bullocks. I question if I could see them at all if I were not told where they were." I had not got my bush eyes yet.

"Can't you count the cattle on the rise over that bush?" "No." "Do you mean to tell me that you don't see three red beasts and a roan!" "No." "Then you must be blind." Before my unpractised sight, all distant objects seemed to shimmer and dance. In a few months, I could see as well or better than any of them.

"There's nothing anywhere here," said Willy at length, shutting his glass — "neither calves nor a beast good enough to kill."

"Bad enough, you mean; we want a good leathery-necked one — good, tough, wholesome shearer's beef, Reggy, my boy; something to test your digestive organs."

"Let's try the Six Mile." The heat was great, the horses were dozy; the black boys hung behind and fell asleep on the manes of their nags; the colley that followed Jack crawled under the bushes and panted, and then ran forward to lap water and stretch herself flat on the damp sand. The cattle at the Six Mile were all hidden — they were camped motionless in the reeds and scrub all around.

At length we got tired of troking along at a snail's pace, and we got off to look for a cool drink and stretch our legs; there was no pipe-lighting allowed in these times.

Willy, for want of something better to do, laid hold of a long branch that stuck out from one of the piles of drift in the creek, one of the same that his father had examined so carefully. As he see-sawed it back and

forward the mass of grass, leaves, and branches opened up, and a hot, moist whiff of vapour puffed in my face.

I had heard enough to know the enormous risk of fire, and I felt an instinctive apprehension. I had seen damp hayricks on the holms of Strathclyde smoulder till they burst into flames, and was not this something of the same kind?

I mentioned what occurred to me.

“Nonsense,” said Fred, who was very matter of fact; “nobody ever heard of such a thing here. Fires in this country are made by blacks and loafing rascals lighting pipes and sticking up broken bottles to catch the rays of the sun. Who ever heard of wet grass burning here?”

Jack had been looking and listening very attentively, and he turned to me. “Young man, don't you think you have a deal of cheek to try to teach us anything new? Yesterday I heard Johnny O'Neill, aged nine, address Tommy Hodge, aged ten (Tommy was imported with his parents only six weeks ago), and says Johnny to him, says he, ‘You dry up; you put your head in a bag; you ain't got no call to speak; a noo chum like you don't know nothing.’ Nevertheless, in the face of this valuable precedent, I have observed that you, Reginald Crawford, in spite of your want of colonial experience, your fine complexion, and other matters on which I have already complimented you, are not utterly devoid of brains; and I do think that you may be right this time, and, by gum, the sooner we smother up this incipient conflagration the better. So, boys, set to and pile me these stones over it; come on, Walbaligo, a few tons of them ‘gibbers’\* will fix him.”

A heap of stones soon covered and smothered up the obnoxious mass of drift; but there were plenty more of them, one at nearly every bend of the creek, and little as I knew about the matter, I could not help having an uneasy consciousness that the danger arising from them was great.

It was now getting cooler, so we mounted and strung out into the open. We soon came on fresh tracks, and the waving of the reeds below and the rustling of the scrub showed that a large mob of cattle was on the move.

“I believe it's the lot we want,” said Fred. “Yes, there's that brindled steer: he'll do for the cask, and he'll be better out of sight.”

“There's calves in that thicket, in the bed of the creek,” said Jack. “Hey, lassie, way forrit; heel 'em up, heel 'em up,” and the yelp of the colley and the smack of a whip brought out at a trot a strong lot of young cattle, and then an Indian file of milky mothers, with their young ones of all ages, from the staggering bob of three weeks to the bumptious bully-calf of six months. “All unbranded, keep them together, and let them go easy; don't close on the cattle — never go near cattle if you want to keep them in hand.”

One pretty strawberry heifer after going a short way seemed to take it into her head that she was *de trop*, perhaps she did not find the society

congenial, perhaps she had left something in the reeds more attractive than stock horses, black boys, and colley dogs; it might be a sweetheart, it might be a fair gossip. Who knows? But she, in defiance of all rules and regulations, wheeled round and burst away along the back track. She little knew what was in store for her; and I then, for the first time, saw a stock-whip used. "You'll break, will you?" and Jack touched with his spur the muscular, low-set bay he rode. In half a dozen strides he was on the heifer's flank; the whip descended three times in quick succession, making a sound like a prolonged pistol-shot, and the poor little beast rushed, with her tail writhing, her spine curled up, tufts of hair peeled off her back, and spots of blood on her pretty flecked skin, and buried herself in the mob head-foremost, uttering a half-stifled, agonised grunt.

"Now, Reginald, my son; that's the way I enforce discipline. Yes, I say discipline; you say, 'I said they were to be taken easy.' Exactly, these are the shallow quibbles one must expect from inexperienced, imported youths. I say if they don't go easy of their own accord, they'll be made go. But you'll please observe that we never hurry them, or use either whips or dogs unnecessarily; but when they try to break, then we make them remember it, as that little lady will. I am glad to perceive, my child, that you have an enquiring mind, and I don't doubt that in ten or twelve years you may be fit — —"

"Go to Jericho!" replied I, by no means abashed. "Teach your grandmother to — — . Hallo, there's a cow without a tail."

"By Jingo! that's Stumpy, the best milker in the herd. We have not seen her for a year, and she's got a young calf." And Stumpy went waddling and swinging along in a high state of lacteal exuberance, with her idiot of a calf staggering and bobbing under her and behind her, but making good way — not going our road, though.

"After her, Reggy; now's your chance; bring her back; out with your whip, and give Becky her head," and away I went, nothing loath.

To hunt a cow and calf on an active horse may be deemed an easy, if not a picturesque kind of sport. I recommend those inexperienced in the exercise to try it. Becky laid her ears back as soon as she got alongside the chase, and seemed disposed to take a bite out of her; she watched every turn of the fugitive, and once or twice, when Stumpy tried to double on us, an electric-like "prop" by the grey mare showed me the quickness and mettle of the true stock-horse, and warned me to keep my seat. I stuck on, enjoying it immensely, and as I could not ride a bit, I bumped about a good deal, but like Dodd and Dempsey, I always managed to come down in the same place, and "a tender place it was," as Mr. Dempsey said; and so I tore on with great exhilaration, till the calf, being possessed by Satan, got confused in its intellect, and took Becky for its mother; then, with a malediction, which luckily was wafted on the breezes, I raised the whip and let out at the aggravating innocent, but the

lash caught under Becky's tail. The consequence was a humping of her back, and a prop or two, that jarred my vitals and made my teeth rattle, and then the cow was off clean the wrong road, and I dashed off to intercept her, followed by that staggering ba-a-ing compound of veal that had not yet discovered its mistake. I had a fixed idea that our course lay to the left, while the cow persistently bore to the right. In vain I tried to head her. I took to the whip again, and it flew this time round my neck and in my eyes. Suddenly, Stumpy played her trump card; she wheeled sharp, and nearly passed behind me, but the mare was too quick for her; she gave, like lightning, a prop, a *demi-volte*, or rather, a *pirouette*, on her hind legs, and I was shot clean over her head, and rolled over and over, tearing up in my course handfuls of earth and grass roots.

When I got up, with head in a buzz, and my eyes swimming, I could not make out the "lay" of things at all. Becky was waiting patiently, as Fred had said she would, with her foot on the bridle, and looking at me with an expression of concern and wonder, but the cow had disappeared. I tried in vain to make out which way I had come, and where lay the gate-way to which the boys would be taking the mob of cattle. I had not learnt the signs of the bush, and all seemed a featureless repetition of forest, plain, and dusty ground! The reed-beds were behind me, to be sure, and the river was beyond them, that was certain, but *which way was behind me?* "Surely I had come over that rise; no, it must have been that other one. Where was the sun? There was the sun, nearly overhead; it was past twelve, however, so the sun must be westerly, and the station was up the river, so that must lie easterly, therefore, I should go with the sun at my back." Not a bad shot for a new chum.

So I got on Becky, who was quite willing to go anywhere, and seemed to have forgotten her fierce pursuit of Stumpy.

"Yes, I was all right — it was quite easy to find one's road, as long as one was not an ass — gee Beck," and a smart canter brought me in ten minutes right into an angle of the reed-bed, a regular cul-de-sac! Here was a poser; there was no getting farther that way I knew. I must try back, and wouldn't they pitch into me, first for losing the cow and calf, and then for getting lost? I took another observation, and wisely determined to follow the edge of the reed-bed, and a mile or so of that brought me within sight of a fence, and not long after, the mare cocked up her ears, and following the direction of her gaze, I saw a cow and calf leisurely walking through a belt of timber on the edge of the plain.

By Jove, it was Stumpy, and my laurels were unwithered, for the brilliant idea occurred to me that, by sticking to her, and driving her along the fence, I would reach somewhere.

This determination was barely put in practice, when to the left there rose a cloud of dust, and, followed by the crack of a whip, a mob of cattle came stringing over the next rise of the plain, welcoming my

charge with joyful rowts of recognition, to which Stumpy bellowed a response.

The riders soon followed, and greeted me with loud congratulations on my achievement — “There was no mistake about me. I would not be long being a bushman.”

“Baal gammon you — baal you new chum,” remarked Binebbera, with a grin that disclosed six inches of ivory.

I have noticed that all great men, at least in these parts, and all successful men, take all the credit that comes in their way, whether they deserve it or not. “How prosperous the country is, Sir John; what capital seasons we have had.” “Entirely owing to my Land Bill, my dear sir.” “What sagacity you showed, Mr. Fibs, in buying those shares,” but Mr. Fibs does not tell you that he took them for a bad debt — it was either the shares or nothing. And that was just what I did. I put all their congratulations in my pocket, and did not say a word about the real facts.

Little did I know that the rogues were chaffing me all the time, and that they had dropped down to a pretty good guess, if they had not actual knowledge of my doings.

When I imagined that Stumpy was bolting from me, she was taking the shortest of all imaginable cuts for the yard where she had been often relieved of her milky burden, and where she had got many a feed of fresh lucerne, and after my fall she kept waddling on, and had very nearly reached the gate when I came up with her.

That night, after tea, as I sauntered about in the cool star-light, I heard something that showed my proceedings were not so much a secret as I had believed.

Turning the corner of the stable, I saw the two black boys in their camp, stripped of their riding toggery, and arrayed in that airy, evening costume in which alone black boys are truly happy. A spread of tea, johnny-cakes, and grilled beef-bones stood by the red embers, and showed that festivity was in full swing.

Their voices blended in a recitative or choral chant, broken by bursts of laughter, and I became, by degrees, conscious that my own name was being intertwined in a musical composition, and would probably figure in the next new corroboree.

“Umma! Walbaligo: close up Mr. Reggy been lose him alonga bush,  
Ki! warri! Binebbera — that fella tumble down alonga dirt! Kabawn new  
chum that fella;  
Yooi, Stumpy been petch him back, I believe so,  
Urta, Stumpy — go! ghindi! wirrr!!”

\* “Grazing: Past, Present, and Future,” by Capricornus.

\* Large stones.

## Chapter V. Reminiscences of Early Days in the Bush.

Up-country life has changed greatly since the time we are writing of. Old ideas and old methods have died out, and new forces are re-casting the social fabric.

One essential change was even then in operation. Transportation had ceased for ten years in 1851, but still a proportion of the population lived under supervision, and all the customs and arrangements of life were coloured by the penal system. Some who read this will remember how marked the distinctions were between different grades, and how clearly defined were the respective positions of privilege and servitude.

A hard and unsympathetic discipline was generally considered necessary. Certainly, the character of the human material dealt with involved the necessity for some special treatment, but whether the tone and method then approved were the wisest, is another question.

When we look back, and recollect what a thorough barbarian the average "Government man" was, and how the free immigrant, yielding to the contemptuous assumption of the "old hand," too often sank in the scale by adapting himself to the ruling standard of the "men's huts;" when we picture over again old scenes, and recall the fact that, among the working classes there prevailed almost universally habits and language which now characterise the lowest grades only, we begin to realise how much our world of Australia has changed.

And these are not the only facts we can recall as proving the extent of the change.

At the other extremity, the other pole of the social system, there was to be found another index, and as true a proof of the prevalent barbarism.

It would seem as if the first efforts that European Australia made to evolve a leading caste, resulted at times like the experiment of Frankenstein — the product was not a feudal hybrid, but a mongrel of original stamp. If we reckon up the chief elements that must have united in this effort at evolution, it is clear that one primary influence must have been the "official." Government was the sole distributor of bread and of prizes.

From the Secretary's seat under the shadow of the Vice-Regal throne to the Chief Constable's guard-room, there opened for all possessing the needful qualities of servility and suppleness, a wide and fruitful field of

wealth and advancement.

All such readily got into possession of Government land and Government labour, and it may be readily assumed that in the sunshine of prosperity these characters speedily showed the additional qualities of truculent tyranny and wolf-like greed. Rising, as they often did, from mean and dirty by-ways into great possessions, they naturally looked upon themselves as gods. As their whole previous experience of human nature had made them acquainted with mankind only in the two positions of gaolers and prisoners, they naturally looked upon all humanity outside of officialdom as placed on a common low level of serfdom.

The free colonists who came out in Sir Thomas Brisbane's time, men of station and education who emigrated at their own cost, could get grants of lands only on the strength of orders signed by Earl Bathurst. If they pushed out to the frontier, to get other holdings for their sons, friends, and followers, or for the increase of their stock, they were often snubbed for "going beyond the bounds of the colony"; but an early *Gazette* showed the tracts opened through their enterprise granted to the sons and daughters of officials, to pliant secretaries, to grog-selling captains, and to conveniently perjuring officers of police.

We read, moreover, that this official school affected as purely and exclusively their own the designation of "gentlemen," but, so far as that term implies the possession of feelings and principles the growth of a thousand years of chivalry and tradition, they were much less conscious of any such impressions than are "Sitting Bull" or King Cakabon, at the present day.

Such "gentlemen" were simply the natural reflex and counterparts of their congeners clothed in grey felt and marked with the broad arrow, whom they treated with so much contempt and cruelty.

The principal difference between them was that one was rich and the other poor.

There was, moreover, a sub-variety of "swell," more or less allied with officialdom that was fully as much detested by the populace; and we have something not unlike the latter even in these times. This was the great station speculator who had more stations, more flocks and herds than he had ever seen, who fed the country bare by driving his huge stock over all men's lands, who worked the oracle at banks, and led opinion at clubs, who entered into bonds and agreements to keep down rations and wages, and who estimated the human race as live stock, and talked of them as "labour."

It is said that when Big Ben B — — once travelled through Monaro, he passed sleepless nights — he was ever on the watch — he feared that he might be murdered by some of the wretched, starved, and maltreated ticket-of-leave men employed on his many stations.

As a counteracting influence to all such debasing and repulsive

agencies, my readers may now understand how the existence of such families as that of Windabyne — and there were numbers of them — was a real benefit and blessing to the poor rude community of these times.

They supplied a humanising element that tended much to mollify and sweeten colonial life alike from the debased animalism of the working-classes, and from the brutish arrogance and purse-pride of the early official-bred magnate.

The poor exiles often found that by such families they were treated something like fellow creatures and not merely as so much animal power or Government stock: and the kindness and sympathy of such ladies as Mrs. Smith told most powerfully in evoking the germs of humanity deeply buried in their rugged perverted natures. The proof of this is to be got in all our traditions and all our records. Ladies who spent their youthful days in the bush in those times speak constantly of traits of fidelity, honesty, and tenderness, shown by the same men, who are pictured as mutinous galley-slaves, brutes, and fiends in the records of capitalists and disciplinarian officials.

The same man who would throw an overseer over the Shoalhaven gullies, or would drop a tree on a flogger, would be heard of perilling his life for his master's child, or performing some wild eccentric act of generosity.

In another direction also, the influence of such resident families and resident squatters told to great advantage, and that was in the relations between the colonists and the blacks. Probably no worse system of dealing with aboriginal races has ever been adopted, than that in use in Australia; and the system is probably worse at the present time than it ever was.

Our authorities maintain, systematically, one function of government, and only one, in dealing with the first residents, and that is, extermination.

This action, as a policy, is, of course, neither professed nor acknowledged: very likely the circumstances in connection with it are not even known to many of the functionaries who conduct the formal official routine, but still the work goes on regularly.

Do you, reader, suppose that even superior Government officials always comprehend the real meaning of the documents they deal with? We have in our eye a hoary-headed, pious-looking old chief-clerk, who, we guarantee, is quite competent to keep the books of a pirate or a slaver, or, indeed, of Mrs. Quickly, 99, Queer Street, without understanding in the least what it is all about. He would draw his screw, be punctual to his luncheon-hour, and be keen about his promotion and his holidays; but he would know no more about the meaning of his work than the crows on Central Mount Stuart know about the telegraph messages sent past them

on the wire.

Now, if you will attend to me, I will show you what no Government papers will ever show you, and that is the difference between the treatment of the blacks under the more primitive squatting arrangements, and those now existing.

The original squatter was generally a real settler, that is to say, he lived on his station and owned it; consequently, his interest in his daily work extended considerably beyond the mere question of profit or loss. He became naturally the representative of the principles of order and authority to the whole community — white and black — for a day's ride round his station; and this position by no means arose from the accidental status he derived from his commission as a magistrate. In fact, many outside stations were occupied years before Government became cognisant of their existence; and there were portions of districts, where there were neither Justices of the Peace, nor any other representatives of the Crown. Being thus often equally beyond police protection and official recognition, it became a necessity to the squatter to anticipate all dangers, and to deal with all questions as they arose, on his own responsibility. The risk was his, and he had to take it, and share the same with his neighbours, similarly situated.

Thus, a group of neighbouring squatters would punish any outrage by the blacks promptly, and with severity, but it was their obvious interest, and we may safely admit too, that it was consistent with their natural humanity, to make peace with the depredators as soon as possible.

The murder of a couple of shepherds, the spearing of half-a-dozen bullocks, and the plundering of some huts, or loaded drays on the road, would all happen in a week. These events would all come together, and would betoken a general outbreak, which would certainly spread and widen unless checked. Before the next week was over, the marauding tribe would be tracked down, and scattered by a party of seven or eight squatters, and three or four domesticated black boys. The gossip of the adjoining districts would give out that two or three dozen of the blacks had been shot dead; while, in reality, three or four would be killed outright, and, perhaps, seven or eight maimed or crippled for the time. It is not so easy to *see* blacks "on the war path," far less to shoot them. When attacked by a strong party, they generally glide out of sight, like ghosts; they attack only by surprise, and they make a stand very seldom; only, as a rule, when there is no possibility of retreat.

The tribe would be effectually frightened by this punishment; they would hardly dare to light a fire; they would lie close in mountain and thicket, and live on what they could pick up; hunt they would not dare, for armed riders would catch them in the open; fishing would be as dangerous; the waters would be watched.

At length starvation would tell on them, and they would seek to make

peace. Some boys or gins would creep up to a point of scrub overlooking a station, and the far-sounding coo-ee would make the boy lolling at a fire in the paddock spring up.

“What's up, Kooramin?”

“That fellow boodgeree now; that fellow want it come up.”

There is a consultation, and Kooramin gets leave to parley; to let them “up,” on promise of good conduct for the future.

A fortnight ago he was keen to slaughter them; now he is in ecstasies to get them back. He rushes up the bare hill in the middle of the paddock, waving a green branch, yelling, and jumping his own height.

In a few minutes the coo-ee echoes all round; shrill query and answer are pitched from rock to thicket, and they come streaming out of the scrub; first, lean boys, naked as when they were born, with hungry eyes, and carrying nothing whatever; then, half-starved gins, carrying their lords' personal estate, skins, nets, dillybags, coolamins, but not a sign of a weapon, not even a tomahawk or a yam-stick, and the conversation begins.

“Ei Mr. Cawfor, you give it timbakka? Min yang indu alonga tockyard? That fella kill him bullock?”

They have noticed the preparations for killing a fat beast at sundown, and this important fact has no doubt accelerated their wish to enter into negotiations. Visions of liver, fried tripe, and “rognons” rise before their well-ried stomachs like festivals of paradise.

Then come the warriors, in very fair condition, the villains; to a certainty they have eaten nearly everything that their wives have picked up, but they are as hollow as a pack of running hounds and tightly girthed. On they come, grinning and delighted to see us. The joke is that they bear no ill-will whatever. We feel, on both sides, that we understand each other better — that is all. Laughing-Billy, a grinning scoundrel, looks as if he wanted to embrace you, and he points to the bullet-hole in his shoulder that you made three weeks ago, as if it was a mere friendly pleasantry — “close up you been tchoot him belongin' to me — my word — ghindi!”

An old gin comes up and enquires about the arrangements for lambing; she wants a job, and a capital shepherdess she is.

Peace is made, and they meet you with the most perfect confidence. It is surely to the credit of the early squatter that the savage knew that his word was to be trusted; that if he said “peace” it was peace; that no trick would be played, and that the blacks knew that they were positively safer under the shield of good faith on the station than when they were hiding and starving in their fastnesses.

In this way the primitive squatters were necessitated to deal with the blacks on their own responsibility, and the result might be seen almost invariably in frontier country. After a few collisions, the tribes would be

found encamped at nearly all the head stations, many of the members being regularly employed in shepherding, stock-riding, and other work, the whole community advantaged by the peaceful relations established, and the station-owner being recognised as their protector and arbitrator in all difficulties and disputes.

The present position of the aboriginal question is very different. A large proportion of the modern "squatters" are not squatters at all; that is, they are absentees, business men, or mere managers representing companies.

They have no knowledge, concern, or interest in anything, except mere business results, and they never feel that any responsibility in connection with the blacks rests with them. A Sydney or Melbourne merchant may own a station in outside country. He professes to manage it himself — that is — he sends somebody to inspect it every two or three years, and he pays expenses and receives the produce. The actual man in charge is a superintendent, or, perhaps, an overseer-stockman, whose sole duty is to brand up, and get his annual draft of fat cattle down the road. His instructions, if he has any, are, if he anticipates annoyance from the blacks, to send for the native police. Generally, he never sees a black. If he should chance on signs of their being in the neighbourhood, he sends for the force at once. If a travelling tribe has crossed the run, it is possible that they may have startled the cattle off their camps, and in the season when bullocks are "topping up," such a scare may take from off the fat mob — say three hundred beasts — something like from four pounds of tallow each, worth fourpence per pound — it may be a value of twenty pounds sterling in the aggregate, a heavy, problematical loss!

Therefore, the missive is sent, and Lieutenant Blood, with Gigwa, Wabrigan, one-eyed Charley, and the rest of the gang ride up some day soon. Each of the troopers has one spur on only; consequently, one side of the horse goes faster than the other, and the result is a peculiar amble called the "policeman's jog."

"Good morning, Brown," says Blood; "niggers about? Sold the Mazeppa colt yet?"

Next morning they take a circuit of ten miles, and quarter the ground backward and forward till they hit on a solitary track.

They run this track with a speed and certainty that the trained bloodhound alone can equal. No impress on the soil, no bent blade of grass escapes them. Presently, more tracks join, all going in the same direction; they dismount and hobble their horses in a hollow. Wabrigan and Charley peel themselves of every rag of uniform, and glide on ahead, crawling and dodging; they come back in an hour; there is a camp of blacks on the edge of a scrub two miles off. By the first streak of day the party is mounted, and they push quietly but rapidly over the ground. When the smoke of the fires is seen they rush in at a gallop. The alarm is

given, the camp is empty in a few seconds; but the troopers are off their horses, and into the scrub, carbine in hand, throwing off their clothes as they go in hot pursuit. The Lieutenant waits outside, smoking his pipe, and meditating over the deal for the "Mazeppa" colt, which he has opened with the Super. Shots are heard; the troopers come back after an interval, they have cut off some half-dozen of the last of the fugitives, and their dead bodies are lying in nameless gullies under bush and thicket. The leading men of the tribe have, of course, escaped; broken-hearted women and wailing children shriek to Heaven and appeal against the horrible "white-fellow." They had touched neither him nor his bullocks — what a fearful God is the God of the white man — what a powerful fiend he must be! "Walli, walli, areiro! the days of the blacks are numbered. We are slaughtered to feed the dogs, to fatten the bullocks of the white man!"

Now, it is possible enough that Brown himself never pulled a trigger on a black, and it is as likely as not that he may never even hear of what Blood's men have done in the way of "duty." Besides, he would be infinitely shocked and indignant if anyone proposed to hold him accountable for what took place at the edge of that scrub.

Moreover, his proprietors never know anything about the matter, and being merely business speculators, working the station with bank money, they consider that questions of policy and humanity in reference to the blacks are the very last matters that they have anything to do with. "Blacks on our property! why, then, they are trespassing. It's clearly the business of the authorities to turn them off." That's all they know or understand about the matter.

Meantime, these half-dozen bronze corpses lie in their blood in that acacia thicket; because the tribe they belong to, *or some other tribe unknown, are suspected of having gone near the Gondary cattle-camp.*

Of course, this is no business of the station-owners, or of anyone else — their concern with Gondary is simply one of pounds, shillings and pence, and as long as the money comes out right, what more is wanted?

So the station is sold at a profit to somebody else, who works on in the same way, and Brown's proprietors pocket each ten thousand pounds clear gain, and they are generally complimented on their "pluck and enterprise," and at public dinners they invariably reply to all toasts given to pioneers and squatters.

And this is the way that our standard religion of the nineteenth century deals with these facts of life and humanity.

Sometimes, however, the Super is not an easy-going Brown, but an energetic, hard-riding light-weight, and a nipping shot, with the pluck of a rat-terrier, and the instincts and brains of a weasel. This sort is generally made into a J.P. Can the reader imagine the version of Law and

Gospel that such a varmint will promulgate amongst blacks and whites alike?

Now, my kind reader, I must beg you to pardon the detail of horrors with which I find I have filled this chapter, in consideration of the conclusion I seek to draw, and the moral I wish to point.

We have remarked the influence of families like the Smiths, in sweetening and humanising the rude elements of the primitive bush population; we have shown how the actual residential settlement of the early squatters, people of the same class as our friends at Windabyne, told in dealing with the blacks; and we have seen the startling contrast presented by the action of pure business principles in dealing with the same questions.

The “conclusion” I think to be seen in the face of these facts is that, with us colonists, questions of national policy, public morals, and proprietary responsibilities, are utterly unstudied and unknown; that Government has completely abandoned every duty in dealing with such all-important matters, and that circumstances pregnant with the highest considerations of duty or disgrace, honour or infamy, are left to the determination of chance, or of blind, bestial self-interest.

The “moral” with which we point most events in New South Wales, and in other colonies, too, is that “money” is the sovereign power and the chief good. We are told that all questions of industry, morals, and humanity, are best solved by “capital.” The growth of the “business” power of the banks and merchants has almost obliterated or absorbed the old system of resident occupation; the plain facts above-stated show with what results in one direction. Perhaps further investigation may show other facts discordant with our theory of “capital.” Perhaps the theory may not be good all round — it may not go on all-fours. Perhaps there may be things worth studying besides the shop-till.

There are other countries where such questions have been differently dealt with, and there are books about those countries that claim to have proven that the interests of wealth, industry, and humanity can all be reconciled by methods quite different from ours. If we get these books and learn to read them, we can hardly fail, if we are human at all, to welcome the cheerful hearth light that beams alike from the peasant's cot and the noble's tower in sunny Lombardy, that pours wealth into the ice-girt valleys of Switzerland, and that makes the Channel Islands the richest spots in the British Dominions. There are vast numbers of highly educated people everywhere who know about these things; and there is a great risk that unless we give some heed to such considerations, the world may yet laugh at our social and economic blunders, and our hog-like creed of money-worship.

If the current theory of the uses and functions of “capital” be sound, how is it that our efforts mainly tend to raise up and ennoble grog and

shoddy, thimble-rigging and usury, and to keep an immense proportion of our people on the verge, if not of starvation, at least of the hand to mouth condition of a proletariat?

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We must now leave such abstruse matters, and return to take up our reminiscences of Windabyne.

The day after my adventure with "Stumpy," we had the calves branded and the brindled steer in the cask by the cool of the dawn, and then we went to the Big Waterhole for our well-earned and thoroughly-enjoyed ablutions. When I came up the river-bank, and went to my little crib to complete my toilette, there was a black picaninny leading away two smart-looking horses. As I went on with my dressing, I could not well avoid hearing a conversation between two new-comers and someone who had apparently arrived before them. To save myself from the charge of eavesdropping I stamped, whistled, and sang, but the talkers continued unheeding. These open slab buildings, however suitable they may be on the score of health and other advantages, do not offer the special character of privacy; but the three strangers in the main room of the barracks did not seem in the least to feel the want of it.

One pleasant, cheery voice, apparently belonging to a gentle man of advanced years, commenced:

"Aye, lads, and where come ye from?"

"Well, Mr. Elliot, you see, me and Bob are on the spree. We got the wool all away, and then we went off for the township. When we got to the Royal, there was Holy Billy, and we have for long cherished an ambition to make him drunk."

"You unmitigated scamps, do you mean by Holy Billy my particular friend, Mr. de Vere Smythe?"

"We do just that same, sir; and Mr. Smythe looked thirsty, and we inquired with great interest about his horse Rajpoot, at least I did, for Bob Short, as soon as he came in, began some scrimmage or lark with Emmy Black in the bar."

"Upon my word, I think you're a pair of hardened blackguards, and I should properly object to having my ears offended with the details of your doings — only I would feel uneasy if I failed to give you a word of caution."

Then another voice — Bob Short's — remarked, "I hope, Mr. Elliot, you know me too well to accept anything to my disadvantage that Rawson may tell."

"I do know both of you; praise be to the saints; and I say, 'anathema maranatha' to all such; but tell me why you cherish such infamous designs against my respectable friend, De Vere?"

“Vengeance, sir.”

“And, for goodness sake, why? What has he done to you?”

“It wasn't him; it was his better half. When Mrs. Didymus, the female bishop, with Mr. Honeydew, the sucking parson, called on her, she mentioned us particularly as being idle, dissipated, and profane, in fact, sons of Belial.”

“And quite correct, too — but how do you know?”

“Because Dosey Smythe, or Theodosia, as her ma calls her, was in the room, and she told little Katie Hawthorne; and little Katie, when she said ‘good night’ to me, cried and said, ‘I'm sorry, Cousin Jack, you'll not go to Heaven.’ ‘What for?’ said I. ‘Because Mrs. Smythe says that you and Mr. Bob Short are going to the naughty place, and that none of us should play with you.’ ”

“What an old beldame — I mean, what an excellent, sensible and so you thought to square it by sending Holy Billy, I mean Smythe, home, inebriated?”

I now entered the room. An old gentleman, of sixty-five, or thereabout, but tall, straight, and wiry, with a merry, grey eye, and white hair and beard, rose and welcomed me in a kind and courteous manner.

“Mr. Crawford, I believe. I'm very glad to meet you; and here is Mr. Short, from Yarupna, commonly called Bob Short; and this is Mr. Rawson, who is believed — at least, so I hear — to live near us at Girrah, commonly called Jack Rawson.”

The two now rose, and, with much cordiality, but a certain ceremony and decorum, which seemed rather out of place, shook hands with me. I understood them better, shortly. They were anxious to welcome a new neighbour in a manner that was due to him, and due to themselves. It was a remnant of the manner of the old *régime*, since wafted away among the forgotten things of the past.

We don't bother ourselves about ceremony now; if a man has the *sugar*, and is all right, we are hail-fellow-well-met at once; if we find he hasn't got it, we cut him short, with a snort and a nod, at once. As to being civil, that's “all in my eye,” unless one can make something by it, or unless it's to an imported lord or a city banker.

Mr. Elliot resumed, “Mr. Crawford, among my other avocations, I act as a kind of mentor to these young men (Bob, cut me up some tobacco); and I am not without hope of rescuing them from destruction; but, in the meantime, I think they may be useful to you as beacons or sign-posts — pointing out the road to ruin; and I think you will be none the worse listening to an account of some of their late doings; so, Jack, go on. By the way, had you no other reason for having a ‘down’ on de Vere than the one you mentioned? That, though not without weight, is of a vicarious nature, and hardly involves the element of personal responsibility; at least, I have doubts on the point.”

“Well, sir, I had no other reason, but Bob Short had. He, as you may remark, is altogether of a coarser texture than myself, being much uglier, more vulgar, and more depraved; and, consequently, he hates Holy Billy, because he thinks himself so much better than other people.”

“Well, you are an infernal imposter; who was it called Billy a prig? — who drew a caricature of him in the album at Girrah — blue-tailed-coat, clean-shaved chops, nankeen tights and straps? — and you made his face longer, and more idiotic and sanctimonious than it is — — ”

“Bob Short, don't interrupt the Court. I think you're a pair of impostors; but with Crawford's help, who I see is of a judicial turn, we'll unearth the truth. This last plea has a good deal in it. There can be no more mortal offence than for a fellow to come the Pharisee over one. Well, then, to come to facts, what occurred? — wouldn't Billy drink?”

“I believe you, sir. He does like to enjoy himself when he's away from his wife; and he put away three glasses of Battle-axe on the strength of the praise I lavished on his stud, only Cubitt came in and took the game out of our hands.”

“And what did that model character, Cubitt?”

“He called for a bottle of champagne, shook hands with me and Bob, then did the same with Holy Billy before he knew where he was; and ‘how are you, Smith,’ says he. Billy drew his legs under his chair, and said, ‘Mr. de Vere Smythe, if you please.’ ‘All right, de Vere, try some fizz,’ says Cubitt; ‘and how's things shaping at Gondomangatoola? good name that? and how's the Missus? Ain't you selling?’ Billy looked straight at the ceiling, and never answered a word. The champagne was now poured out; ‘and how did you say Mrs. de Vere Smythe was?’ ‘I was not aware that Mrs. de Vere Smythe possessed the advantage of your acquaintance, Mr. Cubitt.’ ‘Knew her as the first lady in the district, sir; the prime support of the church, and the morals, and, begad, the manners and fashions in the country; here's her health, sir; now try that cham.’ ‘Ah! much obliged; she is indeed what you say, sir. With reference to your enquiry, I have considered the advisability of realising. One is so completely a mere steward for the working men here, and so much more can be done with capital in England.’ ‘Quite right, sir, say I; make a pile and hook it; you know your way about, I see,’ chimed in Cubitt. ‘I think so, sir; the question of labour is daily more difficult, and society seems to be entirely dislocated, distracted, and dissolved. But I would require a very large sum for my select sheep stock, with the title to the property and run of Gondomangatoola; at the very least five thousand pounds.’ ‘A devil of a price, to be sure, but a splendid property. How many sheep did you say — breeding ewes, dry sheep, and so on? I'll take a note of it. I might do something for you. Another bottle of fizz, Emmy, I mean Miss Black, and pen, ink, and paper, please.’ But here Billy began to draw in. ‘I don't require any agent, Mr. Cubitt; I transact my own business;’ and

so he does, at least Mrs. Smythe does, and very badly too. ‘Oh, blow that,’ says our vulgar friend, ‘I don’t want no commission. We’re all friends and neighbours. Now, you’ll sell it as it is for five thousand; is that it, Mr. de Vere Smythe? Well, we’ll have it in black and white; and suppose you put it under offer to me for a month, as a mere matter of form, you know; and just to give me something to show. Well, sign here.’ But here Bob Short stood up and remarked, ‘Mr. Cubitt, there’s one rule in these districts and elsewhere — no business at convivial meetings.’ By this time, Billy had got somewhat mixed in his ideas — the liquor was simmering in his brain; he had somehow got into familiar relations with a low-bred man, at least with one whom his wife ignored; and he had been enticed into drinking by two others whom she had condemned as reprobates, and had consigned to penal flames. Still, he was so weak and one-idea’d that if Bob Short had not pulled up Cubitt, it is more than likely that he would have signed the contract which had been drawn up in a minute by this practised sharper; however, he staggered to his feet, and with a tipsy assumption of dignity, ‘Good morning, gentleman — your servant, sir — your obedient to command,’ he retired.

“Cubitt turned on Bob Short. ‘Well, Mr. Short, you’ve put a spoke in my wheel.’”

“ ‘Have I? I might put another yet; fair play, Mr. Cubitt.’ ”

“Cubitt was a man of brains and education, though depraved and vulgarised by the practice of every kind of dissipation and fraud. He had missed his chance; so there was nothing for it but to take it good humouredly, and make the most of it.

“ ‘All right, Short; have another bottle of fizz. What do you say, Mr. Rawson?’ ”

“ ‘No more for me.’ ”

“ ‘Nor me.’ ”

“ ‘Did you ever hear of one Catiline?’ said Jack Rawson.

“ ‘Indeed I have; a decent member of Council, that shouted champagne for a lot of scamps, and got into a scrape; all that were in debt, and all that dealt in horse-flesh and liked light company sponged on him; and faith, he must have been something like myself, and I’m too long with the pair of you.’ ”

“ ‘You miss out one trait of his character.’ ”

“ ‘And what’s that?’ ”

“ ‘*Sui profusus — alieni appetens.*’ ”

“ ‘How much did you say?’ ”

“ ‘Here’s a free translation then. *Sui profusus* — he would shout for anybody; *alieni appetens* — he would rob a church.’ ”

And this was the yarn as told by Jack Rawson, which I have condensed.

Mr. Elliot highly approved of Bob Short's conduct and remarked: "If the poor devil had been trapped into signing that paper, he and his family might have been turned out of house and home in a year."

As to the drinking, he warned them to try no more such pranks, and to cultivate sobriety themselves; and he chuckled over the free translation — "Cubitt to a tee;" but there was another feature that did not come out at once. Cubitt had left Rawson and Short to pay for the champagne.

You may find Cubitt yet without going very far; he has made many a fortune, transacted many a swindle, and achieved several insolvencies since. Holy Billy, I think, has vanished — and is no great loss; and the types of old Elliot, Rawson, and Short, are in many districts as extinct as the diprotodon; you might find the drinking, it is true, but you would look in vain for the courtesy, the kindness, the sense, the wit, and the reading.

## Chapter VI. Happy Moments.

The breakfast bell rang at this stage, and Willy joined us, and saluted Mr. Elliot with great respect and kindness, but to Rawson he gave a slap on the back that nearly knocked that youth on his nose, and he caught Bob Short by the throat, and shook him like a terrier. "You little villain; if my governor hears what you have been up to with Holy Billy, he'll turn you out of the house."

This was the cheerful manner in which our youths met each other, but they always held to the invariable rule of treating years accompanied by character, as in Mr. Elliot's case, with deference and respect.

The horse-play was, it must be allowed, at times rough, but it was all in good humour, and was confined to the barracks, and other spots *propria quae maribus*.

Approach to the confines of the ladies' quarters always put them on their p's and q's at once; so, as we entered the breakfast-room, every man straightened himself up, and it was plain that honour and decorum were to rule the occasion.

Mr. Elliot seated himself, as a matter of course, beside Mary, and that young damsel talked to him the whole time of breakfast, and made the old gentleman's face shine. Rawson had made some very ingenious but futile attempts to get beside the young lady, but he consoled himself with much equanimity for the disappointment of being forestalled, by devoting his undivided attention for twenty minutes to cold beef and hot scones, and he did that very well indeed, in fact, we all did that well and I was duly complimented on my appetite as well as on other matters incidental to my chrysalis state of new-chumhood.

Such a merry breakfast I have hardly seen since.

There was, indeed, an undertone in the Major — a shade of depression; but he masked it in deference to the general hilarity.

"By the way, Elliot, have you heard this talk about gold?"

Strange to say, for months before the actual discovery, flying rumours, heralds, and shadows of the coming event passed all over the colony.

"Nothing more than we heard some time ago; that crazy shepherd, MacAlpin, is always telling some yarn or other, but nobody believes him."

"I doubt there's something more than that in it. I fear, if it comes, it will play the deuce with our 'up country work;' but it may make us all rich,

too. There's no saying what shape it might take, only I trust the Government will be firm in maintaining order, if the crisis comes."

"Oh, I do hope we may not have a repetition of 'California' here, with the dreadful doings that we have read of," said good Mrs. Smith.

This was the apprehension of all quiet, domestic people. It was supposed that the discovery of gold would be followed at once by the dissolution of all the bonds of society, and the annulment of law and order, and that rascality and chaos would bear universal sway. And what unfounded distrust there was of the Californians! Little did we know then that our chief stock of villainy was that of our own rearing, and that the mining adventurers from America were to be among the most orderly, kindly, and intelligent of the inhabitants of the Australian diggings.

How could we know anything about the people of the United States, till we saw them? Our information about America, as about other countries, had been chiefly got from London journals, illustrated and otherwise, and the illustrations, as well as a good deal of the letter-press in these highly-popular periodicals, were then, as now, adapted to fit in anywhere, with slight alterations. The same mountain-roads and passes could be recognised as having done duty for the Sierras Nevadas, the Blue Mountains, and the Hindoo Koosh; only in the "Blue Mountains" picture, a slight mistake occurred. The artist had read of bullock-drivers bringing down wool to Sydney, but, as he had no description to guide him, he drew upon his imagination, and the result was this: — Two cows in harness, with winkers, and bits in their mouths, appeared yoked to a box cart, in which the wool was piled loose, like litter; and the bullock-driver was represented by a neat English game-keeper, in velveteen coat and leggings, with a knapsack strapped across his back, and contemplating the "bullocks," or rather cows, with a clean-shaved, well-fed, smiling countenance. The reading matter, it is unnecessary to say, could hardly be more accurate than the pictorial description; but one thing it had, perforce, to be — it had to be interesting, and one rule always held good in catering for the reading people of those days, namely, "The more blood the better." Consequently, all that we ever learned about California, or, indeed, of the States, was the bar-fights, the lynchings, the duels, the robberies. We heard nothing of the thousands of quiet country homesteads and happy villages of the Eastern States, or of the strong forces of civilization and humanity that were even then turning the lands of the Pacific coast into the home of a great kindred people. It was as if the doings of the late Mr. Morgan, bush-ranger, or of Lieutenant Blood, of the native police, were cited as the daily experiences of the people of Sydney.

So our seniors shook the heads of deprecation at the chance of "California" being repeated here, while we juniors rather liked the idea than not.

Things the most pleasant come to an end, and so did this breakfast, and we “boys” sauntered to the horse-yard, where we sat on the rails, and looked over and over again at the same horses that we saw every day, and then we jumped down and caught our particular steeds, and led them into the long open stable, some held simply by the mane, and some with only our handkerchiefs round their necks. What friends we used to make of our horses; and how marked it was that the qualities of the riders told upon them; kindness and culture, roughness and coarseness were all reflected by the animals. I've seen Jack catch an unhandled filly of their own breed without the least trouble, and she, a few days after, jumped over a bush horse-breaker, who tried to bail her up with a roping pole. The breaker turned her into a kicker and a buck-jumper, and the poor thing fell on her head and was killed.

I think it is very noticeable that the domesticated animals partake of the character of their owners; perhaps the sympathy tells both ways. Thus, the rough, or pot-house bruiser, naturally picks a bull-terrier for his favourite, and the dog and man become as like each other as possible in expression and character; in the same way a bush family of the “rough” sort gathers round it a pack of fierce, snarling brutes, ready at any time to pull down and kill sheep, calves, or any other helpless being — woman or child. Mr. Terry's Dog Act should be permanently in force till the strychnine and bullet have thinned out these obnoxious and dangerous brutes.

But, to revert to the Windabyne stud, there was Doctor, a scratch colt from Bukulla, with a screwed tail. He was positively a dangerous horse to all but members of the family. His hot, fiery blood seemed to be magnetically soothed and quietened by the gentle, kindly ways of the place, but let a flash, loud-voiced stock-rider come into the yard where he was, and Doctor would dance over him, perhaps plant his heels in his ribs, and rush at the top rail.

There was a pretty grey mare, with pink nostrils, and a fine skin, shewing her veins standing out like marble tracery, in the corner of the catching-yard. Rawson caught her and led her to the stable.

“What are you doing with Rosabel, Jack? Oh, I suppose Missy wants her — the ‘cutty,’ as Jeems Lapraik says. What's she going out for in this heat?”

“Are not we all going out in the cool?”

“When's that?”

“I'm hanged if I know,” said Fred, for the February sun was then blazing with unmitigated force till five in the afternoon.

“Well, then, after lunch.”

“Oh, I suppose so. Go it — let's have a picnic and a ball in honour of the drought!”

Rawson was very tender getting Rosabel groomed and put comfortably

into her loose box, and I began to revolve certain considerations, putting two and two together, and the result I arrived at, after working out the sum, may serve to answer a question which, I am aware, has repeatedly presented itself to my ingenious reader — “Did I not feel inclined to fall in love with Mary?”

No, not exactly; but I began to suspect that Rawson had a turn that way, and that his attentions were not entirely unappreciated by the young lady.

“Did I not begin a flirtation with her, myself?”

Well, then, I'll tell you how it was.

I used to help her to water her garden, and a few days before, I had spent an hour planting some lemon trees for her. Now, Mary's garden was a lovely spot; it was on the top of the bank, looking down on the Big Waterhole, and commanding a long vista of deep pool and shady foliage; and gardening is a pleasant occupation in such a place, especially in sympathetic company.

While digging, pruning, and watering, waiting on this fair young Eve, I naturally strove to adapt my conversation to the occasion, and, whether from the melancholy of indigestion, produced by over-eating, or from a fit of the vapours, or an attack of affectation, or a mixture of all those causes, I must needs pour forth to her listening ears a monody on the sorrows of a blighted heart. The facts I dwelt upon were touching enough, though they were principally fictions; but the hints and insinuations with which I darkly pointed to the tragic love passages which I had experienced, far surpassed what bare narrative could disclose. The sorrows of Werther, the fierce woes of Manfred, the dove-like tenderness of Paul and Virginia, were all blended into such melting pathos, that I began partly to believe it myself, and my voice faltered, and tears stood in my eyes, as I sighed out these heart-broken “memories.”

With my stomach or my nerves in different tone, the story I would have told would likely have been of a totally different character; indeed, a tune I commonly hummed was —

“Here's to the maiden of bright seventeen,  
And here's to the damsel that's merry,  
And here's to the flaunting, extravagant quean,  
And here's to the widow of Derry.”

There was, indeed, a widow of thirty-five, and if not of Derry, at least of the same delightful island, who used to joke and laugh with me on the voyage, and who gave me her photograph in Sydney; but that same likeness was now appealed to as the only record of a woe that had blighted the joys of my existence.

Mary had listened to all this flow of sentiment, keeping up a semblance of sympathy; but when I reached this point, she dropped her rake, covered her face with her garden gauntlets, and screamed with laughter.

“Oh! Reggy, you're an awful story-teller; didn't you tell me that was Widdy Malone's picture? Oh, you shocking imposter! Come and tell mamma all that over again. She'll think it as good as a play.”

So I never tried the sentimental dodge again with Miss Mary.

Really and truly, I liked her too well to make her the subject of a frivolous flirtation, and but for my recognising the evidences of a sympathy or understanding between her and Jack Rawson, I might have become seriously interested; but I was perfectly heart-whole, and was glad to look upon her as a sister or cousin.

At the same time, when I say heart-whole, I retained very warm impressions both of the “widow of Derry” and of the fair young lady of the moonlight scene beside the man at the wheel, and it would have been quite impossible for me to decide which was the goddess of my affections.

Nevertheless, that great organ of circulation, which we associate with the tender passion, along with my other viscera, remained in a sound, healthy condition, so much so that I was able to hand it over to Mrs. Crawford twelve years afterwards as good as new, or at least, second-hand — and much good may it do her, honest woman. I'm sure there's very little romance about it now. “No, indeed, you old goose,” says she; “just you write me a cheque for £60 to pay the school accounts before you go to the steamer.”

To return to our subject, we stabled our steeds, groomed them, lifted their feet all round, and wrangled about the proper principles of shoeing.

Now, *apropos* of shoeing and other matters in this stage of my probation, whenever I ventured to make a remark or ask a question I was jumped on at once as an impertinent new chum; but I retaliated very soon, and became as loud and confident on all intricate topics as the member for the Northern Hunter himself.

After that, we went and laid ourselves down in the barracks, and tried our hands at swapping horses, guns, pistols, saddles, and even boots and breeches: but we were not very good at it. Mr. Elliot came in while business was going on, but he put our noses out of joint by remarking that, if Cubitt began with nothing at all, he could swap the lot of us out of everything we had in half-an-hour.

Then it was half-past one — time for lunch, and we mustered again round the big table, and fed as if we had seen no victuals for a month. “Too hot weather to eat” remark used-up townspeople. We did not think so. Not only the spiced round of beef from the private house-store, but hot steaks from the brindled steer killed that morning, wild ducks brought in by Binebbera, bread of all sorts, and lastly a basketful of rock-

melons (pump-irrigated) descended into abysses cavernous and apparently unappeasable, while Mrs. Smith looked quite unhappy if we left anything on the table.

“Who's going for a ride?” said Miss Mary, as if it was quite a new idea — the hypocritical monkey! when she knew quite well that Rosabel was in the stable, and also who had put her in.

“Oh, my dear, it is too hot,” said good, careful Mrs. Smith.

“Oh! no, mamma, I will be covered up like a mummy with a sunshade and a big veil. I don't care how ugly I look if I can only get out.”

“What a strong-minded young person” said Mr. Elliot. “I would give twopence to see you got up like a Sister of Charity; or how would you like to try a costume of sack-cloth, dust, and ashes?”

“How did they put on dust and ashes?” asked Bob Short, “was it laid on in a thick paste like cement or pisa? I don't doubt it would resist a good deal of sun, but it would hardly look becoming. There's old Kerella has been in grief for the decease of a pup which died yesterday from some cutaneous eruption, and she has smeared her head with pipe-clay — I daresay it's comfortable, and it looks almost as well as the Sisters' headdresses.”

“Mercy on us, who's here,” said the Major, “a horseman in blue spectacles?” and presently the new comer dismounted at the gate. It was strange in bush houses that when one guest arrived, others always were sure to turn up — what was the cause of it? Was it magnetic attraction? There was always attraction enough at Windabyne.

The arrival was Dr. Karl Kroeber, of Heidelberg, traveller, geologist, and doctor; jolly good fellow generally. “Hallo! Doctor — come in, you're rather too late for lunch, but we've got some more bones — fossils for you.” There was a current tradition that Mick Donohu had sold to the Doctor — representing the same to be the osseous remains of a Diprotodon — the os sacrum and pelvis of an old pole bullock called Tinker that broke his neck on the Swallowtail, and the Doctor was chaffed accordingly; but he made his bow to the old people on the verandah, and walked straight through the circle of frivolous youths who were yelping at him, to receive a warm welcome from the heads of the house, and to take his place at the luncheon table.

But before the Doctor's lunch was over, which he took with the Major and Mrs. Smith and Mr. Elliot sitting round him, Mary danced in with her old riding habit on, made up as good as new through a species of female ingenuity much in vogue among young ladies of the old sort, but which modern female swells would hold in great contempt, and deservedly; for sixteen years later, the wife of the then proprietor of Windabyne received Governor Sir John Young, who went there to breakfast, *seated* on a sofa in *a ball dress!* and her husband's conversation during breakfast sounded exactly like the jingling of

money-bags.

By this time the horses were brought out, and Willy put Mary with a spring on Rosabel, and Jack led the way on Doctor. Becky would not stand still quietly in the throng until I got on her, and she rushed off before I was in my seat, and cannoned off Bob Short first, and then off Willy. The first laughed, and the second abused me soundly. Mary, to please me, asked me to ride on her left. I was not much surprised to see Jack Rawson on her right. Then we strung away down the sideling through the crooked, shady apple trees, and broke out into a canter when we reached the box flat.

Our leaders, Jack and Bob Short, seemed to have made up their minds that this ride should be something more than a quiet, decorous *promenade à cheval*. Following them a few minutes brought us to a big log-yard, the fence being five feet high, and nearly as broad at the top as a dining-table. "Well, Bob, how is it to be? Doctor first?" "All right — done — Warigal follows."

We all stood still to look while the two horses were wheeled back some score or two of yards. Doctor was up on his hind legs at once, but Jack headed him straight, touched him with the spur, and he rushed at the fence like a thunderbolt. He flew over with a snort and a blazing eye, his tail curled over his back, and his heels dashing splinters from the top log, and on reaching the ground he gave three or four plunges, evidently thinking he was no end of a horse. He showed to great advantage; his great quarters, clean withers, long rein, and game head gave him a look of character and power, and his dark brown skin shone like burnished bronze. Bob Short then followed on his fiery chestnut, Warigal, but the horse had not the power, though he had speed and courage. His fore feet struck the off side of the fence, and horse and rider rolled over and over. Mary gave a little scream, but Short was up at once, and so was the horse.

Then all hands set to trying a less dangerous-looking brush fence that divided the yard, and I found at length a promising-looking gap, broken by Fred, which I thought would suit me. Taking heart of grace, I sent Becky fairly at it, but I was in too great a hurry, for *she* did not mean to go. When within three feet of it she stopped short, with her fore legs planted firmly before her, and I flew like a rocket over the fence, into a very fine crop of Bathurst burrs, to the great delight of the cavalcade. But I had the satisfaction of seeing most of them get *croppers* before I got the burrs all removed from my garments; and then Mary said that there had been enough of jumping, and we would go and see the view from Red Cliff.

So we rode over plains, through belts of sandy pine scrub, over round box ridges, and over sharp little sandstone gullies, with patches of stringy bark and iron bark, but we never saw a kangaroo; and you will see them

there now in hundreds. What is the cause of this? Why did the marsupial almost disappear, and then re-appear in overwhelming numbers? Can you explain, too, why in great stretches of the Southern country, the gum tree, the standard tree of Australia — the *eucalyptus* — is actually dying out, while all imported European deciduous trees flourish as if the soil welcomed them greedily. Are these changes merely minor phases of a great abiding law of succession and development? Does the soil beneath our feet, and the testimony of the rocks, tell of these never-ending mutations in vegetation and climate? Who shall tell the whole history of earth growth? Who shall grasp the true theory of creation? Shall man ever know the last, or shall he, even in a higher stage of life, only be able to scan another range of secondary causes? However, there on Windabyne, we saw in varied form the proofs of the forces which had been at work in the past. Every plain shewed mounds of round gravel and red soil; was this sea-bottom at no very distant age? Every ridge shewed signs of abrasion and denudation; and the hard scorched metamorphic rocks that formed the spurs of the range, did not they, too, tell an older story still of the deposit of clay, and the action of fire and water? Did those limestone rocks once come from the ruins of coral reefs? And how came these great sheets of rich black soil to lie above the sandstone and granite? Was that really decomposed lava? And then there was Red Cliff, standing straight up in the middle of poor low sandstone ridges — rich, red mould to the very top, covered with short sweet tufty grass, still alive from the vigour of the volcanic soil in spite of the drought — with black trap boulders and honey-combed scoria scattered all over its face. How did Red Cliff thus stand up like an island or fortress by itself? And what were those shelves of turf-covered rock round it that looked like old beaches marking the gradual retreat of the waters? Was Red Cliff only a shred or remnant of an old volcanic range or island that had been eaten away by flood and storm, and whose fragments had been washed into ooze and mud to build new lands, and feed unborn nations? “Dr. Kroeber could tell us all about it, and we would ask him;” and then we sat on the top of the highest peak and watched the sun as he travelled down westward — a deep red disc in a copper sky.

“Do you see a mist on the Six Mile Creek, Jack?” said Willy. He was shading his eyes with his hat, and moving his head slowly from side to side. But nobody could see it. *If this smoke had been seen plainly, could we have done anything?*

I have hung over this day's doings lovingly — it was a long-remembered day at Windabyne, and we went home, not knowing what the morrow would bring forth; and after tea we pulled Mary and the Doctor and Mr. Elliot in our boat on the Big Water-hole, and we all sang. The Doctor sang two songs, I believe almost the first time they were heard in Australia, “Wann die schwalben heimwärts ziehen” and “Trab

Rösslein, trab, trab,” and Mary said that Rosabel should henceforth be called Rösslein, and then we all went to bed very tired and very happy.

## Chapter VII. Fire.

Dewy sleep still sealed the eyes of the in-dwellers, and the gentle breezes of the hours preceding dawn — the zephyrs winging their way to meet the sun — were swaying the feathery branches of the river-oaks,\* and whispering through the open doors and windows, when a shriek, wild, appalling, and unearthly, rose in the air.

In a second, though but half awake, we were grouped outside the barracks round a black boy, who was shouting and gesticulating, shewing in the pale star-light a face blanched and bloodless, no longer deep bronze, but *yellowish green*.

On the highest point of the river-bank stood a weird figure — old Krella — and her ear-piercing *keen* rung among the tree-tops, as she tossed her blanket in the air and yelled — “Wee-ng! Wee-ng! Wee-ng! Geera! Geera!” till every creature slumbering near, started up in horror.

Fred gripped Binebbera hard by the shoulder, and shook him. “What is it?” The boy pointed with trembling hand to the westward. “You look.” A few steps took us to the higher ground, *and there we saw a red circle tinging the horizon down to the river* — it seemed to creep on as we watched it.

We ran to the stable. Jack was already leading out Doctor, saddled.

“Where is Walbaligo?” “That fella been yan.”

The boy had gone off through the dark, hot-foot, to watch the course of the conflagration.

Fred clutched his forehead — “Heaven and earth! Blind! Blind! *The mist on the Six-Mile Creek last night!* and we never thought of this danger!”

In another second he dashed out of the stable with his bridle. “Reggy! Reggy!” he shouted, “get on Rosabel — she's in the box — and run in the mares in the low paddock. they're all quiet.”

I don't remember how I did it. Rosabel, gracious and kind to her mistress, hated to have the other sex on her back; but, in the excitement of the moment, in spite of her prancing and curvetting, I rode her round the paddock and ran up half-a-dozen quiet brood mares, which were at once saddled. By this time other horses had been caught by the owners, and before long every soul on the Station was mounted and hurrying to the Six-Mile Creek.

What did we mean to do? The wisest of us could not well answer that

question; but no doubt we would find work to our hands and a way to do it. At all events we must first learn the nature of the danger.

Binebbera had been sent off to Red Cliff at the gallop.

From that point the extent and position of the fire could be seen at once, and the boy could ascertain these facts and form a correct opinion far more certainly and speedily than any of us.

So most of us rode on straight down the river as fast as the light would permit. "If the fire was running across the plains and the bare ridges only, we might beat it out by a determined effort — if it had got into the reeds — — ." A figure dashed along the track in front of us — it was Walbaligo. "Fire along a reed-bed — that fella wind blow him straight like it station — cattle altogether mad."

A few minutes more brought us to the Camp on the South Bend. There, as we have seen, the river made a great curve, leaving a wide expanse of meadow and fen, ordinarily half under water, now dry, but covered with rank herbage, the sole support of the herd of cattle in this season of scarcity. The short time since the alarm was given, had been sufficient to send the flames forward with alarming speed, and a startling sight now met our eyes. All at our feet was mirk darkness. Apparently at three or four hundred yards distance, but really much farther off, the flames advanced with a front a mile in width. Where the reeds were long and dry they came on like a wall ten feet high — where the herbage was shorter from being trampled or eaten down, they crept close to the ground; they spouted and leaped through the half-moist patches — they roared through the brakes, and when they reached the knots of scrub they jumped from bush to thicket. A column of white steam would go up from one spot with a loud crackling like the discharge of musketry, and here and there a mass of black smoke would rise like a pall, made plainly visible by the forked flames waving and licking the ground beneath. And now, as the conflagration went on, the formation of the ground gave its progress a peculiar character. Right under the high bank, on the outer edge of the reeds, was an old bed or ana-branch of the river, rarely holding water, but the hollow of its channel filled with vegetation of the rankest and largest growth — reeds and rushes eight and nine feet high, growing densely together, except where broken by the cattle. Into this funnel, the wind freshening to a gale in the track of the flames, roared and rushed, driving towards us blazing twigs and grass whirled high in the air. There was plainly the greatest danger both to the herd of cattle and to the homestead from this branch of the fire. The main body was advancing steadily, though comparatively slowly; but the torrent of flame rushing up this old channel effectually cut off all chance of the cattle retreating to the plains and ridges, and, besides, unless checked, it might be in dangerous proximity to the Station in a couple of hours. Dr. Kroeber and Mr. Elliot spoke to the Major, and recommended some

course, to which he assented, and they mounted and were off at once. "You will find a dozen pounds of powder in the store, and you can get more at Girrah."

Meantime, we could see nothing on the upper side of the fire. We strained our eyes in vain. We had to lie down to escape the stifling smoke. At times the sounds reached us, above the roar of the flame, or the brattling of horns and hoofs, and the confused bellowings of the terror-stricken cattle.

In half an hour the main line of fire was nearly opposite to us, while the flames had rushed far up the ana-branch, leaving the bed, a half-extinguished glowing mass at our feet. We were waiting anxiously till we could ride through, for we wanted to reach the cattle. If we could get them either to the ridges, or down to the river, they would be safe. We knew well that, frantic with the flames on both sides, the flying sparks and smoke, they were ringing in insensate terror, and numbers, especially of the younger, would be trampled to death or maimed. But there was yet too much fire on the ground, either to ride through, or do anything with the terrified brutes when we got near them.

Suddenly, we saw two horsemen burst through the weakest part of the line of flame; there could be no doubt one was Jack, on Doctor; we could see plainly the peculiar set of the horse and the figure of the rider; the other was Binebbera, on old Akhbar — the Major's own steed — on which he had been sent to scout the fire from Red Cliff. He had found the precise extent and direction of the danger, and was coming down to see what could be done with the cattle, knowing that he would find us at the camp, when he met Jack; then their joint observation of the ground, and their guess as to the position of the herd, led them to act with the object we shall presently see. Binebbera reminded Jack that there was a hollow, or rather, a flat between two mounds, running some way across the line of fire, which was almost free from reeds, and, in fact, was covered with low plants of the nardoo species, which the blacks use for food; and he suggested, that if the cattle could be headed by any means into this covered way, they could get back over the burned ground, either to the ridges or to the river; and so, as we have seen, they burst through the fire at its lowest point. We could see the sparks from the scorched reed stalks fly from their hoofs. We could not guess what they were after, but in a few seconds we could hear from their voices and whips that they were in the middle of a mob of cattle. Both horses were courageous and active, though Akhbar was getting old, but, if they could not keep their legs in the maddened rush of the terrified brutes, they would be trampled into the mire, both men and horses. At the same time, if they could cut their way through, there was a great probability that the ring would break, and then it was not unlikely that if the cattle streamed away, they might be headed out of danger.

To our relief, the whips kept going, and Binebbara's "Wah! Wah! Wah! Wurr!" and Jack's "Hey! Hey! Head up! Here, Lassie — heel-em-up! Heel-em-up!" reached our ears clear as a clarion, and then the bark of the colley in the distance soon shewed that she was running straight for her master. The dawn, anxiously looked for, had now come, and we could make out what looked like a whole camp of cattle circling round a central point, but the circle was extending and opening on one side, and when the dog ran through, which we knew by her yelp, the ring split, and, in a long column, the horned multitude streamed away back through the ground that had been over-run by the flames — they had got into the hollow pointed out by the black boy.

Rawson jumped up — "I think some of us had better see if we can head that mob; if we can steady them on the plain it will be all the better."

"Right, my boy," said Major Smith; "you go with Rawson, Reggy, that will be enough. Jack and Binebbara will be sure to be round the head of them by this time." In half-a-mile Rawson and I pulled up. Jack and his boy had ridden round the column and turned it to the plain, but steady it they could not. The animals were wild with terror. They were now rushing in a dense mass right up the face of the bank — the strong, young male cattle leading, followed by the cows and calves. Last of all came an old bull, scorning to fly even from the flames, though the tuft of his tail was burned off. The old hero turned and pawed up the earth, and bellowed his defiance at the enemy, while the fag-end of tottering calves and old cows scrambled up the bank, which had been beaten and crumbled down like a railway-cutting — some could not reach the top, but fell over, and all the track behind was strewn with fallen and maimed beasts. There lay a fine young cow — dead — with her unborn young, from premature labour; here lay a calf with a broken back.

We had to be careful how we rode near them. The bull knew he was safe with us, and walked on soberly and courageously after the *crawlers*, but the cows were wicked, as they always are in fright. One old milker that had fallen down, staggered up, with her eyes red and blood-shot, and charged straight at us.

Meantime, we could hear Jack and the black boy ahead trying to stop the gallop of the leading cattle. Was this the quiet Windabyne herd? They were now like hunted devils!

Having seen the crawlers to the top of the bank, we now set out for the head of the column. When we got up, they had reached within half-a-mile of the back fence, and the two riders were keeping steadily at their head, trying all they knew, to bring them under command. Usually, a horseman heading these cattle, could, by merely lifting his hand or turning his rein, stop them or guide their movements, but the half-dozen leading beasts had their heads down and their tongues out, and with the others following under the mechanical influence of terror, they would

have rushed through any obstacle. They almost reached the fence in spite of Jack and Binebbera, who now were riding close to them, laying their whips into their eyes, when Rawson pulled out a pistol from his saddle and fired at their heads. Then they turned, though it was only to rush into the tail mob and begin ringing again.

“Well done, Jack, lucky you had the pistol.” Rawson had been out lately looking for a troublesome wild bull, and that was how he happened to have the little weapon with him.

We now tried in vain to stop the ringing; we rode round and round the opposite way; we tried every plan; the dog could do nothing; her barking only made them more frantic. Once they stopped, indeed, for a minute. It was when the bullocks ran over and trampled some calves, and the old bull charged furiously among them, throwing them down, and goring them right and left; then for a breathing time they stood in a circle with their heads outwards towards us, as if at bay. While they thus stood, a wild-looking creature of a dirty yellow and white colour, with her hair on end, and her flanks drawn and heaving, singled out tossing her horns; she dashed forward a few steps, tottered and fell dead on her back, her limbs quivering in the air. Jack looked at her carefully. “You would not believe it, Reggy, but that's the same pretty little heifer that I gave the whip to the other morning; yes, I was sure of it; there's the brand and number of the year — 49.” Could it be possible? That beautiful, plump, round, dainty, light strawberry heifer, the same as this wild, fiendish-looking brute that had just dropped dead! It was quite certain; there was no doubt of it, such was the effect of panic, and this was only one symptom of the mischief done to the cattle already. What would the loss be when all the dead and crippled were counted up, and when the results of the famine that the burning of the reed-beds entailed came to be reckoned?

In spite of us, the ringing began again, and at length a rush of the brutes struck the fence, and carried away about twenty rods; then the whole mob flowed away over the back plains. We could do no more; they were now out on the sheep run; some of them would run on till they reached the Big Dam; others would drop; the old bull with some of the cows and calves would likely work back to the river. At the best, there would be numbers of them dead of fright, weakness, thirst, and famine; but for the present we could do nothing to prevent it.

On returning to the South Bend, we found that we had yet to see the worst of the calamity. We had saved only a portion of one camp of cattle at the best, and there were still several other similar mobs clustered on the gravelly knolls studding the reed-bed, now islands in a sea of raging flame. Terror seemed to affect all the cattle in the same way. As the fire approached on different sides, they began ringing, and as they pressed and crushed each other, the outside beasts were pushed from these mounds, and spread circling and rushing among the long reeds. This had

one effect tending to their protection from the fire, namely, that before the flames were actually up to them, a wide space of the reeds was trampled into mud, thus forming a bare margin that the fire could not cross. But this did not prevent very serious suffering and loss. Other groups, nearer to the river, seemed to have taken more timely alarm, and from the high ground where we stood, we could see strings of cattle making for the Yarombil, and crossing over to Girrah, a long way in advance of the conflagration.

The sight of the dense mobs of tortured animals on the mounds of gravel became most pitiable and revolting as the tongues of fire lapped round and flew over them. At length, in the extremity of torment, they broke and rushed pell-mell, either towards the bank or towards the river, but whatever number was saved in this way, the loss was terrible. Many months after, when the rains came, we found piles of scorched hides and burned calves' bones lodged in the vine scrub below by the flood.

There was no use in our trying to save them; staying there would do no good. Some of them would perish miserably; some would linger crippled and scorched; some would starve, and some would turn up again.

Meantime, we had better haste to the Station. Elliot and Kroeber, with the few hands that they would be able to muster, possibly might not have been able to make all safe.

All they had hope of doing was to stop the fire in the direction of the homestead; they had no chance of arresting its general course. About half a mile below the house the reeds narrowed to a width of about a hundred yards, and if its progress could be stopped at this point, one great danger could be averted. If, on the other hand, this was not done, there was quite enough dry combustible matter round the Big Waterhole, in the hay paddocks, and in the garden, to burn the whole place down. The plan they proposed was to lay a train of gunpowder across this narrow neck and to cut away the reeds and long grass on the side next the Station. When the flames reached the train, the explosion would dash them out at once, and the long growth being cut away, would leave little for flying sparks to catch hold of; if any part did ignite, it could be more easily beaten out. This was simple enough, but the difficulty would be to get the hands.

Willy and Bob Short, after hearing the state of things on the cattle-run from Walbaligo, had hurried back to prepare for what they saw would be necessary before long — the protection of the homestead; and with the Major's trusty man of all work, James Lapraik, they were collecting scythes, reaping-hooks, tarpaulins, bagging, ropes, and other articles that would be needed; moreover, Walbaligo had got a watercart filled, with the horse in, ready to start, and the black gins and picanninies were cutting and carrying up the bank bundles of stout oak and tea-tree boughs — moreover Mrs. Smith, Mary, and Bidy Moriarty were

dragging out all the blankets and carpets that could be got at — all if needful were to be drenched with water and sacrificed.

So, when Mr. Elliot and Dr. Kroeber rode up, they found very active preparations for defence well under way; so much so, that there was little to be done but to get the gunpowder, and move to the ground decided on as the scene of operations. But then the want of hands was apparent; to cut the reeds and clear such a space as was needed would be good work for twenty men, and all told, they were only half-a-dozen — at least until the party came back from the cattle-run; and by that time the enemy might be upon them. Willy, Short, and James had hardly been able to breathe, far less to think, in the hurry of their preparations; but now it came into the head of the factotum that there might be men in the traveller's hut and the same idea occurred to the two young fellows; so, as the party moved away with the elder gentlemen, they went up the hill to examine the hut.

Mr. Lapraik proved himself a good man that day. The Major had dropped on him among a batch of immigrants, and, tickled by his sententious speech and consequential airs, he had engaged him, and, indeed, he turned out a capital bargain, besides being quite an acquisition in conversation.

As became an Elder of the Anti-Burgher Kirk, in the Parish of Dreepdaily, Strathclyde, reared on parritch and haggis, Jeems was of a comely, and withal, a substantial presence. The owner of a feu, comprising a good stone cot-house and a kailyard in Dreepdaily, he had received a legacy of some shares in an unlimited company, and, in the course of six months, cot-house, kailyard, and all Jeems' earthly possessions had been seized in liquidation of certain calls, made for behoof of the company's creditors.

But Mr. Lapraik was of too stout stuff to be broken down by such a loss, remarking that there was mair tint at Flodden edge.\* He manfully shipped himself as an emigrant from the Tail of the Bank, and he felt little doubt that his expatriation would tell mightily in favour of the foreign land he was bound to, as well, as was reasonable, to his own benefit and behoof. And, I am bound to state that many men, far inferior to Jeems Lapraik, have made huge fortunes in Australia.

By profession, he was a market-gardener, His great pride and glory on the banks of the Clyde had been to rear broccoli and spring kale, and with the self-sufficiency and obstinacy inherent in his nature, he determined that the same methods that obtained in Dreepdaily should be carried out at Windabyne. Unlike the Chinaman in "Marsupial Bill,"† who "could make the metamorphic rocks to sprout with cabagcc," Jeems had failed, signally, to adapt his native spade-culture to the banks of the Yarombil. In vain he delved, in vain he trenched; he even went the length of carrying some *stowps* of water to the refractory, thirsty soil, that

seemed to crack, yawn, and clod the more he pulverised and tortured it.

While thus engaged, a moon-faced disciple of Confucius came past and smiled. "No goodee, no goodee, too lily watel; you putee moley watel; all litee; goo day."

The horticulturist looked up in pity. "Puir unconverted creatur'; a worshipper of stocks and stones! Wha wad think that was a responsible being?"

In another six months, the rain had softened the soil, and our gardener's favourite pot-herbs blessed his expectant eyes.

One Sabbath morn, Sam Ki came past again, with the same child-like smile, and he pointed to the river — "No goodee, no goodee, too muchee watel; you see d'lectly." Jeems blessed him for a heathen. On the Monday night the flood came down the Yarombil, and scooped the kale yard clean out, broccoli and all, and lodged it piece-meal on the Girrah side.

What could mortal man do with such a country and such a climate? Australia scorched, had grinned for a year like a death's head, and now, like an Antipodean Niobe, she wept unceasingly.

Mr. Lapraik looked through Habakkuk and Chronicles for some good Presbyterian curses, but he could find nothing adequate to the occasion, so he took off his specs. "The fiend's in the country," said he. "It's either girnin, or else greetin." So he there and then threw down his spade, and became Wood-and-Water-Joey, and repairer of fences.

With this stout ally, Willy and Bob Short proceeded to turn out the men's hut. There were three men in it. One, a lively Devonshire lad on the ramble, who had come to Australia, he did not well know why, jumped up at once, and went off to lend a hand. The other two lay still and groaned. Who they were we shall now see.

Two days before, Willy had picked up a "poor man," an able young fellow of four or five and twenty, at the Dam Station, where he went with rations and odds and ends, driving two young horses in the break.

"He wanted a job, sir," he said. Of course, he could have a job, looking round the fences, cutting away weeds and dry grass; keeping watch, in fact, against the one dreaded danger. So he was driven in on the break, and got a good feed and quarters in the men's hut. The next morning, he was called upon to come to terms about work; "Would eight shillings a week do him?" "No, *sir*; it wouldn't pay him; a man could do better than that," with a self-satisfied smirk. He had got his bellyful for nothing, and so he felt flash and independent.

But, instead of "humping his drum," and following the "wallaby track," as he said he would, he "bunked it out" for the day with a character called Snuffling Jim, who came sneaking from a grog-shanty on Rover's Flat, seven miles off, and they had several hands at "all fours" together. (Ugh! how they licked their thumbs!)

One of the Smiths usually made the round of the men's hut, to look out for such loafers; but having been a kind of holiday, as we have seen, the routine had not been observed, so these two characters had a business talk between the meals, which they freely partook of from the Major's liberally supplied flour and beef; and thus, with intellectual converse, and much smoke, they wiled away the hours. "Them squatters wouldn't let a poor man live — eight shilling a-week be blowed; a man could do better than that; a man could make a pound or two easier nor that now and again. There was Rover's Flat. Donohu done well with them travelling cattle for the North; the men was drunk for ten days; and the cove — he was a reg'lar green 'un — paid all their scores; and there was 'osses and cows, and calves left behind; and how was Donohu to know whose they was — he was just takin' care on them like. (There was a mutual grin here.) Them Smiths was damned near in their ways, and looked on a man like dirt." So Bill Jones and Snuffling Jim came to understand each other, and they determined to make tracks in company, after they had finished a bottle that suddenly appeared from the latter's swag, and subsequent to the needful night's rest that would reasonably follow that modest potation.

So at dim dawn, when they suddenly heard, "Turn out men — fire — lend a hand," "What's up, Jim?" said Bill. "Gammon possum — have the *tremens* or the *shakes*, youngster; I'm in for rheumatics and dropsy; it's that young devil, Smith." So they rolled themselves in their blankets, shivered, and breathed stertorously.

"Come, then, what's the matter?" said Willy, in a peremptory tone. "Oh, sir," said Snuffling Jim, "I'm mortal bad in my inside; have ye got 'ere some Holloway's Pills or Farmer's Friend, sir? And my mate, he's worse nor me; I had to carry him in; I couldn't leave him to die in the bush, sir."

"Who are you?" said Willy, laying hands on him. "Why it's that scoundrel from the grog-shanty; come out of that, you dog." "Have a care what ye say of me, Muster Smith, I'll take the law on ye." For answer, he was dragged on to the floor. "Look, Short, who's the other;" and Bob tore the blanket off with no gentle grasp, and was knocked down offhand for his pains by Bill Jones. "Why, it's that loafing blackguard who refused work yesterday — kick them both out;" and he *went for* Snuffling Jim. But shanty-keepers can often use their fists well; and so did Snuffling Jim, as Willy found out; and Bob Short, though he was no more vanquished by a knock-down than if he were a bull-dog ant, seemed likely to have very rough times of it under Bill Jones' treatment. So, as a true chronicler, I am bound to state that a very wild free fight took place for some minutes in the men's hut, Jeems Lapraik's size, his entire ignorance of pugilistic science, and extreme slowness of motion, preventing his taking part therein. Willy in vain tried his straight

shoulder hits on Snuffling Jim; he was as slippery as an eel, and as quick as lightning; and he had the true blackguard P.R. dodge of slipping down without a blow, while he gave our friend many a stinging rap in exchange. But Willy, when he began to taste his own blood, bethought him that he could fight cunning too; he had practised with Jack Rawson some of the famous Cumberland “worstlin” tricks; and all at once, by a rapid dash, Snuffling Jim felt himself lifted bodily and hurled head-foremost to the ground, where he lay with his eyes fixed for some seconds.

As the floor of the hut was now partly cleared, and the other two combatants were locked in chancery, Jeems Lapraik felt called upon to say a word in season; therefore, in the same methodical business-like manner, as if he were putting out a stray wether, he caught Bill Jones by the scruff of the neck and the slack part of his garments lower down, and ran him out of the hut, accelerating his departure with a sound kick, delivered by a stout Kilmarnock-made steel-tacketed boot. Bill Jones was a smart eleven-stone youth, but he could no more resist the solid muscular weight of Mr. Lapraik's grasp than he could have fought against a grisly bear. “Awa wi' ye — dirt,” said the Elder.

\* Casuarina.

\* There was more lost at Flodden Field.

† “Marsupial Bill,” by J. Brunton Stephens, Brisbane.

## Chapter VIII. About Various Characters More or Less Respectable.

These two worthy operatives, Snuffling Jim and Bill Jones; crawled thereon to Rover's Flat, cursing Windabyne and all belonging thereto, and heartily wishing that the whole station, with all its inmates, might be scorched in the flames, which they could see from the high ground they crossed. After consoling themselves for a couple of days in the society of those kindred souls, the Donohus, they made tracks for the township of Burrumburrah, where they entered into negotiation with a storekeeper, and shortly after, they opened a business for the "planting" of horses and the sale of adulterated rum at the solitary water-hole, where the main road crosses the Levels.

The blessings of Mammon and Silenus were upon them, and they thrived and fattened; how well they thrived, and to what high places their merits raised them, we hope the reader will learn by-and-by.

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It was sun-down before the station was safe from the fire. I fell down panting, where I had been beating out the flames, with my temples throbbing and my chest heaving with gasping sobs; and I recovered only to fall asleep and lie motionless till the cool dews of morning woke me. I started up; I was alone; there was no trace of the fire; I found the struggle was over, and all had gone home but myself; it was very easy to understand that nobody, unless some one of more consequence, would be missed on such a night, so I had been left to lie where I fell.

The explosion had been partly successful, and the cutting down of a portion of the reeds had made it easier to master the conflagration; but, though checked in its main advance, it broke out on our flanks; and, at times, a stray spark raised a blaze in our rear, so our small force was kept in motion the whole day, often needing to repel the enemy on two sides at the same time. When beat out in the reeds, it ran like lightning over the bare plains and ridges. There was, it is true, little to burn on those but grass-roots and fallen leaves, which gave the fire but little hold, and its spread was readily checked; but, with a few moments' start, it might, if unnoticed, have got among the dry, tufty turf and tindery fences of the garden and home paddocks; and, if so, the destruction of the homestead

would have been complete and inevitable. There was no fire insurance on stations then; and, indeed, risks and contingencies were not estimated with the business precision of the present day; but the burning of the homestead, coming on the back of other losses, all felt, meant utter and irreparable ruin.

It was late when the household gathered together. The severe exertion, the desperate anxiety, and the intense heat of the day before, could not but tell on all, old and young alike. The first glance showed that Major Smith had suffered much; the mental strain had told. The contingency that had first appeared to threaten his future after the interview at the Waratah Bank seemed now close at hand.

He was not by any means reticent by disposition, still he had not till now talked over his embarrassments with any of his intimate friends. He saw no use in boring them about his affairs, so long as there was hope of things taking a turn; indeed, business and money were among the last subjects of conversation at Windabyne.

Still, his friends were well aware, in a general way, of his precarious position; and while they, with thoughtful delicacy avoided reference to the circumstance, their unobtrusive sympathy and readiness to render practical aid shewed that they were neither blind nor heartless. How different was the tone and stamp of many of the squatting men of the day from the "financial" gentry, by whom our friend had been trapped to probable ruin! Compare Bogus and Elliot for instance. Every sentence of the first aimed at dealing or usury. A lie, a blowing advertisement, the wind and gas of trickery, formed the staple of his speech. Elliot, on the other hand, with far more education and refinement, and, moreover, with a shrewd vein of intuition in his character, never spoke on such topics except when consulted, and then his opinion was well studied, careful, and deliberate. So, when that morning the Major opened his mind to his old chum, more under the feeling that "as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend," than with the expectation of getting any practical suggestion, it was soon shown, by his earnest attention and interest, that the matter had already occupied his thoughts.

There was no doubt that the danger was very great; the worst loss, though not yet realised, was certain, namely the deaths of cattle that would become numerous from starvation; the feed being now all destroyed. There was no use in disguising this, and the mortgagee would certainly look upon his security as prejudiced, and here was the pinch of the crisis. Under mortgage, all losses fall with double weight. The owner of an unencumbered station, carrying 40,000 sheep, though he lose half of them from starvation, is still nearly as far from ruin as ever. The diminution of income, and the necessity for economy for a few years, are the only points on which the loss touches him; and these are but mild forms of pressure. It is only necessary to wait the turn of the seasons to

be *actually better off* than before; *actually better off*. The severe culling which his flocks undergo from the drought, — the hard-grinding and inevitable action which enforces “the law of the survival of the fittest” leaves him, when the period of scarcity ceases, in possession of a choice stock of the soundest and healthiest animals.

Very different is the result to the squatter working under an advance of borrowed money. He must go on paying interest and compound interest on dead sheep. When the rain comes, he cannot bide his time like his unmortgaged neighbour, for he dare not wait for the increase of a stock, the produce of which will hardly pay his creditor's interest, but he must, if he can, go more into debt and buy more stock; his only chance of working clear being by using every blade of grass as fast as it grows; and so he continues to plough in the furrow of the money-lender, and to bear his yoke.

Withal, from this same unwholesome condition of indebtedness, the chances arise, that yield, as it were by a “mere turn of the wrist,” periodical crops of squatting fortunes; the recoil is so extreme, from the peculiarity of our financial system, and from the variations of the seasons; from starvation to plenty, from insolvency to wealth, from depression and unmarketable dullness to extravagant prices and mad speculation. Whenever a certain conjunction happens in matters pastoral, whenever wool rises 3d. per pound in the same year that we have a uniform rain-fall of 20 inches, then fortunes are turned over in hundreds, and new buyers are created in scores by the banks to get their deposits invested. To these new men, again, the past history of squatting and the reverses of former years are unknown — *they* know how to manage; so they proceed to overstock their runs while the wet years last, and to buy up the land; in modern phrase, “to turn their stations into freeholds,” and thereby, some day, will hang a tale, when the wheel turns downwards.

But to speculate in this fashion is wading in deep and troubled waters, and such operations are much more suitable for men like our friend Cubitt than for those of the stamp of Major Smith. In fact we may say that the general effect of these fluctuations is two-fold: first, to lump stations together and throw them into the hands of bank dummies and speculators, and second, to give peculiar advantages to reckless unprincipled schemers such as the man we have just mentioned.

Even now, if Smith had been a man like Cubitt, he might have staved off monetary pressure, but he was handicapped in a fashion that left him distanced in the race of life — he carried a conscience — and with his clear judgment and tender consideration for the rights of others, he was about the last man to enter into, or to succeed in, such squatting speculations.

At the time we speak of, Cubitt was penniless — had been insolvent, and bore a thoroughly bad name, but in a few years he managed to put

himself in such a position as to defy the banks.

He bought so many stations, and got such heavy advances on them, that no banker dared touch him, and he was consequently *shepherded* carefully, and his credit and character sworn to and vouched for, even by our ecclesiastical friend the General Manager of the Waratah. He accompanied that pious financier to the Synod of the Church, and the old scoundrel actually bought for the occasion a magnificent broad-brimmed hat, which he put on with a grin and a wink.

The best that Elliot could make of our old friend's case was, that it was not utterly hopeless. Sharp and Co. would most likely look upon the fire as a reason for bringing some pressure to bear on him; but again, if the drought broke up shortly, the worst results might still be averted. In the meantime, the stock would be pinched to live — his neighbours had no more grass than himself — in fact, up till now, Windabyne was the only station where there was any feed to speak of, mainly owing to the fencing and the preservation of the reed-beds. At the same time, Elliot pointed out that a rising market had often saved people in as desperate straits — he had seen sheep at all prices, from 1s. 6d. to 30s., and such chances were on the cards for those who could hold on. He recommended him to write Sharp and Co. fully and minutely as to the disaster, so that they might feel confidence in him, and be assured that their security was safe under his management. If they meant to act fairly by him, this would prevent their taking any extreme action.

The chief comfort in this, after all, was in having it spoken by a friendly, familiar, sympathising voice.

But there was a still more poignant pain, that no friendly counsel could soothe; his faithful wife had then learned, for the first time, the real nature of the calamity that threatened them.

When he told her first of his difficulties on his return from town, and when she met his depressing statement in a laughing, high-spirited, courageous manner, she did not doubt that things were far wrong, but she felt it became her, as a true loving wife, to cheer her husband up and show a good front: and like mother, like daughter, as we have already seen when our dear little Mary took her father that celebrated walk to see the pigs. But the bitter, utter ruin involved in their ejection from their home, she had not for a moment contemplated. The reality, till now, had never dawned upon her.

In such women, spirit and body are so closely intertwined; their nervous organism and their affections are so thoroughly interlaced, that whatever touches those they love, thrills to the very roots of their being. Her husband found that her fears and anticipations were already excited by her sensitive sympathies, so that it was better to speak plainly, and tell what might be expected.

She had looked forward cheerfully to comparative privation, enforced

systematic economy, the want of some of the luxuries they had enjoyed for a few years, the going back to the "roughing" of their early bush days, to do — perhaps — for a time without servants, and to dispense with the milliner's account and the occasional visit to Sydney. These were the worst results of the business difficulty that she had anticipated, and all this she would have borne happily. But now she knew, for the first time, the full extent of the ruin which appeared impending — a broken-up household — her husband without either home, occupation, or a pound in his pocket; she and her daughter without a roof where they could claim shelter, except from charity; and her boys — her pride — reduced, perforce, from the manly, hardy life that suited them so well; from an independent, social position, in which they bore the good-will and respect of all their neighbours, to seek for their living, to be scattered and lost among the nameless and homeless wanderers of the Australian proletariat, or to earn such subsistence as they could from the sufferance or patronage of the very men who had enticed their father to his ruin; from Bogus, the fraudulent insolvent; from Baggs, the pirate by land and sea; and from that arch-hypocrite and Pharisee, the General Manager of the Waratah.

All these reflections passed before the poor lady's mind with photographic clearness, as soon as she learned what would happen when the mortgagees foreclosed on the Station; no wonder she suffered! She struggled to follow her household routine for a few days before she gave way, then she became restless and slightly feverish; neuralgic pains attacked her, and poor Mary had to keep house and nurse her mother. Dr. Kroeber saw her and talked cheerfully with her, but when he rejoined the Major he shook his head. "My dear sir, it is the mind, not the body, I would wish that I could prescribe for."

"Change of air?"

"Nein, nein, mein good friend, you yourself and your young ones cure her — if you cannot, no one can."

Ten days passed — no change in the weather — Mrs. Smith was better, but not very strong. Mary tried to cheer her parents and us all. The Major sent many letters off to Sharp and Co., and elsewhere; we did such work as we could do in a dead alive way; it was sickening to see the stock, especially the cattle — and one day Dr. Kroeber got upon his stout cob Fritz. "I tell you now good-bye, Major — I wish you well — God bless you." And so the man of science, who was believed to say few prayers, said this one with sincerity, and went off to the Fatherland, summoned about some incomprehensible business connected with the Mediatisation of some Herzogthum, and there he wrote his book on the Ages of Australian Geology; and Elliot too, with our other friends, went their own ways.

So the Major sat by himself in silence and solitude. His work was over,

the clouds were closing round him, his dear wife was breaking down; he had made paupers of his children; the worst might come in a month or in six months, come it must, unless indeed fortune rose on him like a flood. Faugh! was he a child to believe in day dreams; yes, all must go, it would be a miracle if it were otherwise; all would be lost except those priceless treasures — the love that bound the little family together; the friendship of those who knew them best, and that good name which is better than riches.

\* \* \* \* \*

But even now, as the waters of affliction seemed to surge and rise over our poor friends, they became conscious that the springs of life run in diverse channels, and that we do not ourselves always know whence comes our deepest and most heartfelt happiness, and from what hidden sources flows real enduring sorrow. There was the right hand of ruin stretched towards them; the worst of worldly poverty was imminent, and yet nerveless and depressed as they were, their hearts swelled with the fond sympathy and tenderness of their children. Would assured wealth ever so probe the inner nature? If everything went always well, would the best and highest features of family and national life ever spring into blossom.

It is not the sunny Eden, with its days of childish peace and plenty, that brings out character; how could mankind ever be what they are if they had always lived in a Paradise as meaningless as a willow-pattern plate? We are what we are from famine, plague, battle, ruin, and storm; these are the stern teachers that have developed thought, courage, energy, and also loyalty, honour, and sympathy in the race; and the wrecks and fragments of the nations that are washed away among the sands of time, or, that have depraved under slavery and degradation, do not their traditions always tell the want of these very qualities? It is through the one stern law of creation that the perfection of the type is ensured by the same process that crushes and destroys, irrespective of personal merits, the individual, the family, and the tribe.

And it soon began to be said all over the country-side, that the Smiths of Windabyne were likely to come to grief; and the dwellers in the land who knew little about them commented on the news with their customary acuteness and discrimination. One gentleman down the river, who lived by stealing grass, said, "What else could you have expected after that fencing?" And another gentleman up the river, who had never been seen doing any work but cutting tobacco, but who, nevertheless, had built up a great reputation as a practical man on the strength of a dirty shirt and coarse, horny hands — he said he knew it would come to that; it wanted "men that could do their work like men, and not sit in a drawing-room;"

and so, having spoken these words of wisdom, he lay down on his bunk, scratched his flea-bites, and smoked another pipe. And other men on stations talked of the danger of working on borrowed money, and how it was safest to go slow and easy; and yet, nobody laid the lesson to heart, but each of them did the very same as Major Smith had done as soon as he got the chance. And some of those who laid down the law on the subject made great fortunes, and others equally wise came to yet greater grief than the Smiths, without displaying the least foresight or calculation, either the one or the other, but just as it happened and as they drifted; thus proving that in the progress of this world human wisdom and cunning are but very minute factors; and so the mill of destiny grinds on to an end that we busy emmets, scrambling on our dirt-heaps, can neither see nor guess at.

\* \* \* \* \*

I think we have said quite enough for the present about the threatened ruin of a family, which has been denounced already by competent business authorities as thriftless, extravagant, and unpractical; and, moreover, belonging to a sort of people that have never merited, or at least received, any respect from the Australian public; however they may have been prized by those who knew them best.

I propose now to turn the page, and treat with people who meet with universal and enthusiastic reverence from all Australians, both in town and country. While they live, we worship them, and when they die, we give them funerals five hundred strong, with the clang and clash of consecrated bells, and the banks, churches, and public houses draped in black. I am going to jam in a little incident here that happened lately, principally because I don't know where else to interpolate it. I am taking a jump of twenty-eight years, and my intelligent reader may probably recognise in the episode an old acquaintance in new guise.

Coming down lately from Wagga, I found myself in a full carriage, and I was seated beside a man whom I somehow thought I had seen before. He was stout, ruddy, fifty-three or four, with great animal development, bumptious, and strong in gold chain, watch, and rings. A carcass-butcher I assumed. In some few remarks that passed, it seemed that his voice had been heard by me before; it was evident that he was an authority in his own circle; he could not stand argument, and roared down anybody who offered an opinion; it was clear that he was a self-made man, and worshipped his *maker*, and by the self-satisfied smirk that now and then illumined his features, he seemed to say that he knew of little else worth worshipping. During the night, he made himself quite at home in the carriage — took off his boots without scruple, and first leaned against me, and snored on my shoulder, till I let him slide on to the floor, and

then did the same more successfully with a poor delicate young fellow on the other side of him. I have a good memory of faces and identities of voice and manner, but now I was puzzled; still I had seen him, I was sure.

I saw him again in the pavilion at the cricket match. He was there followed sedulously by three station agents, who tracked his footsteps most patiently. While admiring his *hauteur* and their respectful subservience, I elbowed little Grits, the storekeeper, from Spring Flat. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Grits; how are you?"

"Glad to see you, sir; I did not know you were in Sydney, Mr. Crawford."

"Oh, I must see the sport, like other youngsters, ha-ha! By-the-bye, who is that with G. and A. and C.?"

"Oh, sir, that is one of our great squatters, Mr. St. John — one of our aristocracy, sir — worth any amount of money."

"Indeed; and how did he get his money?"

"Oh, sir — great squatter — large capitalist," and little Grits' face elongated to a solemnised expansion, as if I had ventured to "rush in where angels fear to tread," or as if I were questioning some recondite matter, such as a point of faith, or the shape of the Queen of Spain's legs, these being things that the vulgar are expected to believe in, but may not ask questions about. I fear, however, that there is nothing too sacred for this generation. They are asking a power of questions about a good many subjects supposed to be as far beyond the reach of rude criticism as Her Castilian Majesty's ankles.

As I meditated further inquisition, my elbow was touched, and there was Debrett Hawkins.

Hawkins knows everything and everybody. In my new chumhood he was C.P.S. in an outside district: he was a bold rider, and sang a good song; now he is a stout, grey-bearded dignitary, with a double eye-glass. "And pray what are you making little Grits so uncomfortable about?" and he hooked his arm through mine. "Still the same Reginald Crawford, not content with taking on trust what people say, but asking the most frightfully gauche questions. Not know St. John? Why, you know nobody!"

"Look here, Debrett, I've half a suspicion that I do know Mr. St. John, but I can't spot him yet." I looked and saw his eye twinkle, "and I'm hanged if I don't think you know something about him — come, who is he?"

"Another indiscretion," and he looked at me over his glass with his eyes half shut. "And suppose I do. That was a hot catch Bannerman made."

"Confound you, who is Mr. St. John?"

"A-hem, can you recollect the great fire at Windabyne at the end of the

'51 drought?"

"To be sure. I had only been a few weeks in the country then."

"Well, then. Did not you and Short get some horses stolen, or planted, once, in passing the Levels, some years after?"

"To be sure, we did, and there was a low 'pub' there, kept by two suspicious characters, that we believed had something to do with it."

"Indeed, suspicious, were they? Very well, do you remember, after that, the escort robbery, at Marrambene, and a one-eyed scoundrel, called Scully, being hanged for putting it up?"

"Yes, to be sure. Snuffling Jim, that was the name."

"Just so. We are getting warm, I see. After that came Free Selection, and there were some very successful blackmailing and dummied cases on the Yarombil and Wolgan frontages, in which people of the name of Donohu, and another man, whose name has escaped me, were concerned. However, they made a pot of money out of Jack Robertson's celebrated Agricultural Act."

"Bill Jones, wasn't it?" said I.

"I believe that was the name. Well, then, Jones, if he was so called, disappeared; some said he was thriving in Victoria. I daresay that climate was better for him after his horse speculations. Some years after, a Melbourne man appeared, backed by Ginger and Bogoak, and other squatting firms, and went largely into Stations — and there he is in person, Mr. St. John — now look at him."

"Bill Jones, by Jingo!"

"I thought so — on the Commission of the Peace for eight years — has just been revising and correcting the Tallamein Jury List. Very strong Conservative in politics, declares that Free Selection is the curse of the country, and should be put down. No wonder you shocked Grits. Ta, ta, you'll get your eyes opened in time." And this dandy of fifty-four waved his lavender-gloved hand to a carriage, and made his way outside the fence.

## Chapter IX. Antipodean Money-Changers.

One of these days, in the month of March, 1851, Mr. Sharp sat at his office-table in Lower Denison Street. He was gifted with a rat-like industry and intelligence, that took him pretty well through any business that lay right before his nose — just as one of these same gnawers can deal with a Bodalla cheese.

Jeems Lapraik, who had the honour of seeing him once, when he hired to go up to the Station, remarked that he was “a howkin' creature,” and so he was; but any matter beyond the microscopic ken of his daily routine, found him all abroad, capital though he was at “two-and-a-half per cent.” and unmatched at building up a compound interest account.

*Think*, he could not. Sustained reflection was out of his line. He could be down on a man like winking, or, indeed, if there was any set business rule to meet a difficulty, he would jam it on, and make it fit without looking into any of the niceties of “why or wherefore”; but now he had to deal with an important matter, of a nature much less familiar to him than overdue bills or salted invoices. He could not bear indecision; he often used the pithy axioms, “that there were only two ways of doing a thing, the right way and the wrong,” and “that a man should act, and not dream over things”; so, to end his perplexity, he determined to “look round,” see practical men, and get the best opinions he could. The kind of “opinion” that he would respect in the present instance would be that given by a loud-voiced director, or a florid carcass-butcher; in fact, he would think very little of any advice unless, in the first place, it was given by a “monied” man, and, in the second place, it must be roared out “*ore rotundo*.” Anyone who spoke diffidently, who did not “come to the point at once,” and “see a thing in a moment;” in fact, anyone who showed symptoms of using his brains, he set down as “unpractical.”

So, having got to the end of the busy pottering, that he called his morning's work, he selected a letter, docketed, “W. D. Smith, Windabyne.” He turned it over, rolled his eyes, screwed his lips, then took his hat, and went off to various offices, and other places of call. He spent an hour going here and there; he talked to men on 'Change, and at busy corners, and then he went back to Denison Street, and wrote off the following piece of composition:

“Denison Street, 5th March, 1851.

“Major Smith, C.B.

“Windabyne, *via* Burrumburrah.

“DEAR SIR, — We are in receipt of your favour of the 20th ultimo, by which we are concerned to learn of the disaster that has occurred on your Station, also that you anticipate a further serious loss of stock from the destruction of feed by fire.

“In the circumstances, we have thought it expedient to consult with business friends largely interested and practically acquainted with station matters, and the opinions which we have received confirm us in the impression that this misfortune could not have taken place under competent, experienced management.

“We are advised by practical men that the fact of such a growth of grass as you describe being allowed to remain unused in a period of scarcity, gives proof of great want of judgment. If properly secured, this fodder might now be available to save much valuable stock. We are also advised by the same friends that there is great risk of the spread of grass-seed from reed-beds, such as you mention, unless they are cut down in the proper season, a precaution which you do not seem to have taken; and, moreover, we are told that fluke, pleuro-pneumonia, or even Cumberland disease, are not unlikely to attack the sheep stock in consequence.

“On these, and other sufficient grounds, we find it necessary, for the protection of our interests, to take the needful action as provided for in the mortgage held by us, and we have, accordingly, deputed a gentleman to visit the Station on our behalf.

“As our course of proceeding will be determined by his report, we request that you will give him every facility in his inspection, and consider him as acting with full power in the capacity of our confidential agent. We shall probably write more in detail by this gentleman, who will start at an early date. Meantime we have to request that you will suspend drawing orders on ourselves on station account until further advised.

“We are, dear sir,

“Yours truly,

“SHARP AND CO.”

But though Mr. Sharp had thus, with his customary decision, taken “practical advice,” and written his letter, he did not feel satisfied, so much so that that he could not make up his mind to send it to the post. It was not that he felt the least misgiving as to the “facts” that he had collected from mortgagees, wool-brokers, and wholesale butchers. Never having seen a station in his life, he did not doubt the authenticity of these “facts” for a moment. It was natural that, having the very haziest notions as to stock, runs, and the methods in use with the same, he should present the various views he had gleaned in a somewhat mixed and incongruous

form, as no doubt my intelligent readers have observed; and it was equally natural that he should quote, misquote, and unconsciously transmogrify what he had heard with the same trustfulness as he would use the terms of a "bill of lading" or a "charter-party."

The cause of his hesitation was very different. It appeared to him that if he carried out his intention of taking possession of the station in its present state, and, as current prices were, he would incur immediate heavy outlay, without any prospect, near or remote, of being repaid. He would be more money out of pocket, and would get only a barren security. This was what galled him.

Till lately, he had acted in such difficult station matters by the advice of a long-headed friend. True, it always turned out that that long-headed friend did not work for nothing. He recalled again and again that when the moment of fruition arrived, when the financial joint was to be cut up, his kind adviser always helped himself to the richest and juiciest slice; once, if not oftener, had he felt like the unfortunate cat whose paw was used by the ruthless ape to rake the walnut from the red hot ashes; yet once again, and not long ago, it had happened when a division of plunder took place, that his confederate, with many expressions of friendship and professions of fair-dealing, took the kernel to himself and left Sharp the shell.

So much did our friend feel this last aggravation of wrong, that in the Windabyne business he had fought shy of Mr. Gully Trotter, and had indeed not gone near him; and yet now he admitted to himself that he would like well to have the use of Trotter's brains, provided the same could be got for nothing — but then this division of interest — especially such a division as he might expect, was rueful to think of. Here, at last, was Windabyne — the ripe pear — that, for two months, he had looked forward to as a mouthful for himself alone, without participation by confidant or accomplice; and now the prize seemed to have turned to ashes; all seemed risk, and the profit distant or nowhere. Were his fears clouding his judgement, or was it that he had neither nerve nor *nous* to deal with such business?

But the natural order of events was already working to resolve his doubts.

When a camel drops on the sands of the Sahara, the vulture, wheeling out of sight above the clouds, swoops with true instinct to the spot; so the threatened sacking of Windabyne was hardly resolved on before the commercial atmosphere gave sign of interest and stir among the birds of kindred feather.

Sharp was roused up from an unwonted brown study by the delivery of the following note: —

"Dear Sharp, — I hear you have some difficulty about the Windabyne account. I am willing to take it over, or go halves with you — whichever

plan suits you best. Look round if you have time.

“W. G. T.”

Here was his fate upon him. It was as if a hungry crow were just sitting down to the savoury carcass of a dead sheep, when the gaunt shadow of a native dog drawing near on the trail is projected on the ground.

“No, he would not; he would see Trotter — — ; but then, was he prepared to send up a manager and spend more money on a station for the time unsaleable, and with the stock dying fast;” and he writhed in his chair. It wants a good hand on the tiller between Scylla and Charybdis. At length, our little friend got more plucky; his eye twinkled, and a ray of intelligence shone in the end of his nose. “What could Trotter do more than he? Yes, he would go and see what he had to say, and not commit himself; and yes, he would *pump* him, and do what he thought best.”

Poor little man; he might as well try to pump out Sydney Harbour; so he betook himself to his friend's office.

He was a dead gift to Trotter. Before the interview was over, the station account was a joint affair, and the latter secured for himself the first offer — the option of buying the Station when it was placed in the market.

Mr. Gully Trotter was a very tall gentleman. As he sat crouched in his easy chair, his legs reached halfway across the room; and his body, in this position, looked no size at all. But his head, face, and full eye shewed thought and purpose. He was a born financier, of a breed of financiers that have made a good deal of noise in other countries besides Australia.

He did not buzz about his office, tiddliwinking with pen and ink, like Sharp; he could spend his time much better; for, while reclining in the ungainly attitude he preferred, the powers within his cerebrum were assimilating raw material into schemes that would presently take effect through his confederates and agents.

Sharp told his story, and it did not take many minutes before he became fully impressed with the perils and difficulties of his position, and the necessity there was for getting Trotter's help. His previous determination, to “pump,” and make use of his ally, oozed away before the fixed stare of the steady grey eye that fastened on him; and, under the impressive, languid silence with which his words were listened to, the resolution with which he had come primed, sank down to the heels of his boots. His narrative began in a jaunty, brisk, auctioneer-like voice; but an occasional stony stare and sleepy ejaculation from the auditor took the wind out of him completely and, at length, he ended in a hesitating, disconnected drivel, feeling himself to be a greater fool than he ever thought before. Then Trotter, finding that he had thoroughly mesmerised and subdued his subject, with a pleasant smile, spoke to business. “Were they to work together?”

“If Trotter would make a fair business arrangement — — ”

“And did you ever know me make any other? Come, Sharp, you shall fix the terms yourself.” And we know how they were fixed.

“Now then, what are you going to do?”

Sharp handed over the letter just written, which Trotter took between two fingers in a listless way; he skimmed the contents with a glance; and, after a pause, spoke with clearness and decision:

“No, Sharp, this will not do. Who told you this infernal trash about *cutting down reeds, grass-seed*, and so forth? *Black* — indeed; let him stick to his *bêche-le-mêr* and Kanakas; and *Chalker*, you say, *a practical man*; it's him you are going to send up! A butcher's clerk! Now, listen to me; you've got this security in your hands; it is undoubtedly depreciated, but you could not sell the station now if you tried, even at a loss. Your object is to get your own money out of it, and as much more as you can; therefore, you must keep Windabyne, and work it to the best advantage. Well, mark what I say; there are signs of the drought breaking up, and if so, stations will be good property yet. Moreover, there is another event pending, or I, as well as others better informed, am much misled; there are parties out looking for gold over the Bathurst hills, and it is said that some returned Californians have actually found the metal.”

At this point, Sharp, in spite of his fear for his coadjutor, could no longer conceal his sense that Trotter had given way to a childish delusion. Trotter to believe such utter rot! Could any one pretending to be a sound-headed business man credit such nonsense for a moment? He suspected that he must after all have over-rated Trotter's ability in station matters — he felt as if he had made a mistake in coming to him. “Gold found! gold mines! humbug — if he said as much in the Exchange news-room, he would be laughed out of it!”

It is said that Lord Palmerston when in office, kept attached to this staff in some capacity a Major — — . He was asked what he kept him for. He said the gallant officer was his “Foolometer,” and his business was to go round the clubs and other places of resort, and hear what “everybody” said on public questions; and thus his noble patron learned the approved conventional tattle on all subjects, and he could gauge the mind of these coteries without leaving his arm-chair.

Sharp would have been well fitted for such a job from the calibre of his mind. He was so representatively commonplace, that he echoed only the obvious truisms of the day; and to him hypothesis, imagination, or any other forms of mental projection were perfectly impossible; so much so that once he provoked Trotter to remark that “he never knew anything till every ass in the country had brayed it out.”

Meantime his mentor took little notice of his ejaculations, but went on good humouredly, —

“*Theory, humbug*, you say; very well, we'll see before long; but I'm

much mistaken if we have not such a turmoil in a few weeks as has not yet been seen in Australia. No — ‘*Stations will not be smashed, — everything will not go to the dogs,*’ as you say, but plenty of stations will be for sale for an old song in the panic that likely will follow; labour will not be to be had; everything for a time will be in confusion, but afterwards, when crowds of people come here, things will shake down, and then stock and stations will probably be higher in price than ever they were before. Now, the advice I give you will be equally good whether these things come to pass or not. Get the station managed and worked as cheaply and as well as possible till things come round. When you have honest, sober, honourable people like the Smiths to deal with, you ought to stick to them; ‘*no knowledge,*’ you say, ‘*not a practical man,*’ — I tell you Major Smith and his sons know four times as much, and each of them is for any purpose worth two of your butcher's mate, Chalker. Well, with the incentive of good treatment, which I recommend, and the hope of clearing the Station, which may be supposed to be *held out* to them, you may depend upon it, they will keep the stock by hook and by crook whether shepherds are to be had or not; perhaps they may even replace the burned fencing. ‘*Hickory says that all the practical bushmen are laughing at this fencing, and saying that Smith has ruined the Station by it.*’ Does he? I have my own opinion about that. Fencing I believe will be greatly used yet. By leaving Smith and his family in possession you will get the place worked cheaply; far more economically than with a paid manager and hired men; and, by the time prices rise and the station is in good working order, your plan is to foreclose and either sell or take possession — getting rid of them of course.”

“And so you don't intend after all that they should work off their advance?”

“Work off their advance! What do you keep your books for? How can they work it off with charges accumulating at the rate of seven-and-a-half per cent. every half-year; besides with all their saleable stock, produce and payments passing through your hands?”

Sharp's little red bristles fairly stood on end at this plain speaking, and his mouth for a moment seemed to shape as if he would urge caution and prudence, but the superior boldness and cunning of his confrère awed him into silence, and, with a cool, logical gravity worthy of one Nicolo Machiavelli, Gully Trotter went on: “My good fellow, I give you the best business advice I can, in the plainest terms — ‘*you thought I advised you to stick to the Smiths as they were honest people.*’ I fully appreciate the honour and honesty of Major Smith and his family — as items of commercial value — but I by no means hold myself bound on that account to deviate from a sound and legitimate business course out of any consideration for them;” and he added, with considerable scorn, “you needn't sympathise with the ruined family, we are not at a tea-meeting,

and there are none of your pious friends present. I think, when you and I entered upon business, we had little intention of being baulked by any such whims — at least, I never had. I give you plain advice, based on good reasons, and I think, considering how we stand, you should take it. I say, let them look after the place until it is saleable at a good price, and then wind them up and have done with them. That's the only sound course. Meantime, write a short letter, such as will inspire confidence, so that they may get to work with some energy — and you may as well fix a certain limit for station expenses.”

No Italian of the middle ages could play a game in which human beings were the pawns with greater coolness and fewer scruples than our long-legged friend; and little Sharp, whose eyes had been partially unclosed to the profound treachery of the scheme marked out, speedily smoothed over such unwonted promptings by remembering that it was “merely a matter of business,” and he went and did even as Trotter told him.

## Chapter X. Rain at Last.

While business matters were being thus discussed in Sydney, our friends at Windabyne awaited their fate. Major Smith cherished little expectation of reprieve from ruin, but in the buoyant natures of the young ones, it was impossible to suppress hope. They looked to a change in the weather as likely to give things a turn in their favour. The clouds were now hanging heavy and low over the ridges and plains, and the boys watched keenly for the downpour which they thought might even yet repair the shattered fortunes of the house. And so they told their mother, "If the rain comes, a few months will show a complete change; the wretched sheep and cattle would soon recover, and a good season or two would make up for all our losses. Then Sharp's money would be safe; he would get his interest, and what more did he want? Father was too down-hearted — all was not lost — so cheer up, mother, we'll have Windabyne for many a day yet." And she, poor lady, weakened and impressible, was too happy to see her boys hopeful, and Mary was glad when her mother smiled again. But Major Smith encouraged no such hopes; he felt that there were more links in the financial chain that bound them, than his sons, in their simple calculation, deemed.

Mrs. Smith had seen into the abyss that yawned at their feet, and the fright had shaken her; but they had not, after all, fallen in, and, indeed, they might not.

"Her dear husband was too desponding, and it was not for her to add to his gloom. What the boys said, seemed reasonable. Did not her husband think so?"

"No, better to build no hope in connection with the Station, as long as the mortgage was unpaid."

"Well, he knew best, but the rain, if it came — and it looked like it — did not Mr. Elliot say that a change in the season would tell in our favour? and prices might rise? and perhaps somebody would be got to take over our business who could do more for us than Mr. Sharp?"

He only sighed and was silent; he dreaded on *her* account these alternations of hope, with the inevitable, as he believed, disappointment to follow. If the question of "ruin" were once positively accepted and looked on as finally settled, he believed that Mrs. Smith's mental vigour and courage would strengthen her to cope with their altered circumstances; but, with the symptoms of nervous disorder she had

displayed, he dreaded the wearing irritation, the strain on the mind and tender frame that would follow the changes from sanguine hope to deep depression, and Kroeber had warned him to the same effect — “Study, my good Major, to preserve in Madam the equable mind — let her not be harrassed with ups and downs. In a poor cottage, with you and her children content, she will do well. She cares not for *anything* but for you and them to be happy. But, like the constant water drop, one day hope, the next fear, will wear her away. Bah! never mind the Station, let it go. Get a post — they want men like you, Poliz Magistrat, Councillor, what not — a soldier of rank surely can find a modest place in a young colony. And the boys, what can they not do? I will back Jack, and Will, and Fred for five pounds against any young men. Go along, do what I say, and Madam will be well.”

And so our old friend wished it to be; he hoped that the uncertainty would soon be over, and then he could look for some position such as his German friend suggested; but he heard the eager, joyous voices of the young ones as they watched the floating clouds and changing signs of the weather, and he could not but involuntarily share the reviving influences that filled the household, though his inward promptings warned him against yielding to illusive imaginings, too likely fraught with bitter disappointment, and it might be with enduring sorrow to her whom he loved best.

Still withal, even in the utmost peril and distress, the human temperament is elastic; life would be sad and bitter indeed, if every grief and every disappointment made their enduring mark, or cast a pall over our daily outgoings and incomings. It is well for us that the whole scheme of nature involves daily changes, soothing influences, and pleasing variations, that yield an element of health and pleasure, even as the sunshine falls on all alike, the rich and the poor, the good and the evil, the just and the unjust.

With the middle of March, the turn of the season comes, and how pleasant is the Australian autumn, especially after a long dry summer. The sun-heat no longer pours straight on the burning soil; the earth on her course to winter has glided from under the direct influence of the day-god, and his oblique rays cast shadows at noon; fogs and dews appear at morning dawn; the clouds rest on the hills; and at length the needful electric shock bursts the treasury of waters.

As these changes come, a new page of nature is opened; the sights, sounds and odours are altogether different from those prevailing during the height of the drought; we breathe a different air; our pulses beat by a new rhythm; while joyous life bursts out anew in plant and bird and beast.

So we stood in the verandah at Windabyne watching the signs of the drought breaking up, and feeling our veins and nerves beginning to tingle

with new life — and we did not watch in vain. With dark, there was steady drizzle, and when midnight came, there was the real long-looked-for down-pour, overflowing the eaves of the house, softening the brick-like soil into mud; cracks that had yawned for months settled in and closed, and puddles stood where no water had been for a year. The river, for long little more than a chain of clear-brown waterholes, felt the swirl and the swash of a thousand streamlets, yellow and turbid, carrying before them the scorched and blackened relics of the fire. As the ridges soaked full, every cattle-track became a gutter, and as each ochre-coloured runnel spouted and jumped on its way to the main channel, joining with thousands of others, Yarombil and Wallundry came together with a roar among swaying oaks and crashing logs, to grow yet in width as the flood rushed on another hundred miles, to swell the sister stream Wolgan in its race with its kindred waters, to where the wool-laden steamers now snort and scream on their way to distant Goolwa.

And men's hearts began to revive, and the lank weary kine licked the green shoots that burst at once through the ovenlike soil, and the poor brutes seemed to be cheered as if they knew that the time of plenty was at hand; and the good wife, in many a back-country hut, brought out the carefully hoarded stores, the last half-bag of flour, and the few pounds of rice and sugar, to make plenty of good bread and pudding for the little children; and the wretched calves, that would have been killed and turned into food to save, as it was said, their own and the cows' lives, were now let go free; and the poultry, the few left, were spared; for there would be milk and beef in plenty now, and the carriers would bring everything else in abundance, as soon as there was grass on the roads.

This was well for all up-country people, and for days after joy and hope beamed on every face at Windabyne, except on that of the master of the house. His experiences of finance had branded into him the impression that there was no safety short of the extinction of the mortgage debt, and, as he sat alone, he mused of what answer would come to his letter — whether the climax would be now or in some months. In any case, sooner or later, the wreck was certain, and the ruin would be total. He had kept no separate funds, no other resources. Everything that he had in the world was in the Station and was legally the creditor's property. The proceeds of his commission, his interest in an Officers' Life Society, a little Government stock left his daughter, all had been capitalized and put in the one venture. Every article in the house; the old silver plate that his mother left him, Mary's piano (a relic of his wife's school days), all would be covered by the Deed he had signed, "a mere matter of form — a bank rule — a temporary arrangement," as Bogus smilingly told him, turning the parchment folios.

He had never put away money in any shape. His strict sense of honour, the very quality on which Trotter founded his calculations, thoroughly

verified the opinion of that shrewd financier: it made him helpless in the hands of the business men, who each and all of them feathered their nests warmly whenever they had the chance, whoever might eventually pay the cost. This fact — his absolute poverty and helplessness — stood before him like a beacon in his future track. He braced himself to think that in so many days or months — it could hardly be more — he would be without a roof, without money, without any resources or means of getting an income. His name, when he was turned out of his Station, would, he knew already, be vilified by the commercial authorities who had dug the pit for him. They could not call him dissipated or dishonest, but poverty and helplessness can be damned and libelled effectually and safely by a shrug, a sneer, or a cold shoulder. Poison-barbed slander and imputation of this kind are unanswerable.

There was, in especial, one feature in the future, pictured by our old friend, that filled him with dread and aversion. He knew well that circumstances would force him, when the crisis came, to move to town life, to Sydney, with his family. Their neighbours in the bush would urge them to stay with them; but to accept such hospitality was impossible, beyond the few weeks' interval while needful arrangements were being completed. They must keep together, and they must do something, and to Sydney they must go, for all the network of interest, power, and patronage, centred there. His clear discernment interpreted and drew in vivid outline, what the town life, toward which they drifted, would be.

The chief "town life" that he hitherto led, was that of the club or the barracks; an occasional guest at the best houses; and, until lately, honoured and welcome everywhere in the chief city. But for the ruined squatter, the man trampled on and derided by bank authorities, there was no hospitality, or even countenance to be expected. In this he knew Kroeber was wrong. It was natural for the continental, trained to look on military rank, scholarship, and character as giving a man status at all times and everywhere, that he should make the mistake. He could hardly be aware of the actual predominancy of money as a power in English-bred communities, and how it needed nothing but the name of poverty to cut a man off from all the ties of interest and connection; always saving and excepting in those favoured commercial coteries, where a heavy insolvency tells nearly as much in a man's interest as a moderate capital.

The ruined man from up the country would be unknown, unnoticed, or covertly pointed out and disparaged as impracticable — hopeless — a man "to have nothing to do with."

For him, there would not be the life of the merchantprinces, the magnificent villas — the glorious "rus in urbe," of those who counted their incomes by thousands; or the trim terraces with their wide balconies festooned with trailing creepers, and looking over tree, sward, and water, where dwell the families of officials and professional men; or even the

snug cottage built for thrifty clerk or thriving artisan, by that modern miracle-worker, the Building Society; he knew well that none of these were for him; but for the man on the downward track, there were the slummy streets, the third-class houses in the last stage of building-lease decay, with dirty, unwholesome, and vulgar surroundings, rotting with poverty and municipal neglect, and leading to a yet descending scale, a lower abyss beyond of social death: beginning with the cheap boarding-house, and ending, through easily-calculated stages, not necessarily to be realised, but still always possible and in view — in the common lodging-house.

Absit omen! He shuddered at the foul vision. Such must not be their fate — he would bring home interest to bear: he would write to old political and military friends; there must be offices suitable for him in the gift of Government, if due pressure were brought; and so he wrote letter after letter; and many a veteran of the wars, and many an old family friend shortly put old gazettes in their pockets, and revived the memories of old Under-Secretaries about Meanee, and Prome, and Bhurtpore; and strong recommendations came to Sydney in a year or two in favour of the Major; but then, there were shoals of candidates — of younger and fresher men — men, moreover, who had made themselves more agreeable at the “Lands,” and at “Government House”; for, during the satyr-like regime that preceded the gold discovery, neither the Major, his wife, nor daughter, had even been within the Vice-regal walls.

Meantime, it pleased him to write and open his heart to old cronies, and the rain poured on for days and days.

We “boys” did not now go often on the run. The less the stock were disturbed in such weather the better. They would get grass by the mouthful in a few days, and to rush them about in their weak and precarious state would cause endless disaster. Judicious watchful leaving alone — that was the best plan. Somebody would crawl down the main road through the run, and go quietly round the outside now and then, and this had to be done with caution. Much of the ground was like a quagmire, and the reckless rider was soon embogged to his girths; at least, I met with such a mishap one day I was sent to try to make my way to the Dam Station, and report on matters there. Becky floundered, and went down to her brisket, throwing me off, and rolling on her saddle, with the white spume spurting all over us; and when we got out of that, the black-soil plains were nearly as impassable — each of the mare's feet carried twenty pounds' weight of sticky mud, and she made a track like an elephant. I came back, and was well laughed at. It needed a wary bushman and a clever horseman to ride through the run now. And so we spent most of the wet days at home, getting ready our equipment, saddlery, whips, hobbles, and so on, for the muster that we must begin as soon as the ground became dry, and things were plainly mending; lowing

cows, with tender calves tottering beside them, would come round the home-paddock fence, and the bush mob of horses would race up from the distant back gullies to the well-remembered racks on the pole fence, where they used to get hay and salt, and they would whinny, and gambol, and buck, in the joy of vigour and life, and then they would dash away back to their haunts in the ridges, manes and tails plastered and tangled, scattering showers of mud, and leaving a broad, raw track through the young grass like a mail-road.

And the Major still sat every afternoon in the same seat, to muse and brood. He sat at that very window on that memorable day when Bogus came down to the white gate — just five years ago — and told him how Fixity of Tenure was passed into law, and offered him a loan in the name of Admiral Baggs and the directors of the Waratah Bank. And this rascally transaction was the cause of all the mischief impending — and this was what people called getting “capital!” How well they would have been without it. There, before him now, was the real source of wealth — the grateful rain — the teeming earth — the mighty luxuriance and genial forces of Nature. These asked only the aid of man's hand and eye to give him the riches of the herd, the field, and the forest. He saw now that the pen and ink processes sworn to and practised by financiers produced nothing — did nothing — were but shallow tricks for putting money into wrong pockets — and how mankind were gulled by these same financial rigs! He himself had been offered bread, and, lo! he found it was a stone.

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And a horseman was entering the gate again. There was his fate once more. It was the postman. A wiry, lean youth dismounted at the gate, and took the post-bag, wrapped in much oil-cloth, from the pack carried by a wild-looking filly. He hung the horses up and came to the window, where he saw Major Smith. “I hope the letters are not wet, sir — the coach reached Burrumburrah only night before last. The filly got away from me in the four-mile creek, and I thought she would be drowned, and I had to swim two other crossings.”

“Well, my lad, get your horses into the stable, and go to the kitchen yourself and get something.”

He opened the letter, and it fell from his hands. Could such things be? Sharp wished him to go on as he thought best — expressed full confidence, and desired him to draw for wages and necessaries up to a certain limit.

Was there more in this than what appeared.

## Chapter XI. Of Mustering Cattle, and Other Bush Work.

Our old friend now laid aside his distrust — at least he schooled himself to do so — to suppress the doubt that still lingered in his thoughts. Sharp must be, he felt bound to assume, either a fairer man, or a more far-seeing one, than he had given him credit for — he might indeed be both the one and the other. After all, he himself might have misinterpreted the commercial mind, and mistaken the standard of commercial morals. Undoubtedly the wisest policy for a merchant or financier, who wished to build up a high reputation, and make a powerful connection, was to befriend and support his constituents, when in difficulty, judiciously and liberally; and it might be injustice to Sharp to doubt that this was his intention now.

Simple Major! to think that such high wise forecast entered into the calculations of our smart men of the Antipodes. If he had studied the stages of Capel Court and their doings, some years before, he would have got a much truer index of the stamp of business men he had now to deal with. Indeed it may be asked *where* the Merchant-Prince that we used to read of in books is to be found now-a-days; or indeed if such a person — with the wisdom and integrity that we gave him credit for — has ever been more than a myth?

At all events, the celebrated Montague Tigg's plan of working his customers *out*, and then making a *bolt*, is more our way of trade here. We are in too great a hurry to be rich; we have no leisure to follow any other policy. Suppose that *we capitalists* worked our business, as if our interests were bound up in the solid welfare of the people of Australia; as if we were bone and fibre of the same community; if we took pride in making *men* of our clients as well as of ourselves, how could we take our *proper position* in the world? how could we spend £20,000 a year in Belgravia, rubbing shoulders with “good society,” marrying our daughters to broken-down lords, and starring the Continent, meeting on equal terms New York Oil-pumpers, Russian Spies, and Parisian Chevaliers of billiards and of industry? How could we obtain such immense advantages for our families, if we always acted on the square?

So it befel that Sharp's letter gave general satisfaction to the household at Windabyne, and all hands prepared to set to work with a will. “Of course Sharp knows which side his bread's buttered on; he's not fool

enough to ruin us. Now, if the ground was just dry, we would have a big muster. All the cattle on this side of the country will be running together down the river, and we shall have lots of help — the Girrah fellows will be sure to lend us a hand,” — “and the Donohus too” — put in Fred, the downright; for sanguine Willy had the steam up, “Oh, confound the Donohus, we'll soon drop on to them if they try any tricks — and surely we can manage to mend the fencing at odd times without more hands — there's two or three thousand of stuff lying ready split at the foot of Red Cliff; and old Lapraik can lead it in and” — “But, Willy dear,” his mother said, “remember, papa said that we must discharge some of the people; and in the first place, Biddy and James Lapraik must be paid off.” “Oh, nonsense.” “Indeed, but it is necessary, and I have just given Biddy notice.”

At this point the family argument was interrupted by a succession of sounds that would have been inexplicable to any one not acquainted with the Celtic races of Northern Europe. Beginning with short sharp ejaculations at the full pitch of a female scream, a prolonged wailing recitative or lament followed, seeming to find vent from a pair of overcharged and by no means feeble lungs, and gradually became articulate.

“Holy Mother uv Moses, an' am I to be turned out of my place by a black-hearted ruffian of an Orangeman like that thief Lapraik — och! the rotten Protestant heart uv him — to thry to be the ruin of a dacent quiet Christian girl. Och mistress dear, an' is it myself to lave ye' bekase the stony-hearted ould Scotch villian would be blasphamin' the Holy Father to me face, and me just to fling the frying-pan at him!”

“Biddy, my girl, do be quiet — Lapraik made no complaint of you; we are parting with you only because we cannot keep you.”

“Glory to God! ma'am, an' is it the wages you're manin'? an' is'nt it to raison that the master has lost by the fire — divil recaive it — an' me to lave ye for the matter of a pound or two after the gownd Miss Mary made me, an' the way ye nursed me through the measles — an' shure what'll Mick say when I told him I would wait here till he come for me — an' — ”

“Well, well, Biddy, the last argument is unanswerable, I mean you must have your own way.” So Biddy's *congé* was withdrawn, and she trotted back to her kitchen in a voluble transport of joy and glory.

Shortly thereafter, a discreet knock sounded at the door of the Major's sanctum, and Mr. Lapraik formally requested the favour of an interview. “Ye'll racollect, Major Smith, that when I hired with ye, it was for the term of twelve months, with the condection that I was to go to work in the shed if found qualified as a shearer. Noo, the twelve months is only half gane, and the shearing will not come on, aiblins till Martinmas.”

“Quite right, James — you are perfectly right; but I thought you might

prefer to take your cheque for six months now, to waiting for the shearing. That may be any time between August and January. I don't know precisely when Martinmas is."

"But, sir, I am by no means clear in my mind that it will be to my interest to shorten the term of my agreement; forbye that it would hardly be to my credit to leave certain jobs on hand half done; and I will feel much beholden, and I doubt not but what it will be greatly to your benefit, if I get my own way in this. As to the siller, I am perfectly content to leave that matter till your honour thinks proper."

"Well, James, I cannot compel you to leave, in the face of your agreement — fulfil your bargain, if you must; but you had better take your cheque now that you can get it."

However, James, with his pragmatism and self-conceit, had already retired, and thus it was impossible to get rid of either Biddy or him. The one was bound to the family by warm gratitude for kindnesses shown her; the other was prompted by the grim puritanical pride, born in him, intertwined, perhaps, with old-world ideas of fidelity and loyalty — all very excellent sentiments, and of considerable moral and political leverage in past times, but as yet little known in these parts.

So James, having got his own way, proceeded to see about getting in the fencing stuff from Red Cliff. He got the lightest horse-draw out of the shed, but Binebbera stood and yelled at him, and laughed aloud — "Ba-al that fella yan, Jeems," remarked the indigène, "that fella wheel cut him ground altogether!" and he showed, how, in the boggy ridges, the wheel would go down to the nave, and the body of the draw would be aground. James eyed the heathen savage with disfavour. Could an unbelieving effigy like that teach anything to a Christian man? Was neither his former dignity as an Elder, nor his skilled character as a horticulturalist, to save him from being sat upon and derided by rogues and fools of all sorts, in this cursed half-made and wholly botched country?

But Binebbera grinned all the more as James scowled; and, forcing open the door of an old fowl-house, he raised a perfect tornado of screeching and fluttering, while he dragged down an article, seemingly in use as a perch, but which, on examination, turned out to be a very simple, light, but efficient sled, made out of the forked limb of a scrub ash. "Look yere, Jeems, you nail him two cross piece alonga here, and that fella carry altogether post and rail; and me put him two fella bullock — long spare chain — Nobby and Yallaman; and then you and me bring him fence büdgerie — eh ghindi! — baal mine pumpkin cobra!"\*

James saw the sense of the contrivance, and the way that the two bullocks and the sled glided over boggy ridges that would have engulfed a cart and horse, gained his warm approbation; so much so that he relaxed so far as to enter into frank unreserved conversation with his dusky companion, and gave him at length an explanation as to the causes

of wrath in connection with the recent disruption of the Erastian Establishment, all which Binebbera heard and assented to heartily; and I have little doubt that he comprehended nearly as much of the subject as many of our Melanesian converts do of their creeds and catechisms. Probably, with equal advantages of education, Binebbera would have made an excellent aboriginal bishop; however, worse luck, he never got beyond the narrow spheres of stock-keeping, droving, and rough-riding.

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In another week the creeks had fallen; the ground was getting dry, and one could ride anywhere; at least, Mr. Donohu with his sons and some neighbours had evidently been enjoying an early canter, for, on the morning we speak of, they came home to breakfast, and brought before them a fine, quiet mob of cows and calves, which they put into the yard at Rover's Flat.

The old gentleman appreciated the advantages of early rising; healthy he was — as far as a diet of neat rum would permit — wealthy he hoped to be, and, indeed, was in a fair way of being; and wise he undoubtedly thought himself — “what he didn't know wasn't worth knowing.” In a listless way he got off the ragged but hardy and active nag he rode, and walked round the yard, looking at the horned stock within. “Well, well, how them cattle is fallen off; them fences and that green washy feed is the death of them!” This was a theory of Mr. Donohu's; cattle wanted liberty; did not do within paddocks; and they did not agree with the grassy flats of the Yarombil. They did much better at Rover's Flat. Anyone looking over the stock, however, could see, not only that they were in very fair order after such a drought as that which ended only six weeks before, but also that a very large proportion of them were branded on the ribs, W over diamond. But these facts did not seem to attract the patriarch's attention. He continued to commiserate the “poor things.” The humane man seemed deeply to feel the maltreatment that they had undergone.

Morgan Donohu, meantime, was lighting his pipe, and in an absent way he raked together some leaves and strips of bark, and applied a match to them. Little Dan then laid sticks together, and fed the fire in a purposeless kind of way, as if he hardly knew what he was about; while Johnny sauntered out with a bag containing branding-irons, in a slouching easy way, as if it did not matter much. Pat, who had been gazing intently at a particular calf, at length ejaculated, “Well, I'm blessed!” “What's up?” said Morgan. “Didn't ye see that snaily-horned brindle cow on the Cherry Tree Flat? Well, if we haven't dropped her! but that's her calf there.” “But,” chirped Dan, “the calf's a-suckin' a cow with that there W diamond on.” “And what of that, Dan'l?” said the

senior, "calves isn't particular no-ways; but, anyhow, if Pat says it's the brindle cow's calf, it belongs to your sister Sally. Calves is no-ways to be trusted, nor brands neither for that matter. Now that W diamond brand, they say old Smith claims it. I know hundreds of people as has got brands like that; a man can brand anyways he likes, surely. I got some like that myself. There's that cow there without the tail (Stumpy, no less!), I know that cow for six year, that's Polly's. Live and let live is what I holds by." Then the brands were put in the fire.

The family now responded to Mrs. Donohu's call to breakfast, and let us hope that they enjoyed their meal with the gusto produced by early habits, healthful exercise, and a delicious, bracing atmosphere. They did not dawdle over it though, but were out as soon as the brands were heated, and in much less time than you could think possible, every calf had the mark of proprietorship imprinted on his hide. Questions of maternity or ownership were not raised, or, if hinted at, were overruled by the senior. "The strawberry cow! — and supposin' she belongs to Smith, who's sayin' anything agin' it? Only, if she's his, why don't he look after her? But that don't concern the calf. Ye don't know nothing about it more nor them young swells. Them know about c-y-attle! Their father had to fence in the paddocks to keep them from losing themselves; and now the fences is burned, they can't find a beast. No doubt they're well enough to set in the drawing-room and read picture-books, but they can't tell me anything about mothering calves. I know my own calves, and them's mine — so put away the irons, boys, and let the poor beasts out to feed."

The calves were *not* let out yet, but the cows were hunted with dogs and stock-whips over a certain gap a few miles off; it was as well to wean *them*, at least all that could be weaned.

There was one characteristic in these doings of the Donohus that was consistently maintained, which was, that they never admitted that they were in any way meddling with what was not their own. Their everyday speech, their theories of property, their nomenclature, and their ideas of geography, were perfectly distinct from those authorised and used by such people as our friends at Windabyne. Indeed they knew nothing of "Windabyne," or of the "Yarombil." The one was "old Smith's," the other "Ruggy's Creek." They knew nothing of "Runs," and localities, and distances were dealt with on the most elastic principle; and, in the way they put things, incident and circumstance were so enveloped in hyperbole and fiction, that it would have been quite impossible to translate their meaning into the common speech of honest men. For instance, all cattle adventures occurred either in the "Oaks" or "down the Creek." "The Oaks" really consisted of a patch of dwarf casuarina scrub in the gap leading to the Yarombil, of about a hundred acres in area; but it was the custom to speak of the spot as an illimitable wilderness, where

there were thousands of cattle that no white man ever saw; and where new chums "like them Smith's" might be lost for days. "Down the Creek," it is needless to say, comprised all the lower cattle stations, and "the cattle that no man ever saw" consisted of the stock running on these, with a wing of the Windabyne short-horns when opportunity offered, as at present.

It followed from this habitual mystification that the views of "meum and tuum" bred in the younger members were naturally somewhat peculiar, and no doubt if Johnny Donohu had been asked "whose cattle these were in the yard," he would not have been conscious of any breach of integrity, if he had answered, "them's father's ky-ettle" — while Dan, three foot six inches high, with a stock-whip wound round him, and half a pair of braces supporting a pair of somebody else's trousers, when one of these days our old friend Stumpy was pointed out to him with the Windabyne brand on her side plain enough to be seen a quarter of a mile off, stated plump out with all the confidence of innocence, "that's Polly's *keaow*."

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All was now ready for the muster, but we were puzzled on which side to commence. The herd was scattered like a burst bag of peas: we knew or guessed where a portion were, but there were some large mobs that we could hear or see nothing of, and there were others that we thought should be looked to and got together for pressing reasons. The quiet mobs that hung round the home paddocks and milking yards, also those that had straggled on to the sheep run, and some hundreds that had crossed the river and got on to the Girrah flats, to escape the fire — these all could be collected at any time, there was no difficulty about them; but there was the large camp of cows and young ones with the old pure bred Durham bull that got his tail burned — they were away, and we could hear or see nothing of them. Willy had been down the river a long way, a week before, and it was his report that decided our course of proceeding. He had seen nothing of the missing lot, but he had found animals with the Windabyne brand on different camps in twos and threes all the way down for fifty miles, and he had noticed sundry symptoms of movement among the stock-keeping fraternity of the river, that led him to advise immediate action.

The reed-beds were already green and strong in growth, but there was not a beast moving through them; nor the trace of a hoof on the tracks, that, beaten hard for years, intersected them in all directions. The vegetation was even covering these paths — hardened though they were. A few months more of sun and moisture, and every bare spot would be obliterated, carpeted by a luxuriant thicket of reeds, flags, and cane-

grass. Thousands of cattle would now fatten on the same ground where a few months ago hundreds starved.

So, at length, we made our way down the river, across the Six-mile Creek; and there I pointed out that the mounds of drift had all been burned, and that new piles of grass and brush-wood were rising in their places.

Had the fire really been originated by these masses of damp vegetation fermenting? Who could tell now?

In this semi-tropical clime, when Nature awakens from her torpor of drought, the features of stream and forest are changed so quickly — all old tokens and marks are rubbed out, and the fresh page opened tells nothing of the past. Nevertheless, there were patently the same causes at work, competent to work the same results again; a few more freshes, and a few more months of sunshine, and these mounds and piles of inflammable matter would grow as big as before.

There was not a trace of cattle here, so we went down to the lower boundary, nine miles farther. Here was the last fence; about half-a-mile of it had been burned down. At this gap we first struck a trail, but it was not recent. It showed that long strings of cattle of all sizes and ages had gone through. Some apparently had passed immediately after the fire and before the rain, and others while the rain was falling.

We were now beyond the lower boundary, and on a disputed block of country. It had been supposed that it was included in Tarrandong Station, which belonged to a Mr. Bold, whom his neighbours had never seen, and knew nothing of, except that he lived in Sydney; but it had been made to appear at the Lands Office that this was vacant country, and it was consequently covered by a tender put in by some unknown man called Brown. There was a tree at the mouth of a creek marked B, and a black boy, who had been out with the Commissioner, said that the Orderly marked the tree. It was a queer story. The Commissioner had owed a heavy wine bill, it was said, in Sydney, and it was also said, that at a critical moment the block of country had been sold by auction, and that it was bought by a Burrumburrah store-keeper who had dealings with the Donohus. There was little doubt that Bold was juggled out of this country by the Commissioner. *He* was a fine old gentleman, who had many friends and many claims upon him.

The head station, Tarrandong, was twenty miles below. We had written to the overseer in charge, that we intended to begin muster on a certain day — the 25th, I think — but we got no answer. We heard afterwards, from the postman, that there was nobody at home but a stockman who could not read, and that some of the Donohus were with him. “Sugarhands,” the postman, (his real name was Joe Grant, but the nearest approach to the pronunciation that the blacks could make, was “Sugarhands,” and so he was always called. Try to pronounce “Joe Grant”

aboriginal fashion, and you will find how the name gets transmogrified); well, "Sugar-hands," the postman, said that he told the stockman what he understood was the object of the letter, who answered, "As to mustering, it was nothing to him; they might suit themselves." This stockman was called Jack Mooney, and he had low wages from Mr. Bold, but he claimed and realised certain perquisites on branding; keeping a brand of his own. There was another of the same kidney, called Ruggy Ned — what these worthies' real names were nobody thought of asking — and he lived at the upper end of the debatable block, where there was a hut and tailing-yard; and immediately behind this out-station there was a gap that led at no great distance to Rover's Flat, the abode of the Donohu family.

My intelligent reader, if he can interpret these facts, may have already surmised that neither Mr. Bold's cattle nor his neighbours' were likely to increase in number, if a friendly understanding existed among these good people; and the consequences of his residence in the metropolis of Australia did not end there. His presence on his station would have prevented a vast deal of mischief and demoralisation in the district; but like many other wealthy gentlemen, Mr. Bold thought only of getting all he could out of his runs at as low a cost as possible; and in the plan he followed he made a most woeful blunder.

So, when Walbaligo shouted out, "Umma! Mister Jack, fresh horse-track here," we felt that, in our vernacular idiom, "something was up."

I speak of "we" — but my readers will of course understand that at this early period of my probation, I did not individually comprehend such matters. I learned the science of bushmanship, and that yet more complex study, "colonial experience," through the teaching of much toil and observation. Hence, I did not see the significance of our coming, at that spot, and at that time, on the fresh track of a shod horse.

The track was followed carefully in one direction for half-a-mile; then the rider seemed to have dismounted and allowed the horse to browse about close-hobbled. Walbaligo jumped off and peered about; at length he called out — "here he goes" — and pointed to the track going off at an angle, evidently at a sharp canter; at the same time he made a dive in the grass and picked up a small fragment of silk evidently fresh off a whip-crack. "Directly find him now" — and as he jumped on the saddle, his eyes flashed with that peculiar glee always shown by our aborigines, when any adventure or sport is on hand. I was beginning to wonder what this would lead to, when, while spurring on at a canter, he threw his horse all at once on his haunches with a sharp jerk. "All right; that fella been run him cattle." And, indeed, even I could see now how the ground was cut with many hoofs. Jack alighted quickly, "Now, Reggy, you stop where you are, and mark the spot. Go on ahead, Walbaligo, and the rest of you spread out to the left and go round the track; I expect the villains

have been too quick for us.” The black-boy now pushed ahead, running the trail at a fast amble, while I stopped where I was, and the rest of the party dismounted and spread away to the left, quartering the ground, and peering into every broken grass blade and fresh clod of earth. Before three minutes they had read the sign like a book. Five or six horsemen had swept round the river bank in a circle, driving a large mob of cattle together, and these had been rallied on the spot, blocked by the man whose track we had first come upon. A loud “ki” from Walbaligo showed that he had found what was expected, namely, that the whole lot in one dense mob and followed by the riders, had gone off towards the tailing yard, up the creek.

These might indeed be Mr. Bold's cattle, but it was just as likely that they were not, and Willy's report made it very desirable that we should be certain. Knowing that we intended to begin muster, it would have looked better if Mr. Jack Mooney had waited till we came down the river before *he* began. In any case, there was good reason that we should not waste daylight over it, but should see at once what this mob consisted of.

When Willy passed along a few days before, he had not seen a sign of a beast here, and that circumstance, with what we saw now, prompted at least a suspicion of foul practice. It seemed as if the gang — if they were to be so considered — had set to work in anticipation of our avowed intention to muster; but that, naturally, they had expected us to begin at the other end of the run; hence, if so, we had caught them, as it were, in the fact.

We were at once mounted, and pushed on at a brisk handgallop. The track through the young grass was as plain as a parish road, and it was quite clear, as we got over the ground, that they had passed but lately, and were moving at a brisk pace for cattle. But no cattle can keep up such quick travelling long; especially such as these, weakened by long fasting, and then, as it were, surfeited with washy young feed; if pushed, they would lie down in a few miles, so we knew we were certain to pull them before long.

Suddenly, as we passed a scrubby ridge almost within sight of the tailing yard, a stock-whip sounded ahead of us, and we rushed in at full speed. There they were! about three hundred cattle standing as if rounded up in the middle of a flat, just as they had been driven, but not a soul was near them. We examined the brands and there was no doubt now of the game that we had stopped; three-fourths of the whole were Windabyne cows with calves by their sides, and a very telling piece of evidence appeared in that some dozen of the calves, though following W diamond cows, had on them, put quite lately, the grid-iron scroll brand used by old Donohu. This was a kind of brand much used by regular duffers or cattle thieves, as it effaced previous marks, if these were not very distinct. The including of those branded calves in this lot was doubtless not intended,

but they could not well be separated till they reached the yard, and so they fell into our hands.

In these later days, since Mr. Bruce's Act has been law, a bowl-out of this kind might have supplied evidence for a criminal prosecution; but, at the time mentioned, it would have been difficult to bring a case before a jury on the strength of the mis-branding of the calves. Donohu would likely have passed it off as a mistake, and would have offered to give us others in exchange; and the cattle of different owners then ran so much together, that such an explanation and restitution would have been considered fair and satisfactory; but if we had succeeded in pouncing upon them in the act of driving, then the intent would have been so obvious, that we would have been justified in arresting them, and in using any force necessary to do so. This they knew, and therefore they vanished at once as soon as they saw that they were followed. Their tracks, we found, scattered in all directions, and doubtless they met soon again at one of their haunts.

We lost no time in cutting out the cattle of other brands, and then headed the mob for the boundary fence. The sun was getting down towards the west when we got the now wearied animals to the Six-Mile Creek; farther, they could not go; it would be necessary to camp and watch them for the night. And yet time was precious, if we hoped to recover the remainder of the scattered herd. Before the drought and the fire, there were six thousand cattle on Windabyne. Now, all that we knew of did not count much over two thousand. An equal number would be a large allowance for the decrease and casualties of the year, and this estimate would leave two thousand head still unaccounted for. The forest country between Red Cliff Range and the lower boundary was the only part of the run where any number could be hidden, and Jack proposed that this should be thoroughly ransacked at once before renewing our search outside. He believed, or, indeed, knew, from the event of this day, as well as from his brother's report, that the remaining part of the herd not on the run would be found, if found at all, scattered through the cattle of other owners, more or less honest. How many of the full-grown stock, as well as of the calves, might have already been spirited away, probably would never be learned. There was no telegraph line then to Maiden's Punt, to Wilcannia, or to Adelaide, that would set mounted troopers and trackers to watch drove roads, and stop overland thieves; and, in a wet season, if stock were once got away into the back country, they might be travelled across the continent without a chance of being intercepted. Some of the W over diamond short-horns might, even now, be stringing over the Darling Plains, on their way to the Burrah Copper-mines, or the shores of Spencer's Gulf. But, even if so, it was best first to search the Run thoroughly through, in order to see what camps or mobs were actually missing, before going further.

As we dismounted, to breathe our horses and eat the slender stock of lunch that we had in our saddle-pouches, a welcome sight appeared, rising from the thicket of river-oaks. It was Bob Short and Jack Rawson, each mounted on his best nag, and leading a spare stock-horse, carrying a pack. Both looked in right trim for work, from spur-leather to crupper, and they dashed up the bank, their steeds shying and snorting with life and frolic. It was a treat to see two such young fellows — true sons of the bush — with all their fixings workmanlike and complete — their long, well-oiled, horse-hide whips slung at their sides; their well-fitting, pliant brown leggings, and their strong, coloured shirts, open at collar and sleeve, showing their dark-browed throats and well-turned arms. Saddles, bridles, girths and stirrups, all proved by their appearance that they had been thoroughly overhauled and made fit for a fortnight of serious hard and rough work. Many scores of such riders have I seen in the old days, when co-operative musters were the fashion. Now, that kind of thing is all done by hired men, and squatters and their sons drive in buggies, and do their squatting by book-keeping — a method of double-entry, in which their bankers and land-agents fill alternate columns in their accounts. No doubt the present practice looks more business-like.

We gave the new-comers three cheers at once, and demanded what they had in their packs. The answer was opportune — “Damper, flour, tongues, hung-beef, tea and sugar.” This supply, and their presence, proved a lift to us. It got over a difficulty. We could now divide the party, and go on with more work this same afternoon. Fred and Short would keep the rescued cattle in camp, and take them to the Station next morning. Willie, Rawson, and Walbaligo would sweep down the river at a quick pace, and drive down on to the flats whatever they met. They would camp near Tarrangdong, and, in the morning, after giving notice at that station, they would come up the river, cutting out all Windabyne cattle as they came along. Jack and I were to go right back through the wooded and hilly country under the Red Cliff Range. This division of the party would make sure of any of the herd yet on the lower part of the run, or within twenty miles down the river, and, moreover, it would be certain to result in obtaining information that would serve to guide our future movements.

Red Cliff, the abrupt volcanic peak to which our riding-party went the day before the fire, formed the apex of a series of low broken ridges, the backbone of a peninsula, around which the Yarombil bent its course. The reed-beds, at their greatest width, were at the lower extremity of this peninsula; and the cattle camp and the South Bend, from which we saw the advance of the fire, was on the extreme end of the ridge. The peninsula was cut across at its narrowest neck by the fence of the Big Cattle Paddock, which, likewise, intersected the Six-mile Creek about eight miles above its mouth, and nearly the same distance from its source

near the peak. On the left bank of this creek, beyond the fence, began the sheep-run, and on the right bank, down to the lower boundary fence, were the paddocks for weaners and fattening stock; this last side was not wholly fenced, but was considered secure, being backed up by the rough country to which I was to accompany Jack. To finish the geography of the Run, I may say, that North-East from Red Cliff, on the bank of the river about seven miles off, lay our head station, and that about due North from the same peak was Donohu's shanty, about the same distance; these three points thus forming an equilateral triangle; consequently, the best way to reach Donohu's was to cross the plain at the end of the sheep-run, and on scrambling through some boulders and scrub — the fag-end of the ridge — you would be right on the top of the stock-yard and shanty. Jack told me that he meant to make a dash in this fashion with the grey of the morning, and see what he could drop on to.

So we started on our way through the forest country. It appeared to my companion just within the bounds of possibility, that some of the quiet cattle might be hidden within the gullies and glades of those wooded hills. Some of these recesses ran a long way into the range; mere fissures and breaks in the rocks, their bottoms filled with soil, and, no doubt, now containing grass and water, but narrow and tortuous, indeed, worthless for pasture in an ordinary season; but the variety of sweet herbage that would follow the rain in these stony solitudes, and the craving for a change of diet natural to all animals, might have enticed some of the stock to leave the more level ground. It is wonderful how all cattle, but old cows particularly, will crawl and climb, of their own free will, over scaurs, along dizzy sidelings, and up precipitous spurs, while it is often hard work to drive them over level ground. The whole extent of this rough hill and forest country was not above a block of five miles by five. An ordinarily open or undulating tract of the same extent we could have hunted with tolerable certainty in three or four hours; zig-zagging across it once or twice would have told whether there were any stray mobs there; but in the labyrinth presented by these wooded dells and tortuous glens, there was no making a straight through course. We could follow up a main spur, and thus reach the highest ground. When there, we might possibly be able to see what was below us, but it was not at all unlikely that if we saw cattle within two hundred yards, we would need to go a mile round to get near them. Again, if we went up one of the gullies, most likely we would have to come back the same way. Our task, then, could hardly be but slow, difficult work.

Jack decided that we had better make for the top of the leading ridge, as it gave a chance of seeing about us, and we soon cleared the lower slopes, and in half-an-hour were leading our horses, scrambling and stumbling among broken whin-stone and slate up an ascent like the roof of a house. The top of this rise shewed only a short descent on the other

side, and entailed a repetition of the climb over a second pinch, and we kept on at this, making our way slowly till the short twilight of these latitudes found us on what looked like the main spur: a long, winding, saddle-back ridge gradually rising to what looked like a flat table-land at no great height above us. We just reached this table-land with the dark, in time to find a small puddle of water; so we hobbled our horses, lit our fire, boiled our tea, and made ourselves comfortable for the night. I must say I was tired — however, we both ate heartily, and I soon fell asleep. I awoke in a few hours, feeling chilly. Jack was away. I heard the clank of the hobble-chains, and so guessed he was going round the horses. He had piled plenty of wood on the fire, and the heat was grateful. The moon was rising, throwing her weird light over the gaunt gum trees, and tinting with her silvery beams the plains that now appeared under my feet, and the dark line of oaks that marked the distant course of the river; and I was trying to trace out different spots that I remembered — when a sound arose within a few hundred yards that made me jump; again and again it filled the night air, echoing and re-echoing among the woods and rocks, now in a high-pitched long sustained cadence, and again in roars of thunder. Jack ran up. “Hurrah, we've got them — I'll bet anything that's our old short-horn Brutus — the mob is not far off. Poor old fellow — he's a trump. The horses are close to — I wish it was daylight. Let's make it breakfast time — I could do another feed — it'll pass the time — I can't sleep, I'm sure.” I ventured to express some objection to this wild and profligate proposal of Jack's. “Eating all our grub at once,” as he said, “would save us carrying it.” Such a Bohemian theory! However, I was over-ruled, and we fell to and polished our supplies off handsomely. We had only a light poncho each to cover us, which we used to carry strapped to our saddles, and we got through the rest of the dark hours better seated at the fire than if we had lain down again. The autumn nights were now cool.

At last the daylight came, and we were able to examine the ground on which we had encamped. It was a flat expanse, covered with honey-combed basalt! The melted lava had evidently been arrested, when liquid, by some agency that we cannot guess at. In places it lay in solid sheets, but it was mostly in fragments. There were the air bubbles that the seething mass had enclosed and hardened around — who shall say how long ago? and from the crevices, where lodged the slowly decomposed volcanic soil, there shot up tufts of sweet blue grass, which our horses had been greedily devouring all the night. The only trees on the plateau were dwarf blood-woods very thinly scattered. We soon started, and we had not gone far before we came on numerous traces of the cattle. We found it better to walk than to ride; the poor nags blundered and stumbled so over the hard slippery boulders; it was lucky they were well shod; but we had not far to go over this ground, the whole

extent of the tableland was not above half-a-mile across. Becky shortly gave a tremendous flounder, and nearly came on her nose, and I jerked her mouth and yelled at her, when a horned head popped up above the surface of the ground and stared; then the owner of the same, whom we recognised as a cow belonging to the South Bend Camp, climbed out of a chasm and stood at gaze. She snuffed, tossed her head, wheeled round, and dived again into the fissure, and then we heard the clatter of hoofs, and the skurry of a mob bolting. "Get on your horse," said Jack, "I declare they're getting wild." We scrambled down the dip, and found ourselves in a depression — as it were, the lip of a vessel from which the lava had overflowed: this was the source, apparently, of a long gully or creek, down which we could hear the cattle making their way. As we got past the boulders, we quickened our pace, and we saw by the ground that there was before us a large mob of all sorts — cows and calves chiefly. We cast about to right and left as we could find footing, and made our whips rouse the echoes of the rocks — at least Jack's whip made a terrific noise, enough for two. We wanted to make sure that none of the lot were left behind, and now we felt the pleasure of the muster — the work that savours of sport. We held our horses hard, as they were getting hot with the chase. We had to take the ground as it came — scramble, jump, prop, splash, logs, boulders, and all as they turned up. Moreover, our course often lay down hill at a very forbidding gradient, and my seat was sorely tried. Jack went over everything like part of his famous horse, Doctor, and Becky took me along somehow. A turn of the narrow gully showed that we were getting nearer level ground, and shortly appeared down a sloping hill-side before us the wide fresh track, with odour of crushed herbage, and the fresh milky steam of the cattle filling the fragrant air. Another bend brought them in sight, and they were now dropping down to a steady pace, and in half an hour more the great torrent of beef, with clatters of hoofs and horns, came out between the high rocky banks of a blind gully into the Six-Mile Creek, a few hundred yards above the fence.

We had met with great luck in finding the cattle, and in getting them out so easily. If we had not happened to camp on the table-land, we might have spent days in going up the different gullies looking for them.

When they found themselves near their old quarters, they wheeled round and stood as if they were in camp — the old bull walking soberly a little apart as he used to do. There were not less than five hundred grown animals, and they were identical with the missing camp of the South Bend, almost to a beast.

How they got up through these gullies and remained on the range without leaving a trace on the lower ground, was at first a puzzle; but, no doubt, they had drawn, in the first place, up the sandy bed of the blind gully, attracted by rough grass that had escaped the fire, and then, when

the rain came, their tracks in the sand would be washed out, and the sweetness and variety of the young growing herbage would tempt them to go higher and higher, till at length they reached the basaltic plateau.

“But,” I said, “such a number of cattle could never live up there.” “Not all the year round, certainly,” said Jack, “but this is an unusual time, and while the present growth lasts, they might find feed for a good while yet.”

“But why did they not come back to the plain and reed-beds where they used to run?”

“I suppose they enjoyed the change, and no doubt variety of food does them good. It is lucky they had not forgotten their old teaching; a year of life in the ranges would make the young ones as wild as kangaroos. But, after all, I expect we would have seen them down before the winter was over.”

The latent capacity of our very worst back country has ever since this been apparent to me. If a chance fall of rain makes a back gully, usually quite worthless, able to keep five hundred cattle for some months, what may we not look for with improvements to be carried out some day, when good laws have grown from advanced intelligence, and industry and honesty have become our rules of daily life.

We now started to crawl slowly homeward. By night we reached the big herding paddock. We were both fagged, and I was fairly famished. We had eaten nothing since we took our breakfast overnight. Starvation did not seem to affect Jack; he was tough, but I had still the new-chum gristle in me. Jeems Lapraik opened the gates, and came round to us while the horned multitude hurtled and jammed each other into the well-remembered roomy enclosure. “Aye lads,” remarked the oracle, “ye hae gotten a when o' the beasts. Ye'll hae the deevil and a' noo, Maister John; thae born idiots the herds, Sailor Jack and Limping Jerry, and Bothered Bill — they're a' clean daft and away after the gold. They've found the real stuff this time in bushels, and aiblins ye'll be able to buy a sovereign for a four-penny bit, believe. Muckle will they get, and a hantle of gude it will do them — born idiots!”

We could not at first make out what the old fellow was maundering about; but presently the great fact burst upon us. Gold had been discovered — the colony was in an uproar, and all hands on the Station, except Lapraik and Bidy, were off to the diggings.

\* He meant that *his* head was not a pumpkin!

## Chapter XII. The Gold Discovery, and What Happened in Consequence.

The convulsion of 1851 told in the social and political life of Australia as a volcanic upheaval acts in nature. All relations were at once disjointed, and it tells much in favour of the people that society was not torn with intestine discord and crimes of violence.

The colonial population might be barbarous, drunken, and ignorant, but the vast majority still proved themselves to be kindly, peaceable, and fairly honest.

There was little or no crime on the gold-fields for the first two years; and at the critical moment, the ruling powers grasped the situation with marvellous forecast. A venerable gentleman,\* lately gone from among us, whose memory will be long held in honour and esteem, then in his prime, was the Administrator of the day. By him, the first Commissioner was appointed, with full power to represent the Crown on the gold-fields, and John Richard Hardy rode on to Ophir one afternoon, with trooper Flanagan behind him.

The Commissioner fixed a piercing eye on the first cradle he came to; then he dismounted, selected a soft stone as a judgement-seat, and proceeded there and then to administer Government and collect Revenue.

“Your names?”

“John Tom Lane, sir,” etc., etc.

“Getting lots of gold?”

“So, so, sir; we're just beginning to get into it.”

“Well, you must pay me each thirty shillings for a month's license, and that will secure you each a claim of so many feet frontage with so many feet back.”

These gentlemen having paid their fees cheerfully, the Commissioner went down the creek, taking each party as he came. There had been a deal of bounce talked the night before round camp fires about sending the Commissioner back; but now, under the influence of example and the instinct of obedience, disaffection became mute; and the bush lawyers and rowdies who had tried to suggest disturbance, found that their game was hopeless: there was nothing left for them to do but to dodge the collection of the fee, and make money Donohu-fashion — by planting horses, stealing cattle, and selling bad grog on the sly.

The difficulty of government was solved, and the Gold Commissioner,

a Department of Administration in his own person, went about issuing licenses, hearing complaints, giving advice, and talking freely to all and sundry.

One man only, on being addressed, took no notice of Mr. Hardy. He would neither stop work, answer when spoken to, nor pay his thirty shillings. The official remonstrated with him patiently, and pointed out that he must and would have attention and obedience; he would not speak for nothing. The man, a stolid Saxon, gazed into vacancy, and squirted tobacco-juice into the creek. He had made up his mind that he had come there to get gold, and that he "didn't want no more masters." Her Majesty's representative waited a few more seconds to give him a last chance; then, counting, one — two — three, to himself, he sent cradle, hopper and all, flying into the muddy gravel with a smart right-handed kick. The owner looked black as thunder, and grasped his shovel; but he was alone, his mates took no notice, and Mr. Flanagan stood before him with a pistol in one hand and a pair of handcuffs in the other. The rebel looked up and down the slate gully in vain; where were the flash men who had made the night re-echo their brags and profanities? *They* were nowhere. But there were plenty of grey, and blue, and brown eyes fixed intently on *him*, and there were signs that pick-handles and axes might, if required, be wielded in defence of law and order. So black rebellion had nothing else for it. She had to smooth her wrinkled brow.

In the years following, the Gold Fields Staff were often blamed for the irritating manner in which they carried on their duty. Certainly, many of the officers, subsequently appointed, did not possess the tact and intuition of their Chief, but admitting such deficiencies, the fact remains that the main difficulties of management, and the harshness and arbitrary character of the system ensuing, arose directly from the peculiarities of the semi-criminal section of the population. The hard-working, decent people never gave any trouble to the officials, and on the first opened fields never received discourtesy from them; but, as time went on, the pursuit of gold-hunting was abandoned by all who had other resources, and thousands of men who worked for the first year on the Ophir and Turon, returned to their trades, their stores, their farms, and their stations. Consequently, the population remaining on the fields, shewed the objectionable leaven more plainly than before, and the outskirts were infested by old hands of all kinds, ticket-of-leave men, shanty-keepers, horse and cattle stealers, and runaways of all sorts. These were the sections of the populace that gave trouble to the authorities, and it was in dealing with them that a method of supervision came into use, well-adapted, no doubt, for enforcing obedience from mutinous galley-slaves, but singularly unsuitable when applied to free men, working in good faith, doing everything in the light of day, and conscious of their rights and duties.

The greatest blunder of all occurred when the Victorian Gold Fields opened, and the administration of the same was left to an inexperienced staff that adopted all the most objectionable features of the New South Wales method, without judgment or consideration.

People fresh from the Mother Country, from the Continent of Europe, and from America, resented being addressed as if they were escaped convicts. It might be necessary to hunt down, pistol in hand, a horse-stealer from the Abercrombie, or an expiree burglar from Sydney; but it was not the way to deal with a party of young London tradesmen, New York artisans, or German students; and of such as these was made up the heterogeneous multitude that swarmed to Melbourne within a year or two of the discovery.

Chaining to a tree, for want of a lock-up, might be right enough in the case of Snuffling Jim, forger, cracksman, and prize-fighter; but, certainly, it was most inappropriate in the case of Thomas Williams, bank clerk from the city, for the reason that the said bank clerk had not got a license; yet, such was the absence of nous and discrimination in the authorities, that these things were done.

In reality, it wanted men like Mr. Hardy to work out and adjust the system, besides initiating it; but some of the young Sub-Commissioners were quite without the capacity to comprehend their Chief's policy. They could never understand that, though kicking over cradles, and chaining recusants to trees, might be the right thing with mutinous convicts, nevertheless, that such treatment was both inexpedient and indefensible if applied to orderly, law-abiding people.

The stampede which appeared on all the roads was one of the most remarkable and amusing features of this period. The lame, the halt, the deaf; men, women and children; shepherds of the pattern of our friends Bothered Bill and Sailor Jack, tramped along till, in many cases, they were pulled up by the public-houses. Some reached the diggings to starve, others got gold only to achieve their fate in bad rum. Some lost heart almost before they reached the goal of their hopes, and turned back; one man trudged resolutely and footsore a week's journey, and then set to, to fossick in the slate-rock with a shear-blade; a man with wife, child and family belongings, came up wheeling a barrow, the wife pulling ahead as leader, the child seated among the household goods. The Flying Pieman, one of the crack pedestrians of all time, started with the coach from the corner of King Street, and arrived first at Sofala. He was a marvellous walker; he flashed through the Turon claims like a meteor, selling his pies, and tossing heads or tails, with speculative diggers. Old Jorrocks, the race-horse, came up as a hack, carrying a well-known journalist and doctor.

In fact, the world of Australia, as it was then, met on Sofala Flat. On Sundays and holidays, there could be seen twenty thousand men,

including all the youth and vigour of the colonies, where the present township is.

Victoria was then but newly separated from the mother colony, and the cream of her small population came to the first discovered fields among the Bathurst hills. Queensland was not yet; but many of the pioneers of the future colony stopped exploring and forming new stations for a season, to try their hands at the gold drifts in the icy streams of the Blue Mountains.

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Meantime, while these marvels appeared, we at Windabyne were left on the Station almost without hands. Every shepherd had taken himself off. The bullock driver and his mate; the long lads who hung about and could be reckoned on to lend a hand at mustering and yard work; the floating labour of the country that did the shearing in the season, and spent the rest of the year in fencing and odd jobs — all were gone up the northern track, and it was said that the Donohus themselves were talking of selling their business and right of brand.

If *they* cleared out, it would be a blessed riddance; we might then finish our muster without danger of any more depredations. But the flight of the shepherds left a problem behind; and James Lapraik did, not without reason, pile maledictions on their heads.

Hitherto, it had been generally held as an established rule among the flock-owners of the colony, that sheep could not thrive, or indeed eat grass, unless they were kept in a close yard all night, and hunted about by a man and two dogs all day. The proprietor of Windabyne had indeed tried to modify the rigour of this method: and in fact he had once taken occasion to point out to Sailor Jack, by ocular proof, that sheep could actually supply their own wants without being so tended.

Three hundred weakly weaners had been put into a close-fenced little paddock, a sheltered grassy spot — and being carefully left alone, they very soon began to look as if the joy of life had not quite departed. They snuffed the breeze, occasionally tried a convalescent gambol, and gradually lost the “lone and lorn” look of herring-gutted anatomies.

When the experiment had so far triumphantly vindicated the Major's theory, Sailor Jack was, one afternoon that he happened to be in at the head-station, told that his master wanted to speak to him at the weaners' paddock. He meant to direct the mariner's attention to the fact, that the flock had given up the habit of marching about in close column, destroying the grass, and had, reverting to natural instincts, spread themselves over the surface; he intended by reasoning from analogy, to point out to the docile Jack that nature was in all matters the best teacher; and he would so pin him with syllogisms and illustrations, that a

revolution in the mode of shepherding would necessarily follow. The Major considered that no reasonable man could fail to see — but at this moment his reflections were disturbed by a shrill ear-piercing whistle, and Spot and Bally, obedient to their master's signal, had the previously happy weaners rounded up in a trice in a panting, terrified, trampling mass. Jack had entered the gate, and habit had asserted itself promptly; he saw the crawling devils, as he called them, all adrift; and his fingers were at once in his mouth; so the theorist's ideal ovine paradise was brought to a sudden end. What could our old friend say? Jack, as every other shepherd, had been trained to keep sheep mobbed together; one cogent and irresistible reason clenched the idiotic custom — namely, the shepherds on most stations were charged the full price for every head missing; so necessarily, they had to keep them huddled up always within sight. When we think of these times, our principal cause of wonder is that the woolly victim could stand such treatment so long. It shows the intense vitality and hardihood of the original merino. So Major Smith gave up all further attempts at suggesting a better mode of shepherding. He was clearly before his time.

Now the force of circumstances compelled us to do without shepherds altogether. Bad as the system was, we had still nothing to take its place, and whatever we might do through make-shifts, serious loss was sure to ensue. Still, with the ideas which we had acquired from the Major's theory of stock-management, the difficulty did not appear to us so fatal as no doubt it did to many others similarly situated. The season, too, was now most favourable; there was no danger of a scarcity of grass or water for a year to come, and, moreover, sufficient of the fencing remained uninjured to enable us to make the needful separation of the flocks. Having done this, we could distribute poison all over the outskirts of the run to keep down the dingos, and we could keep riding constantly among the flocks. I, myself, having seen sheep kept, going free, on land almost unfenced, in the south of Scotland, ventured to express my belief that they would do here kept in the same way. I was right so far, but I had not estimated or understood the difficulty of breaking the flocks of the inherited habit of being shepherded. It turned out that it wanted some seasons to break them of the trick of trotting after each other all day, and it was only a generation bred in paddocks that completely reverted to the natural habits of grazing animals.

At the most, we could do little from want of hands. Our friends, Rawson and Short, were called away at once by the same troubles at Girrah and Yarupna, and the whole staff left on the Station, besides the family, was Bidy and old James, the two black-boys, and their grandmother, Kerella. That venerable female, indeed, was of little use for her own personal exertions, but she was very valuable from the influence she possessed not only over her descendants, but over other blacks, the

remnants of the tribe, who occasionally turned up. The white race, in the abstract, it could not be said that she liked: the glitter of her eyes and the tight pressure of her lips, when she found her self accidentally in the presence of a party of rough, white strangers, might be interpreted into hatred or contempt, or both; and perhaps she had reason. She remembered well her tribe camped on this very spot, in the old drought, and how Mr. Shoddy's sheep had polluted the rapidly-drying waters; she remembered the children starving, and the madness of the hunters at the careless cruelty of the whites; then the brief hour of savage vengeance, and the terrible retaliation of the troopers on the burned-up back plains. Her sons and her daughters had gone, root and branch, and, with her two infant grandsons, she had toiled and starved, and wandered back to the old spot; and there she found a white man — a chief, a warrior — — not a mean man — one who walked erect, and spoke with dignity and courtesy, like the great Hippâis and the Coradjés whom she remembered in other days, when the tribal confederacies of the Murrumbidgee and the Lachlan met in council, or to fight by challenge in the glades of Burrangong. Yes, this white man was good; he did not get drunk, or shout foul words like the swine of his race, who hung about the fire-water shops, and he fed her boys; and the woman was good, and told her to rest, and gave her a warm, beautiful skin (it was an old grey blanket). So Kerella got to love these white people, and she always used her influence for their behoof. This old woman had always been a person of note, a lady of rank, and of actual work as a commercial contract she had less idea than many dowagers of St James' or the Fauburg. She would occasionally, in a debonair, patronising way, look after some young lambs for her "good friends"; and would graciously accept a raw sheep's head and the customary fig of tobacco, not by any means as pay for work done — she could never understand that — but as a graceful and friendly act of recognition passing between two high-contracting parties. That these jobs had in them nothing of the nature of hired service from the old creature's point of view, was plain; and that very warm feeling was enlisted in all her dealings with the family was certain, for she would look nearly as fierce as the late lamented Countess of Kew, and she would quiver her yam-stick and yell like a she-fiend, if she thought any of her tribe were not acting right on the station. And thus, through this venerable female aristocrat, we now and then got work done for us, that at the time no wages would have bought.

I have diverged somewhat, and must now return to the point we had reached when I was shunted off by the gold discovery. The glamour of this astounding news dazzled us for the time, but not sufficiently to blind us to the necessity for immediate action. What we had learned in our attempt at muster, could not lie over to be disregarded. A large proportion of the cattle was yet unaccounted for. We knew now that

those missing consisted mainly of bullocks, young heifers and weaners, the contents of the lower paddocks, and as the first step to follow up the search, Jack, myself, and the younger black boy were across the plain the next morning before daybreak, and round the Donohu's premises. There were no animals in the yard. In a paddock there were about a dozen big calves newly branded, but being taken from their mothers, there was nothing to throw light on the legitimate ownership. The ground shewed that work had been going on for a week. It was poached and trampled in all directions. If we had happened to look about three miles to the North-West, we would have found, as we did afterwards, a track of cattle, deeply worn, leading to a temporary yard about twenty miles behind Tarrandong; but we got no clue to lead us to this discovery, and it was long before we understood that we had come within the toils of a huge conspiracy which, in after years, stretched its ramifications from the northern rivers of Queensland to the mouth of the Murray, which has since aided to recruit the ranks of bush-rangers, and has raised some of its heroes to the gallows; while with too partial hand it has elevated others from its ranks to the bench of justice and the saloons of fashion; which, in its palmy days, swayed juries and fee'd advocates, and which is only repressed now by the universal practice of fencing, and the Brands Acts of New South Wales and Queensland.

A few years ago only, a gang representing some of the wealthiest families belonging to this cattle-stealing confederation, went on to a Western Queensland Run, then on the frontier. They put up a yard, and mustered cattle till they got together six hundred head of the description they wanted, and these were driven over-land through the unoccupied country, and sold in Adelaide, a distance of nearly one thousand miles. This particular raid was long of being discovered and traced out. First, the yard was chanced upon, on a back creek; then it happened that some one recognised the brand on some cattle in South Australia, and further enquiry led to a bull of special blood and stamp being identified. The investigation was followed in Queensland, and circumstances pointed to certain persons as the criminals. The bull was re-purchased and brought back, and was at once recognised by the superintendent and his men. On the strength of these facts, a criminal trial took place, but the accused were acquitted at once by a sympathetic jury. Wealthy cattle-stealers, connected with dealers, publicans, and butchers all along the stock-routes, ran no risk of conviction among a population of the same kidney. Though the bull was produced in the yard of the Court-house, and was proven to have been stolen and taken to South Australia beyond the possibility of doubt, and though, in the judge's summing-up, every step in the theft of this large lot of cattle was plainly exposed, the interest which the confederacy brought to bear was too powerful for law and justice.

How often before similar raids have been made, undetected, we cannot

guess; certainly this was not the first; but a daily traffic that went on for many years consisted in smuggling small lots of stolen horses and cattle through the back-country. A gang would begin on the head of the Dawson or the Burnett, and would sweep through Darling Downs to the South, picking up horses as they went along; and cattle were travelled in the same way, increasing in number and in the variety of brands till they reached some rendezvous, where they were traded away, and vanished from sight.

We had grounds for believing afterwards that some three hundred of our bullocks had been put in the yard that we found behind Tarrandong, and thence travelled away towards Melbourne or Adelaide, while great numbers of the heifers and weaners were undoubtedly headed down the river a long distance, and scattered among other herds, so that they might be easily dealt with, as opportunity offered. We never collected again above half the cattle that had been in the lower paddocks; and our total count over six month's age when the muster was over, out of 6,000 head, was barely 3,800. A great deficiency was inevitable from starvation, after the burning of the reed-beds, but probably an equal number were stolen.

The thieves must have acted with great activity, and acuteness. No doubt they had been moving the stock off quietly for some time before we detected them finishing off with the cows and calves. We did not believe that it was possible to do what they had done, the ground being too rotten to ride over, at the time they must have commenced operations; but they knew what they were about — it was a skilled trade — and all the stock-men on the river were in league. We had not let the grass grow under our feet, and yet what Jack said when he came on the solitary horse-track, proved literally true, “the villains had been too quick for us.”

As it was, Jack, myself, and Walbaligo kept on cattle-hunting from day to day for months. We went down to the junction of the Wolgan, and searched every camp and every gully. We got mock civility and chaff from the hired stock-men of absentee owners; sometimes they pretended that they did not know who we were; so we went as little to stations as we could help. These same fellows, there was little doubt, had passed on our stray heifers and weaners from camp to camp, and any directions they pretended to give, were only meant to mislead. But this was great experience and training for me, and many a pleasant starlight night have I camped with my chum on the edge of the great plains, under the sighing oaks of the river, and on the breezy spurs of the Bogarralong range. We usually brought home ten or twenty head at a time after being out for a few days; then we branded any calves that might be among them, and started off again to continue the search. We marked all that passed through our hands by square-tailing — a common practice still. As I have already said, but a poor result followed our work. There were not

two-thirds of the number of grown stock that were counted before the drought, and we branded only some seven hundred calves.

At the same time the duty of looking after the sheep fell to Willy and Fred, and they spent most days in the week riding round the flocks and laying baits for the dingos.

At times, an odd man, hard up, or crippled with travel, a returned digger, or an un-nerved drunkard, would hire for a month's shepherding, but this kind of labour was on the whole more trouble and cost than it was worth. And yet, such wrecks of humanity could get one pound a week as readily now as an able-bodied man could have got half the money a year before. The loss in the flocks was very great; it could hardly be otherwise. Till they got used to care for themselves, the sheep were liable to constant panics, and when these occurred, they would scatter in all directions; some would seek the high ranges, and breaking into small lots would become hopelessly lost, or would fall an easy prey to their enemies; while others, under the influence of terror, would crush each other to death in long grass or in deep gullies. Of all helpless creatures, shepherded sheep are the most helpless. Still, withal, though reduced in number, the character of the stock did not fall off, either in constitution or fleece; indeed, as the time went on, and close shepherding became more and more a thing of the past, it became plain that the sheep were improving, from living more in consonance with natural habits: the tendency being no doubt aided by the severe culling entailed by the more exposed life, and more frequent risks. Those that perished were commonly the weakest, the worst — while the best, the fittest to live, escaped and survived.

And thus the years slipped on with the changes of the seasons; we kept up the work of the Station as we best could, and the unceasing loyal exertions of the family fully bore out Mr. Gully Trotter's calculation. The fences were repaired by degrees, sometimes by ourselves, sometimes with the aid of any labour we could get; the stock was kept as well as was possible — thanks to the very fencing that had been so generally condemned by *practical men*. And we kept on our daily routine cheerfully enough, for work has a pleasure of its own for wholesome youth. The open forest life caused our pulses to beat with the cadence of health and vigour, and the task and fare shared in familiar concord, served but to strengthen the ties of affection that bound us one to the other.

But still "*Atra Cura*," the dark phantom of financial sorrow, that haunts all Australian enterprise, sat behind the head of the house; the shadow could not but at times fall upon us youngsters, too; then we felt the dulling deadening weight of the up-hill struggle, and the careless mirth that enlivened the home in days gone by was less heard.

It was easy to see that the Station, with all the luck of the good seasons

that had set in, and our comparative success in management, was not making head-way. The goodwill of the creditor might postpone pressure, and indeed the Major could not but believe that Sharp was treating him with consideration, but the ultimate issue could not be doubtful, unless the horizon ahead shewed more hopeful signs.

Major Smith gave me the accounts to look over during a week of wet weather, and the revelation that opened to me when I got to see the meaning of the figures, made an indelible impression on my memory. And yet there was nothing to strike one as extraordinary in the items cursorily examined: it was only after dissection, and in the aggregate result, that the wonder appeared. The debt of £10,000 during the next twelve months ran up to £13,000. There was first a commission of 5 per cent. charged by Sharp on taking over the account from the Waratah Bank; then there was interest charged half-yearly at the annual rate of 10 per cent., and a half-yearly commission charged besides of 2½ per cent. Moreover, orders drawn on the firm, supplies purchased, and produce sold through them, all paid toll on a scale that threatened to eat up the Station twice over.

I rather liked figures, and when once I got on the scent, I enjoyed running the track of usance and amercement through the sinuosities of Mr. Sharp's columns. I made out that my old friend was paying, reckoning all charges together, eighteen per cent. per annum on his advance. The old gentleman could never understand accounts. After cudgelling his brains and trying to follow his former business adviser, Mr. Bogus, he was obliged, in the end — he told me — to be satisfied with that gentleman's unctuous smiling assurance that “the charges were only the customary nominal rates, my dear sir.”

The dislocation of all business and industrial arrangements for the time, made it very difficult to turn the products of the Station into money. Wool and stock were both low; the latter next to unsaleable, and these facts kept the balance down to the wrong side, and made interest and charges swell prodigiously and rapidly. What availed all our management and work, if no buyers came for our bullocks and wethers, and if the wool did little more than pay shearing and carriage? But the “unexpected” is what always happens and even now, though unnoticed, the train was laid that was to carry the revolution of the day into new quarters. The harvest of gold had by this time flowed and spread over the roads, streets, and by-ways of New South Wales. Through every store and every grog shop ran the stream of wealth, and the wheel-tracks groaned with the traffic of teams for the western uplands.

Ballarat and Bendigo, too, had burst out, overshadowing the fields of the Old Colony, and every bank became full of deposits. A plethora of bullion perplexed the directors. All this coin could not be lent to traders to import case-gin and sardines; if so, the market would be swamped.

Could the money then be advanced on farms, manufactures, mines, or shipping? Farming had always been in these colonies a hand-to-mouth, poor man's trade; it was carried on without method and economy, and with little profit; moreover, nobody seemed able or willing to put the occupation on such a footing as would cause it to be appreciated by banks. As for manufactures, there was neither labour to be had nor skilled knowledge. Bank deposits could not be launched out in experiments. Mining was still, as respected gold, in the primitive pick-and-shovel stage, and in all branches, copper and coal included, it was then the same lottery as it is still. As for shipping, the ships were in dozens left by the crews to the care of the skippers and mates. There was no want of products in plain and forest that would have been readily welcomed in the crowded marts of Europe; but, to be worth money, these must first be brought to the sea-board, and then shipped on board craft that had hands to weigh their anchors.

And so there was plenty of money to lend, but none of these occupations offered good security for investment.

All at once, a note sounded, that signalled a change. Mr. Gideon Lang published a letter in the *Herald*, which pointed out that the live stock of the Colony would never stand the strain occasioned by the meat consumption of the Gold Fields, and the new population that had gathered at the mouth of the Yarra. How often have we read such prophecies — how often have such hypotheses and such theories turned men's heads for a month or two, to drift away and be forgotten — how often have time and fact turned the unread side of the page, and shewn quite a different version from that expected? How true have been the figures; how incontrovertible the reasoning; how error-proof the syllogisms; and yet the quiet growth and progress of events have told quite a different tale. Some factor has always been left out in the reckoning.

“The runs were already stocked,” said Mr. Lang; “and no fresh operations that could produce increase were possible, either through taking up new country, or by improving stocked runs; labour was so scarce and dear. Famine prices were inevitable, and stock-owners were urged to economise their resources and avert a general calamity.” The error was, as it always is, in under-estimating possibilities. Who could tell, that in a few years, stock would be kept on sounder and better principles, through the very pressure now brought to bear, the scarcity of labour; that in a few years more, the fencing of runs, which of itself doubles the capability of country, while it reduces by one-fourth the cost of working, would be adopted universally; that William Landsborough and a dozen other pioneers were already leaving the Gold Fields to follow up former explorations, to open up, North and West, oceans of grassy downs, and to trace the park-like ironbark forest far beyond the

tropical line; and that these new tracts of country would be, ere twenty summers, covered with herds of cattle, in numbers equal to the whole bovine census of New South Wales, before the gold discovery; and by sheep whose countless fleeces now whiten the inland slopes, from the mouth of the Warrego, to the head of the Flinders.

So Mr. Lang's unimpeachable logic has not been verified; like many other prophets, he could not see the blade that was to cut the knot.

But the excitement caused by his celebrated letter was great, and almost at the same time a rise took place in the price of wool. London buyers became keen in their purchases, and the great product of Australia jumped from 1s. 3d. to 1s. 6d., to 2s., to 2s. 3d. for washed fleece — what a rise! What a pot of money came back to Sydney shippers after paying off advance and charges! Only think of a shilling a pound more than you expected. You had drawn IS. on your two hundred bales, and you thought that you might have a ten pound note over, or perhaps be fifty to the bad; and lo! you get a surplus of a couple of thousand. No wonder the lucky fellows got their heads turned. And so it happened that the banks were fuller than ever of deposits, and stations began to be talked about. Yes, there could be no doubt about it — squatting was the best spec after all — here was the field for investment that was wanted, and everybody must now be a squatter.

London Jews and Syro-Phoenician Greeks, formerly from Houndsditch and Aleppo, recently from Port Jackson and Bendigo; Sydney politicians with nothing but brass and paper; and Ballarat storekeepers with store of nuggets; all must join the pastoral ranks in person or by deputy, and Mr. Mort's rooms and the Royal buzzed and swarmed with dealers in flocks, herds, and stations. Half-stocked sheep-runs went up to 20s. per head; everything on four legs found a buyer, and a few square miles of spinifex or mulga sold readily if properly offered.

Shortly after this wonderful news reached us, and while we were wondering how it would tell for Windabyne, a letter arrived from Sharp and Co., announcing two gentlemen to arrive on business. The letter was as follows: —

“Major Smith, C.B.

“DEAR SIR, — Our confidential agent, Mr. Chalker, accompanied by Mr. Giblets, from Melbourne, goes to Windabyne to inspect, and if approved, to take delivery of a lot of fat cattle.

“We refer you to Mr. Chalker for needful details, and we shall thank you to treat with that gentleman, on all questions that may arise, as our representative.

“We have not yet got account sales of the wool.

“Yours truly,

“SHARP AND CO.”

We may as well remark here that when the account was finally made up, this wool appeared as having been sold in Sydney six months' earlier at 1s. 2d., while there is no doubt that in the February sales the W over diamond brand realised 2s. 1d. This little slip, with other clerical errors of the same kind was laid before the Chamber of Commerce, but the commercial authorities declined to entertain any complaint against a man so much respected as Sharp!

However, be that as it may, these two gentlemen who shortly made their appearance, and were ushered into the little drawing-room at Windabyne, had come to deal in fat cattle, and not in wool. They deserve particular description. Mr. Chalker was big, florid, and wore an enormous white waistcoat, with bunches of chain-work and nuggets rattling against his stomach; he had huge clean-shaved chops like sides of beef, and he filled all his clothes as tight as if he had been melted into them. Mr. Giblets was built on much the same lines, but he wore a loose suit of tweed and a red beard. Chalker was genial, and had the greatest flow of conversation, such as it was; Giblets had a *dour* look, and an eye and front as *torve* as the old bull, Brutus; and when once roused he could fairly roar Chalker down. The first was, of course, as his companion called him, a "Sydney-sider," and the gods he swore by were Sharp, Bolt, and Baggs, all hierophants in that temple of mammon worship — the Waratah Bank; the other was from the southern capital, and his patron saints were named Neil Glass and Hugh Black.

Mrs. Smith and Mary opened the eyes of wonder at the two visitors whom the Major ushered in. They made their bows — Chalker, as if he was going to dance a sailor's hornpipe, and Giblets put his head down and came on as if to butt them.

"Beautiful weather, ma'am," smirked Mr. Chalker, as he seated himself, "quite a snug little place, ma'am; reminds me of Pimlico 'All, when Mr. Bolt first lived there — the Honourable Mr. Bolt, ma'am; know Mrs. Bolt, ma'am, I presume? Ah! quite the lady — law — any am-a-ount of money, and no h'airs, ma'am; just a simple plain body like yourself, ma'am; and her sister, Lady Bralligan, ma'am, no doubt you've heard of her — lovely place the Curragh — she says to me, quite free like, 'why don't you drop in, Mr. Chalker?' And such a establishment, miss, two hundred guinea piano, carriage and liveries, conservatories, champagne, and the Miss B — "

"Not a patch on Hugh Black's place at Toorak, I'll be bound," dashed in Giblets to the rescue, savage at his mate for keeping all the talk. "You're from Melbourne, no doubt, ma'am. Saw it at once. Too much blow about these Sydney-siders."

"Go it, Gib," retorted Mr. Chalker, crossing a leg over his knee, so as to present the sole of his boot to Mrs. Smith's inspection, smacking his lips, snorting, grunting, and preparing to trim his finger-nails, "now then,

tell me this — have you got a man among you that can draw a cheque for a hundred thousand?”

Mrs. Smith looked from one to the other while this delicate persiflage went on: she had never seen such men before; and Mary, wide eyed as a startled fawn, crept under her mother's wing. The young girl had often thought her brothers and their friends rude and rough, but that was, outside, among themselves. Indoors, and with ladies, they were modest as maids, and courteous as Sir Tristram; but this kind of thing before her now was not the least like our horse-play. The grand manner of these gilded ‘youths, the true *jeunesse dorée*, was new to Mrs. Smith, as well as to her daughter. There was no woman in Australia so devoid of that true feminine British dignity which is always so keen to assert itself; in reality she never had any doubt as to her own social position, and innate kindness prompted her to make comfortable every one she came in contact with. She felt great sympathy for shy gawky lads, as I knew, and for nervous men accustomed to lead solitary lives: such as these she liked to set at their ease. She could no more stare down a stranger with an eye-glass, like some great ladies, than she could sell grog at a bar. Perhaps experience in the last provides the needful nerve to do the first well. In truth, the dear lady filled her place with, and shed on all around her, a fragrance of kindness and courtesy; but as she turned from one speaker to the other, she felt herself at a loss; she was in contact with a repelling element. Mary, with a turn of the head, had been ordered out of the room, and shortly, her mother, making a frigid excuse, made her escape and sought her husband.

“Are these men to sit with us?”

Our old friend was failing fast; the elasticity of his life was well-nigh spent, but a trace of the old humour that reminded her of the days when he won her heart, glanced over his features as he re-opened Sharp's letter.

“Well, old lady, you see, Mr. Sharp calls them gentlemen, and no doubt they behave as such.”

“Then I am no judge of the manners of gentlemen.”

“Indeed, my dear, we'll all get used to novelties, and no doubt the style is a little too much. You don't like it. Well, we'll see what we can do. Suppose they mess with the boys in the school-room; and then you know, they will be up early and home late, — so that way you will see but little of them, but you must put up with them for an hour in the evening. We can hardly keep them out altogether without giving offence. And such rich fellows too; what a pity you and Mary can't stand — ”

“What a shame, papa!”

\* Sir Edward Deas Thompson.

## Chapter XIII. Messrs. Chalker and Giblets.

As, one morning shortly after, Mr. Chalker sat on the toprail of the Windabyne stock-yard, he looked so bumptious, and he talked so loud, and his speech was so full of "capital," that he might have been taken for the very incarnation of the Money-God. A sharp boy, whom he had picked up at the township, one of the gutter-snipe species, looked upon him with open-mouthed awe, as a "cove" of untold wealth and mysterious power, and Mr. Chalker was by no means averse to reap the advantages arising from this impression going abroad.

Though he knew nothing about station matters, except what he had learned at the Homebush Sale Yards, and from other business experiences, and though quite uneducated, and ignorant of nearly all things worth knowing, Sharp was nevertheless right, in the one main sense, when he called him a "practical man." As a mortgagee's bailiff, he was simply perfect. Coarse, thick-skinned, shrewd, inaccessible to either fear or favour, with a dog-like fidelity to his salt, and an utter contempt for all interests adverse to those he represented, he was the right man for the job he had come about. What that job was became evident very soon.

He sat, perched aloft, to take tally of the lots of cattle passed through the drafting pen. Those approved by Mr. Giblets, who bestrode the cap beside him, were to be run into a yard to the right, while the others were to be let into the herding-paddock outside.

"Two bullocks, three steers, four cows, two calves — altogether nine head over six months," shouted Fred, who was in the middle of the pen, roping-pole in hand.

"Pass in two bullocks, and the two youngest cows — four head. Gate!" shouted Mr. Giblets.

"Let the rest go," said Mr. Chalker, pencilling in his note-book.

"Stop!" called out Jack, jumping on the fence from the inner yard, where he had been *filling up*, "surely you are making a mistake, Mr. Chalker; these two cows belong to our best breeding stock; neither of them is five years old. I hope you do not mean to sell them as fat."

"Why not, Mr. Smith? I call 'em prime."

"You can make up the lot you want from bullocks and old cows. It will spoil the herd if the young cows are taken out."

Chalker's bristles were up at once, all his bluff geniality vanished, and the wild beast within him awakened; no man should question his

functions. "Man alive, do you tell me I don't know prime beef when it's before me? Them heifers will go seven hundred, if they go a h'ounce, and they're worth at this moment six pound in Melbourne. Do you call that spoiling the herd? I know what I've got to do, and I like folks to mind their own business."

Jack did not like this, but he was more surprised than angry.

"Surely it is my business to see to the drafting of our own cattle."

"Maybe aye — maybe no — put in another lot there."

No one moved, and the gate remained shut. Fred looked as if he would like to soften Chalker's head with the pole, but he stood still, and looked to Jack for orders.

The elder brother controlled himself for the sake of all at stake.

"I must ask you, Mr. Chalker, to wait till I consult my father. I can hardly think that any bargain Mr. Sharp has made on our account can include the sale of our best cows."

"Now then, what's the use of talkin'? Do you think a man's a fool? Is it likely I would come here without knowing what I was about? Just you ask your father and he'll refer you to me — but I don't mind if I tell you, just to save trouble, that I've got a mortgage in my pocket, with my name endorsed on the back of it, and unless you're ready to pay sixteen thousand sovereigns on the nail, I can drive off these here cattle or put a man in charge, just as suits my pleasure. So there now — what do ye say to that?" and he pulled out a parchment, and smacked it on his thick, fleshy hand till it rattled. "Now, is the work to go on?"

"No, I'll see you — — " But Jack checked the hasty expression, and went to speak to his father.

The Major had found it impossible to get Chalker to say anything about the particulars of this sale to Giblets. "Mr. Sharp refers me to you about this business; now can you tell me what cattle are engaged to be sold, and at what price?" "Giblet's contract. Ah! Five hundred head. Deliverable 15th January. These are the particulars, Major Smith."

"But the description and the price?" "Surely you got a copy of the contract yourself, Major Smith?"

"No; he has not sent me a scrap of paper but the line announcing your visit."

"Indeed! Sorry I can't oblige you with a copy. He'll write you to a certainty, sir. But, look here, I'm a man of this sort: I hold by doing my work, and not talking about what don't concern me. Now, I advise you, Major Smith, get them cattle in the yard, and you're sure to hear from Mr. Sharp in a day or two."

Owing to the great growth of grass, since the good seasons began, the bulk of the cattle, in fact, all but the young heifers and female weaners, had been put into the Big Paddock; it needed them — every one — to keep down the excessive vegetation. This arrangement also enabled us to

bring a portion of the sheep within the fences — a great advantage, as one half of the flocks were yet without shepherds. But, when Chalker expressed his wish to have the cattle yarded, the young Smiths objected strongly, pointing out how useless this was, and what injurious consequences would follow the running-in such numbers of all ages; while, if the description wanted was specified, they could be easily cut out. The camp at South Bend was a beautiful sound piece of level gravelly soil, almost clear of timber, and an admirable spot for drafting.

But this was all Greek and Hebrew to Chalker. “Aw! get the cattle in the yard — draft them where we can see them; Mr. Giblets must pick what suits him, you know.”

“Well, but we can put all that we consider fat together, and then Mr. Giblets may pick out what he thinks fit.”

“Not at all, not at all, yard the cattle; we can't do no business unless we yard the cattle,” and his wooden face assumed a portentous look, and he stroked his oracular jaw.

To end the matter, and not delay business, though far from satisfied, we set to yarding the cattle, and this was the first yardful that had raised the dispute. Chalker saw no use in being communicative, and he wanted no opinions from anyone; he came there to do a certain thing, and he would have it done his own way; as to what the owner of the Station might think, or might suggest, or might wish to know, he did not trouble himself: and in regard to anyone getting information from him, his practice was to “keep his mouth shut and his eyes skinned.” As to the young Smiths having any say in any matter connected with the Station he would have replied to such a suggestion with a glare of his yellow eye and a horse-laugh. “Useless young loafers; why, look here, not a shilling among them but what Sharp allows them; beats me that such a mob hasn't eaten up the whole Station before now.”

So, if Mr. Chalker had an iron hand, it was *not* disguised in a glove of silk.

Major Smith could say little on his son's appeal. The copy of the mortgage was taken out of the desk and examined carefully. The terms were most absolute, stringent, and clearly expressed, and as Chalker was fully empowered, he might enter upon the station at once and take possession with perfect legality, unless the full amount of mortgage debt was paid off there and then. Sharp's letters had professed to show consideration, and they were couched in amicable terms, but Chalker's tone now gave things a different complexion. “Could it be that they were being made use of, merely to work the Station till it was advantageously sold or taken over?” If this were so, no plain-dealing was to be expected. But even if foreclosure were determined on, surely possession could not be taken till the accounts were rendered, examined, and proved. This was just one of the things that our veteran did not understand. The power

given by the mortgage was in no way limited — possession might be taken at any time, and without any reason being rendered. A station can be seized by a mortgagee under the authority usually contained in these documents, without his being bound to prove the claim by account, or indeed, without its being necessary to render any account at all. Of course, redress may be sought through a Court of Equity; but, supposing such action taken, an account demanded, and a law-suit raised, probably the authority of the Court might be brought to bear on the defendant in about five years, and by that time the mortgage claim would be made to show an accumulation of debt and charges, amounting on such an account as that of Windabyne, to £70,000 or £80,000. Such things have been, and are going on now. If the plaintiff questioned the charges, or the sales of stock or wool reported, how could he make good such pleas against a defendant entrenched in possession, and fortified against him with plaintiff's own money? He would be laughed out of Court by all the bankers and other representatives of vested accumulations. But, indeed, a penniless man ejected from a mortgage station would never have the chance to prosecute such a suit. Law and equity are not for poor people.

And here, non-pastoral readers and pastoral readers, who may not have waded deep in financial waters, may well ask “can such things be?” I say in reply, “My friends, read the law reports, but don't get into such scrapes yourselves.”

It is said that there are some countries, France for instance, where a code of law, intelligible to all ordinary capacities, capable of being worked by ordinary officials, accurate and rapid as machinery, protects all people, rich and poor alike; and that a fraudulent trustee, agent, or mortgagee, is there kicked out of his usurped position with as little ceremony as a defaulting bus-conductor is ejected here; and his accounts are at once set right by people appointed so to do. That is not our way. We have very great respect for vested muddles, and for successful swindling of all kinds; above all, we cherish a special aversion to making law cheap, speedy, and effective.

So our friends derived little benefit from reading the mortgage, and they could find no satisfactory interpretation of Sharp's intentions in the action of his agent.

There was, in reality, no change in the mortgagee's policy — it was just the old “hanky-panky.” If it suited him, the Smiths would be left for longer in nominal ownership. On the other hand, if certain current dealings took effect, then it would be better to turn them out under a colourable sale to Trotter and Co., in which Sharp would retain an interest. In the latter event, other station purchases would be made, and the stock of different stations would be dealt with as one property, shifted back and forward and mixed up, and thus the identity of the sheep and cattle would be totally lost, and all scrutiny of accounts would be

made impossible.

But the Major was only beginning to have a glimmering suspicion that some such policy was working against him. He could not forget the considerate friendly letter that he received after the fire, now two years ago, and the satisfaction which had been expressed with his management of the Station during the difficulties arising from the gold discovery.

He would write fully to Sharp, remonstrating with him for entering into the sale of cattle without due notice given, and he would represent to him that the increased value of stock and stations, and the rise that might be expected at the February wool sales, would certainly reduce the advance relatively in a very material degree. He would for this reason urge him to postpone further sales of stock until he received the full statement from the station sheep and cattle books that would be sent down directly, and he begged him particularly to refrain from selling any female stock at all under seven years old.

Meantime, the work must go on as Chalker dictated — there was no help for it — indeed, if opposed, he would certainly, in the mood he shewed, take the matter into his own hands, and they could not prevent him. Moreover, the boys must be cautioned against losing their tempers. It was more manly to govern their impatience and submit, than to make a senseless outcry and attempt an unavailing resistance.

As Jack got back to the yard, he could hear that Mr. Giblets had lost patience. He was boiling over, and holding forth — “Now, look here, this is Sydney style all over. You sell me a lot of fat beasts, and I'm ready to take them, and I can't get them; always the way with you Sydney-siders — just the same humbugging as ever. Says I to Neil Glass, when he started men for cattle to the Lachlan this time last year, ‘Mark my words,’ says I, ‘you'll get nothing but jaw and time wasted,’ and he lost £5,000 by the fall of the market before the cattle was drafted, and that's just what I said it would be here, when I got in the steamer; and now, Mr. Chalker, may I ask you, *sir*, whether I am to get this lot at all, or what do you say to an action for breach of contract?”

Chalker was cursing to himself and walking about in a red heat. “Well, then, Mr. Smith” (when he saw Jack, he jumped forward as if he was going to bite), “will you let the work go on, or am I to get hands and do it myself?”

Jack said, quietly, “We will draft out any cattle you like, Mr. Chalker, only I warn you that you will ruin the herd if you take out the young cows.”

“I thought you would come to; the sort of cattle I take is my business — cows or no cows — just as it suits me,” said the gracious Chalker.

In a few days the lot was made up, nearly half of them being the very pick of the young female stock — a wasteful and destructive proceeding

that would certainly tell against the herd for the future; and we got them clear of the fences and saw the back of Mr. Giblets — and heard no more for a spell of Neil Glass and Hugh Black.

That evening, when Jack judged that Chalker had time and leisure, and was cooled and appeased after the irritations of the day, he schooled himself to speak to him in a good-humoured, diplomatic fashion.

“Now, Mr. Chalker, we have not stood in your way at all; we have carried out all that you wanted. I think it is fair to ask you what you know about this contract, and also for Mr. Sharp's account, if you have it.”

“Account! I got no account. Mr. Sharp told me the balance in his books against the station was £16,000, three months ago, and, as for the contract, I've nothing but a few notes for myself like, but, as to your not standing in my way, I tell you, my good fellow,” hauling out his mortgage again, “this here dokiment bears me out in taking every hoof off without asking your leave or giving you any account” — and there was no doubt it was the case. The man knew well the enormous power that the mortgage gave him, and he looked as if he knew it. With his hat cocked on one side, a straw in his mouth, and his legs straddling, he looked the very *moral* of a bailiff, and Jack, as he said, felt his gorge rise against him; but he turned round and walked away; he had other things to think of than quarrelling with a bully. Still, it was by no means pleasant being talked to in that way.

And yet Chalker would have thought himself most unjustly maligned if he had been called brutal or unscrupulous. He identified himself so thoroughly with his work that the possibility of there being any opposing interests, founded on right, was scouted by him.

“Sharp was a monied man, and he represented Sharp, therefore Sharp must be doubly in the right,” and, “the farce of them Smiths having any claims or rights in the concern, and not a copper among them — let them go to law and see what they would get.” This use of a pecuniary rule of three, in a question of ethics, is by no means rare. There are plenty of men besides Chalker, who say, practically, “Show me where the money is, and then I'll tell you who's right and who's wrong.”

Shortly, we were relieved of the gentleman. He took himself off to Tarrandong; what for we could not guess.

He could hardly but have known of late that his presence was disliked, and yet, though he must have felt himself excluded frequently from the “*vie intime*” of the house, still he did not show that he was conscious of the fact, and made no remark.

There was a certain manliness in this; and if he were divested of his truculent business qualities, it is quite possible that he might not have been a bad fellow. No doubt the florid smirking manner and blatant speech, which seemed so offensive to the ladies of Windabyne, might be

appreciated elsewhere: it was merely a question of habit and taste, not of morals; and even we, who were in constant contact with him, and hated him sincerely, had to confess that there was no petty malignity or mean rancour in his character. After one of his blackguard wrangling matches and rows, he would turn up in the yard, or at table, perfectly placable and good-humoured. He was, in fact, a compound of qualities, very much like many more of us, the elements being in each and all differently mixed, and more or less pleasantly apportioned.

Presently a short letter came from Sharp and Co., in answer to Major Smith's remonstrance. It stated that, *as previously advised*, the pick of the herd of cattle, namely, 1,500 head, deliverable in three lots in January, March, and May, had been sold to Trotter and Co., at £3 per head, and that the station account would be made up as soon as advices of the last wool sales were received. Chalker's authority was again confirmed, and he was referred to again for further particulars. For the rest, the chief matter of Major Smith's letter was ignored and evaded. It was pretty clear now that such business effusions served mainly to mask the real purpose of the firm, and all hope of saving the Station, or even of getting a small reversion from the wreck, now seemed to be fading away. But nothing was said among us on the subject, though it was well-understood that the crisis could not be far distant; and each day's work still went on with a dull sustained persistence. A strong sense of honour was deeply rooted in the family, and even in this plight, their honest pride made them anxious above all things to get out of the Station, if they must perforce give it up, with credit.

Another symptom of the course things were taking soon appeared. Chalker wrote up to say that Tarrandong was taken delivery of by him on behalf of the buyers, and that 5,000 of the Windabyne ewes, which were previously under offer at 8s. per head, were now sold to go on this new purchase. He specified ages wanted, and description, and he would feel obliged if the sheep were held ready for delivery in ten days, when he would be up. Major Smith did now feel exasperated at this free and easy way of making ducks and drakes of his property — nominally his only, perhaps — but still, it seemed as if he was being coolly thrust out of possession, without either authority of law or any sufficient right being established; and this time, before the sheep were removed, he wrote his mind to Sharp very clearly and emphatically. The answer came very promptly by return of post.

“Denison Street, 5th March, 185 — .

“DEAR SIR,

“We find that there has been an oversight in not advising you beforehand, of the lots of sheep and cattle put under offer in last December to Messrs. Trotter and Co., and we would apologise for the

same.

“Further detail at present is unnecessary, as we have now to advise having concluded the sale of the Station and stock not yet delivered to that firm, deliverable 1st May, for £15,000.

“The balance of your account appears, so far as it can be made up, to be, debit £18,250, against which there remain to be received certain balances on account of the last lot of sheep sold, etc.

“A fully detailed statement is in course of preparation, and, when completed up to the last date, shall be forwarded.

“We request that you will be prepared to carry out delivery to Messrs. Trotter's representative on the day mentioned.

“Yours truly,

“SHARP AND CO.”

And so the doom had fallen at last; and yet, after all, our friends could breathe more freely. Suspense was over, and a certain relief was felt. At first — two years ago, now nearly three — the threatened ruin had appalled the little household; now the surging billows were coming over their heads, and they welcomed peace and rest.

Mrs. Smith smiled gently at her former tremors, and Mary's loving, tender eyes beamed with soft light, as she put her hand in her mother's. The Major arose and looked round like a man coming out of a dream. What was world's gear after all, in comparison with the priceless treasures that no treachery could take from them, consciences void of offence to all men, a good name, the good-will of true friends, and the love that bound them to each other. And about this station work: was the chance of profit worth the toil and anxiety? What had availed them all the labour of the last years?

He thought of his friend Doctor Kroeber's advice, and surely there must be some easier and surer way to make a living in this young country. But yet, one thing he would do, — he would not submit without protest or resistance to this treacherous wrong and fraudulent rapine, and he would see what law could do for him to have these accounts thoroughly examined and tested — and I may as well tell briefly now what came of that. He wrote to a solicitor whom he had occasionally employed, and in a few weeks he got his statement back, with the following memorandum written across it. *Confidential* — “Tell your client, whom I know well, that unless he has £10,000 ready to spend in costs, to have nothing to do with an equity suit. Go to arbitration, or appeal to the Chamber of Commerce. P. B., Q.C.”

This wrong-headed Queen's Counsel was an old family friend from distant Westmoreland, settled in the antipodes at the law, and the old-fashioned feudal spirit, or whatever you may call it, urged him to give good, plain, honest advice. The old gentleman followed it so far as to

appeal to the Commercial Witangemot, and for answer he received a list of the rates of commission authorised by that body. He wrote again, more urgently, and requested that an enquiry might be made into the matter. He heard in due time that nobody would sit on the committee when the notice was on the paper. Members said, as a reason for not acting, that questions of fact were involved, of which they had no means of judging: the Chamber could merely give an opinion as to points of commercial usage.

“Yes,” said Treacle, “seems hard, too, on this Smith. But look at the capital in it; and who's going to pry into Sharp's account sales? — and then the Waratah — I've quite enough to do to square my account with the old discount shop. Catch me running my head against a wall.”

“True,” said our old friend Bogus, who had just failed for the third time, and had newly furnished his house in Adelaide Bay, “capital must be supported, and what do these up-country people know about business? Good-day, I'm off up King Street.” And that was what the Major got from the commercial authorities.

And now it seems to me like yesterday, when I recall how we sat and talked on that memorable night, in the familiar room where so many pleasant hours had been spent. How associations of the past crowded on our thoughts, and my friends first felt how much their lives had been made up of the surroundings of their forest home, and how fond they were of the spot that they were leaving. How memory would in the future picture these well-remembered scenes, the daily trod bush-tracks, the fresh, open plains, the blue outlines of the distant ranges, the river with its ever-shifting moods and living interest, its sighing groves of oak, and circling flight of wild fowl, with all the other hundred familiar sights and sounds. And then — how new interests and new events would on this same spot, turn over fresh pages of human life, in never-ending variety, after all that concerned us was past and gone. And where would we all be in another year? Scattered, adrift, who could tell? With youth and health and strength, hope could not well be absent; and if in the parents, matured years had sobered the buoyancy of life, still there was now content, resignation, and more than satisfaction in their children.

Rawson came over, like a good fellow, when he heard that the crisis had actually arrived. He would have done anything or sacrificed anything to save the friends whom he had known so long; moreover, there was a specially tender tie that bound him to one member of the family, to her on whom his heart had been set since the first bloom of her girlhood. I remember how the young fellow, when he came in, seemed quite abashed and speechless with sympathy and anxiety, and how little Mary, at once, with true womanly tact, led the conversation into simple familiar friendly chat, and at last we got on a subject that was a favourite one among us — taking up new country — and with such a topic once started

there was no end to it among us "boys." And we spoke of Major Mitchell and Leichardt and Hume, and Sturt's desert that was now a sea, and then we reached down the well-thumbed volumes, and looked at the old Surveyor-General's famous sketches. There was the peak of Tangudda, rising with its masses of sandstone in an open forest of myall and pine. There was Cambo, the wild hunter from Wingen, whose stout heart beat aloud, when he saw the white wizard sketch him in his book. There was poor Cunningham's track, where he was lost on the Bogan; and there was Milmeridien, the burying-ground of a great Western tribe, a dreamy solitude, a clearing in the midst of a thicket of weeping acacia; shewing that, among the untutored sons of the desert, there were existing both tender human sympathies and a native love of beauty.

And what was to hinder us going out, taking up new runs, and putting stock on them? There were plenty of fellows who had got backing in going to new country.

It was common then to get sheep and cattle on halves; and so we talked on, building our airy castles, the Major and Mrs. Smith listening in pleased silence, and Mary with her arm linked through her mother's, giving a saucy pout now and then, as if we were only "boys talking nonsense."

A wet week had set in again; this truly dripping season, and the patter of the rain on the roof, was broken only by the fitful gusts of wind that tossed the tree-tops, and whistled round the eaves of the house. We had piled the chimney full of logs, for the fire was grateful these damp autumn nights on the uplands; and as we drew cozily round the hearth, the past seemed to be floating away behind us, and the future began to unroll, blazoned in the magic tints of hope.

And so we talked of the dim grassy wilderness that spread away inland, as yet almost untrodden, and of the homes and fortunes that were to be found there some day yet; and of the wild tribes that held these mighty wastes, unused; and then what we had heard of the frontier warfare, that seemed constantly and inevitably to follow the advance of the flocks and herds; how on the coast and table-land country, the blacks under the cover of great scrubs of jungle and brigalow, had destroyed whole stations, or harassed the owners till they were abandoned; and how, but some few years ago, men could not be got to go on the Nammoy, because great numbers of the shepherds and stock-men had fallen victims to the savage spear and nulla-nulla; and then Rawson told how he had seen in the township one of the old border-police, called McIlroy, who had made money on the diggings, and he spoke of having been out in that country once with a small detachment under Commissioner Denny. They had been patrolling, escorting the Commissioner on duty, and generally keeping the peace of the district, and they were going through some open clumps of scrub when a yell of "Wah! Wah! Wah!" arose,

and in a second they had round them a half-circle of demons in red raddle, white chalk, and feathers, and a shower of nulla-nullas and boomerangs whistled through them, cutting, mauling, and scattering the horses and riders. The troopers wanted to charge, but the Commissioner gave the word "right about face." The men grumbled, but obeyed, and they followed Mr. Denny at a hand-gallop across a plain that they had just passed; the blacks following hard, yelling in triumph, "Dilli — Dilli! whi fella! Wah — Wah — Wah!" and clashing their weapons against their shields. When the Commissioner reached the middle of the plain he halted. "Form line, right in front, left wheel, forward, gallop," and the force was at once between the blacks and the scrub. The savages stood, mobbed in a dense circle and jabbering, when they found themselves outwitted, but they were too late either to fight to advantage, or to flee, for a rattling volley of carbine bullets cut through them, followed by the order, "use your swords, men," and in a second the horses were bounding, and the bare steel was flashing among the painted warriors. There was one trooper, a Scotchman, a blacksmith by trade, who went mad, Berserker-fashion. He tore off his uniform, threw away his sword, and wrenched up a young myall tree by the roots, and he galloped among the fugitives, whirling this knotted club, at every stroke laying low a plumed buck of the tribe. There were no more shepherds killed after that.

"Well done Rawson — very fair Jack." and then a general laugh followed this narrative; the Major laughing loudest of all. "Capital, Jack Rawson, where did you get your cavalry drill? I'm sure I've heard of that Scotch blacksmith ten years ago. It's a regular old standard yarn, and I daresay could be traced back to the times of Governor Macquarie. You see, that is exactly how myths and traditions arise. Mr. McIlroy coolly tacks this incident, not knowing whether it is true or not, on to his story of some patrol-duty on the Nammoy, which no doubt is true enough; and if the legend is repeated and survives, it will likely be told that it was McIlroy himself that was the blacksmith. This will give us an idea of how much history, or any narrative, can be trusted, especially before the era of printing began."

"Suppose next time you say it was Jeems Lapraik," said Jack, who had a fine perception of the ludicrous, and was very hard of belief.

"I don't think it is much in old Jeems's line," said Rawson, "but you remember, Willy, he did take part in a scrimmage once? — that time of the row in the men's hut. By the bye, they say that scoundrel, Bill Jones, is making money as a publican and horse-dealer."

Something in Fred's attitude now arrested our attention. He seemed to be listening to some distant sound, and he rose from his chair — "What is that?" A sudden calm and strange lull had followed the rain. He opened a sash, and stepped into the front verandah. The sky was clear overhead, with the stars shining like diamond points, but as we followed

him, a sudden swirl of wind struck the tree-tops, stripping off some branches and tossing them high in the air; then the squall died away as quickly as it had come. "Strange weather," said Major Smith, "I must go and look at the glass."

As we peered into the night, the starry vault was covered with wreaths of cloud-drift, that whirled and scattered overhead as if driven by the breath of a hurricane. Fred had stooped down with his ear close to the floor of the verandah. He held up his hand, "Hear that!" and shortly we heard a roar as of a monster railway-train coming from Red Cliff. Looking in that direction, we soon saw a luminous cloud rising like a pillar of mist, and round it, as it sailed onward, gleamed meteoric flashes. As it got nearer, the wind struck alternately in all directions with indescribable fury; strong trees bent and groaned; bushes and shrubs were twisted round and thrown high in the air, but in the direct track of that luminous pillar, devastation held its unchecked course, for no tree, no building, could withstand the blast of the cyclone, rushing in its furrow of wrath.

Born of the electric forces of the Tropics, and carried to the South by the laws of its being, the giant whirlwind was upon us, cutting its way through the forest.

There is a fairy sea far North, for long intervals as placid as a sun-lit lake. It has on one side that long barrier reef, where the ceaseless hum of the Pacific washes the coral strand in miles of snow-white surf, and on its other side are the volcano flames of Java and the Malay isles. In this sea is Wallace's Strait, named after one of the prophets of Evolution, a narrow channel of water which parts in weird contrast, the worlds of India and Australia — the rocks, plants, and animals of two distinct creations — while high above the gently rippling waters, tower the jagged peaks of Papua. Who can tell but that from these scenes may yet arise a wealth of future myth, poem, tale, and romance, as prolific as ever came from the waters of the blue Ægean and white-capped Olympus — but that these isles may yet be as renowned in ode and saga as Vesuvius and Hecla; for here come blended together all the grotesque and all the beautiful that can be found in the volcanic chaos of peak, dome, and pyramid, clothed in the gorgeous vegetation of an eternal summer. And moreover, here slumber the giants, that at times unchained, shake distant mountain-ranges to their centres, and start the cyclone on its race of terror over the summer seas and through the forest pastures of Australia.

We read that "in the high rarified strata of the upper atmosphere, under the Equator, there is a great latent reserve of electricity, and if volcanic or other disturbances bring a conducting power into operation, then the electric current will strike towards the earth, and the disturbed elements, the gases and vapours of the atmosphere, will whirl like water agitated

by the fans of a screw. These gyrations increasing and travelling present certain fixed conditions. They are said to revolve in the direction N.-E. by S.-W., and to travel to the South at a rate, varying from ten to twenty miles an hour. But I must refer the reader to meteorological authorities to learn the causes and history of the cyclones. I can tell only of what I have seen myself. I have heard its din and felt its fury, and I have seen the marks of its course covering the ground for years after.

Nearer and nearer still it came, while the blasts of wind became more frequent and more violent; and we watched, with tense anxiety, as we could now distinctly see and hear the terrible havoc that marked its path. It seemed to reap the open forest, taking a swathe of some hundred yards, and within this space, the trees either went down bodily or were snapped short off. If it came over us, the house would at once be shattered in fragments, and there was no safety for any living thing; but even the side gusts that struck us every few seconds, though comparatively harmless, were enough to shake the stout old wooden building. Fortunately, there were no trees close. Poor Mary's climbers, her jasmine and trained roses, were torn off and whirled away, as we could see by the pale light that now filled the upper air. Even as we looked, trying to shelter the ladies from the storm, the destroyer crossed the river below the Big Waterhole. As it reached the bank, we could distinctly see the drift of broken branches and tree-tops hurled before it like straws by a summer breeze, and then it pursued its course through Girrah, away toward the Southern ranges, till, in an hour, its sound died away in the distance — no sign of the cyclone was left, and the weather came back to what it was two hours before — a steady drizzle of rain and gusty, variable winds.

## Chapter XIV. Of Tempest, Havoc, and Ruin.

Next morning awoke, balmy and mild, as if the hurricane of the night before had been a dream. The warble of the magpies along the river filled the air, while the glints of sunlight tinted with varied radiance the green, bushy banks, and dimpled with leafy shadows the laughing water. With such a smiling face upon her, you would never believe that Dame Nature could have appeared as the raging termagant of the night before.

\* No doubt, in the days of Faith — those happy days, to which the Apostolical Metropolitan longs to lead us back — the cyclone would have been announced as the appointed minister of Divine vengeance, the penal consequence of prayer and confession neglected, and masses unpaid for; and the Queen of Heaven would have been implored, with propitiatory profusion of wax candles, to arrest the hand of wrath.

It is said, that a few centuries ago, the Papal Anathema, backed by the exhibition of relics, and the denunciations of an army of bishops and priests, frightened away Halley's comet on its first appearance; but, for all that, regardless of the terrors of the Church, the same comet actually came back in the very year prophesied by the old astronomer; and, as to these latter days of heresy, a whole ship-load of consecrated bones and holy water would be totally inadequate to carry out the smallest piece of ecclesiastical business, which any Mediaeval Father, with the most ordinary Church properties, could have put through without turning a hair.\*

Twenty-five years ago, the "Great Apostacy" had not come up to today's mark, or received its full title; but still, Major Smith, and many other people, looked upon cyclones and such phenomena as the products of natural law, and as filling a settled purpose in the economy of Nature — perhaps giving old mother Earth a little tonic stimulant, filling the atmosphere with health-giving elements, and invigorating all vegetable, animal, and human life.

"And how about the terrible havoc, the destruction, it may be, of life, of shipping, of food, of crops, of property?" asks meek-eyed Piety.

"You can't make omelettes without breaking eggs," said the bold Marshal Pelissier, as the crowd of red breeches, gapped and torn by the grape of the Muscovite batteries, swarmed over the Mamelon. There is no doubt that the moral of the Marshal's remark fits into all our experiences of life; but yet we may believe, with reverence, that the

scales of justice and mercy are evenly balanced through methods we wot not of.

Anyway, touching cyclones, whether they do most good or harm, the Mediaeval rule of accounting for these occurrences has quite gone out of fashion, and Science has taken upon herself the function of collecting, recording, and compiling all such doings, without the slightest reference to the opinions of the priesthood, consecrated or otherwise.

But, on looking over the woodlands of Windabyne that morning, we might well believe that the storm-fiend had revelled to his heart's content. All the open forest was more or less littered with fallen trees and branches, while, on the direct track of the whirlwind, running North-West to South-East, there was a clear-cut lane about one hundred yards in width. Within this space, the trees were either hurled down bodily or snapped off some twenty feet from the ground, and the débris formed an irregular hedge of huge proportions. We could see, from the verandah, glimpses of the box ridges and apple-tree flats, that were formerly clothed in their grey and green foliage, now looking like patches of open plain, and, far up, where a sombre pine-scrub covered the left shoulder of Red Cliff, there was now a gap opened through, sharply defined as a cutting for the modern telegraph line.

That wonder of our century, the magic wire, had not yet reached Australia. Now, the approach of a storm is heralded a day in advance; then, throughout the lonely bush, with a slow post only once a week, distance and time shrouded us from the rest of the world as by a veritable wall of darkness, and all events came upon us with stage-like suddenness. Remembering that time, and reflecting how in the greater obscurity of past ages, people must have been shut out from knowledge, is it any wonder that superstition established a vested interest of terrorism and extortion?

However, Mr. Chalker was much too practical a man to care for any such unprofitable speculations. To his shrewd discrimination, metaphysics, polemics, and wind meant all very much the same thing; these affected him not, but delays produced by the inauspicious weather, and the contrariness of things generally, had conspired to put him into a state of mind that Bob Short called "a pelter." The second mob of cattle under Giblet's contract, was deliverable in a few days, and Chalker had come up, resolved that, at all risks, he must and would have them ready for inspection.

The stock had escaped the cyclone almost without injury, thanks to the wonderful animal instinct. They had either gathered in mobs on the open plains, or had huddled together in sheltered nooks. Other damage had been small, mainly consisting of portions of fencing destroyed. The serious injury to the run consisted in the masses of timber, fallen trees and branches, piled in heaps, that covered and crossed the wooded

country in all directions, but mainly in the direct track of the cyclone from Red Cliff to the Big Waterhole; and to gather cattle or drive them to the stockyard was now, if not actually impossible — at least, it would be tedious, difficult, and dangerous, and very harrassing to the stock.

This was pointed out to Chalker on his arrival, but he made very light of it. Moreover, “he was acting under contract to the buyer, and unless the day fixed were kept, damages might be claimed.”

“In that case, would he anticipate the delivery of the Station, and take it over at once; then he could make his own arrangement?”

This was Major Smith's suggestion; but it would not do, either. Chalker, it appeared, was in that other matter, “acting *for* the buyer, and the station was at the seller's risk until the date fixed for delivery.”

The Major would willingly have thrown the whole concern up, but the occasion needed wary walking, and he was determined that any claim he might yet make on the mortgagee should not be prejudiced by rash action on his part.

So he assumed a suavity and a good-humour somewhat foreign to his feelings.

“If better cannot be, then, Mr. Chalker, we must try to get the cattle for you; only, I put it to you, if Giblets would pick them on the camp, it would be much easier for us, and better for the stock as well.”

“Giblets is entitled to the pick of the whole herd put through the yards; that's why I insist on yarding them, and you may depend upon it he'll not take them any other way.”

Now, if Chalker had told us this much at first, he would have saved himself from a great deal of misconstruction. We had assumed that his insisting on having the cattle yarded was mere obstinacy and caprice; now it turned out to be one of the conditions of the sale; but, what an absurd contract Sharp had made! Though a hard-fisted screw, he was always adrift as to technical matters. It is extraordinary how these pen-and-ink men manage to wriggle into so much station property, when plenty of them don't know a wether from a donkey. It is a great science, is finance.

So Jack with his followers, much against the grain, went off to the cattle run, and in the meantime “Bully” (for so we “boys” had got to call Chalker among ourselves) gave out that he was going to take tally of the horse-stock. There was a good market for horses in Sydney and Melbourne, and he would “go over the lot, and make up a mob for sale.”

The breaking up of the stud we had expected. Horses had for long been nearly unsaleable. For years before, it was a good horse that would fetch £10 and the common stock, all round, were not worth more than £2. Now, with the change of times, prices had gone up, so that anything that would carry a saddle was worth £12 or £15, and thus Chalker determined to take advantage of the opportunity to sell. But, on such stations as

Windabyne, it was customary to exercise some discrimination in placing horse stock in the market. Most squatting families prized their special stock highly for various reasons; but Chalker's views did not go beyond turning everything into money that could be sold. The working requirements of the Station in future, the reputation of the stock, and other considerations more or less practical, either did not occur to him, or appeared as so much moonshine. If the selection had been left to us, we would have drafted out for market all the strong colts and fillies, and the broken-in horses not needed for work; but we would have kept on the Station our particular mounts, which were the best horses, and really did the chief work of the place, and all the old mares and superannuated stock-horses. The latter, for reasons all-powerful with the Smiths, would have been kept all their days undisturbed; but Chalker, as a sound business man, laughed at any such distinction, and we had the mortification of seeing all the great grand-dams and veterans of the stud, besides those others that we prized so highly, yarded and put into a list for the Melbourne market. There was Rosa, the old Arab mare, the ancestress of an equine tribe; there was her great grand-daughter Rosabel, Mary's favourite; there was Akhbar, now groggy on his pins, and getting to look very old; there was Becky, my first steed; there was old Rory, a pure Satellite, the truest and boldest stock-horse that ever dashed down an iron-bark range, now over twenty years old, with his poor old legs nobbled and bruised out of shape with many a day's heavy gallop. All these and more that looked like old familiar friends were to be sold for what they would fetch, most of them to end their lives as diggers' slaves, and to exchange the well-earned ease of the Yarombil pastures for a purgatory of starvation, sore backs, and all the other innumerable tortures that arise from hardened cruelty, stupidity, and careless ignorance. A hint to this effect was echoed by "Bully's" horse-laugh — "Ah! ah! ah! the notion of sentiment in business." Horse-laugh indeed — what an inappropriate term! it was more the discordant howl of the hyena. He had as much sympathy for horse-flesh as Legree had for niggers!

As usual, any opinion or suggestion offered adverse to his determination, put him in a fume, and made him more contrary and suspicious. Short and Rawson, partly with the view of carrying out a long proposed trip to the North, and partly to please their friends, and for the sake of "auld lang syne," agreed between themselves to buy the private horses and the old stock, knowing that the first being choice animals were well worth their price anywhere, and believing that the value placed upon the others would be nominal; but our bluff friend could not see it.

"And that's it, then, is it? that's what you call an offer? £15 a-head for ten head, and other ten *culls*, as you call them, at £3. And don't I look like a fool, eh? Look here; do you see that old bit of carrion, there

— aye, ‘Selim’ you call him — ‘he swam the Macquarie flooded, carrying Doctor *Crowbar* to save a child's life.’ Did he? Seems there's some yarn about all of them. Well, I seen a Yankee digger give £15 for the dead spit of him, and he packed him with a cradle and tools from his ears to his tail; and do you think I'd allow the station property to be sacrificed? Not if I know it. The horses go to Melbourne, every crawler of them.”

Nevertheless, Rawson, lover-like, could not bear to think of Rosabel departing to this nether gloom. He would yet make an effort to keep her for her mistress's sake; but then he and Chalker could confer together with difficulty. They were like oil and water. The prejudice of the one, and the coarse, self-assertion of the other had come in collision already in the horse yard, and had been expressed in hostile looks and in sundry disparaging remarks and retorts more or less courteous. Of course, we all swore by Rawson, and detested the other man; but really and truly, looking back, I can see now that it would be difficult to tell which of the two provoked these bickerings. It was a case of mutual repulsion. Still and anon, under the powerful prompting of the little god, Rawson would tackle him about Rosabel, and he vowed that he would be careful, that he would give no cause for offence. He had not long to wait for an opportunity. Towards evening Chalker appeared in the verandah of the barracks overlooking the river. He had just come from a swim, and he was arrayed in all the fresh effulgence of a white shirt — the collar coming up to his ears — with a light coat of gay pattern. He was plainly pleased with himself and in good humour with the whole world, so he lit his pipe and sat down in one of those excellent arm-chairs made of two poles and a piece of bagging, to read the *Herald* of a week old just arrived. Having got the work of the day over, and all the wranglings and angularities connected therewith having been brushed out of his memory, he felt now no ill-will to Rawson or anybody else, and indeed, bully though he was, his mind was so healthily constituted that he never retained grudge or rancour.

But Rawson did not feel, and could not assume the same bonhomie. Though a modest, kind-hearted young fellow in his daily life, still, his prepossessions were strong, and by virtue of an illogical, though common enough style of reasoning, he held Chalker to be responsible for all his friends' misfortunes, as well as being “a low, treacherous ruffian” on his own account. So it required an effort, and it did not look quite easy or natural when he accosted Messrs. Sharp's representative, and with a deal of what Mr. Mantilini would have called “demnition” politeness, remarked, that if he thought fit to sell the mare “Rosabel” separately, a good price might be got for her.

Chalker looked up quite affably from his paper. “Certainly, Mr. Rawson; we'll have a look at the stud-book, and you can show me the

mare to-morrow in the yard.” This was so far well, but as the day was drawing to a close, further proceedings were adjourned.

Next morning, stud-book in hand, Chalker proceeded to the horse-yard with Rawson. “Rosabel, you say; let me see R — folio 23. Rosa — Rosetta — Rosalind — Rosabel — ah, yes; grey mare, foaled November '47, out of Rosalind by Saladin, from a Satellite mare by Ploughboy. Yes, I remember her now. I've got a mark against her. Well, now this mare's not for sale, at least not under a big price. From what I hear, she's the best lady's horse in the district, and she looks like it. I mean to offer her to the Honourable Mr. Bolt, unless I get a hundred guineas for her.”

Rawson laughed aloud in scorn. He did not believe a word that Chalker said.

“A hundred guineas! Well, if you can find anybody fool enough to give as much, by all means sell her. I don't suppose the Honourable Mr. Bolt, from what I hear, will be so free of his money. If the mare's for sale, I'll pay the market price for her. I suppose my money's as good as the Honourable Mr. Bolt's, but I can't give a hundred guineas.”

Chalker's teeth were shown at once. “I should think not. No, nor fifty. I don't suppose your cheque's a heavy one, Mr. Rawson.”

“It's heavy enough for anything I undertake to do, and it's honestly come by, and that's more than can be said for some folk's money, not a hundred miles away.”

Chalker fronted him square, burly, and bold. “Now, look here, young fellow. What's the use of your trying to jaw me? That mare's not for you, or the likes of you. She's for people as can pay down a hundred pound for every shilling you've got,” and he stood chewing grass and looking with a sneering smile in Rawson's face. “Anything else in a small way?”

Rawson doubled his fist, and felt his knuckles. It was hard to be rubbed down that way, but he had spoiled his chance of a deal, and such vindication as suggested itself to him, would only make things worse; so, with a snort of contempt and defiance, he wheeled round, and made for the house.

The order of the day next took Mr. Chalker to the stockyard, and in a humour that argued ill for the work in hand being carried on comfortably.

Jack and his mounted staff had been trying to get together the cattle for inspection, but after a day's heavy work for men and horses, and a severe knocking about of the stock, not one-third of the number required was collected. As soon as they got near the piles of fallen trees, they took fright and split in all directions. They would not face the yard; the ground near was so changed in appearance; and, when headed and mastered, they got so terribly punished from being entangled in the branches, staked and torn, and, at last, were so completely cowed, that scores laid

themselves down on the ground, while numbers of others stood with their heads and horns jammed in the fallen timber, and would not move. It was sickening work. Jack said that they might be dogged and flogged into the yard, leaving numbers knocked up and crippled behind, but he would strongly recommend Chalker to give up the attempt for the present. A mob that should please Giblets could be readily cut out on the South Bend Camp.

Unfortunately, Chalker was in no mood to hear reason; moreover, at all times, opposition made him obstinate and suspicious, especially in regard to matters of which he had no practical knowledge. "As to the fallen trees preventing the cattle yarding, here were some hundreds in the yards — there was proof that the rest could be got in."

"Well, then, Mr. Chalker, suppose you get them in yourself."

"So I will, if you pay for the work in cash. They're yours till the first of May."

Chalker was in a mood to quarrel with anybody, and Jack was sickened and disgusted with the position he was placed in. One hot word brought another.

"It was all humbug — it was only a stall\* — the cattle could be got if you wanted to get them."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I will advise Sharp to see whether the stock have not been put out of the way."

The grossness of this charge nearly brought the double of a stock-whip on Chalker's head, but Jack turned abruptly, and rode off in a fury.

To do Chalker justice, he did not mean, so far as he had any definite intention, to convey the insult implied in his words. Accustomed to wrangle in the sale-yards with butchers and dealers, he often used language, in the heat of dispute, without considering its literal meaning. Indeed, in such circles, charges of robbery and swindling, and threats of personal violence, are often used in carrying out the most common and every-day transactions; and, as long as business is put through, it is held that "no bones are broke," and the foulest Billingsgate passes unquestioned. Indeed, it may be said that this trait of our social life is not confined to sale-yards. The tone and language common in discussion throughout this Colony, could certainly not be used in any Continental or American community without entailing serious consequences. We may, if we choose, claim credit for our pacific habits on this score; but we cannot boast of our manners and language, while blackguardism enjoys protection here that it enjoys nowhere else. After all, "Bully" was not a whit worse than several of our Members of Assembly, and, probably, was equally well acquainted with the niceties of etymology.

And now I must discharge my conscience as to Chalker. I believe I have conveyed to the reader without stint the unmitigated ill-will which

we youngsters cherished towards him. Afterwards, I found out the extent of our injustice; but there was nobody at Windabyne, except Major Smith, who interpreted him fairly — who admitted that he was any better than the “foul fiend.” To Mrs. Smith, naturally, his vulgarity, his odious purse-pride, added to the errand on which he had come, made his presence intolerable; while the hostility of the rest of the household was evidenced in dumb opposition and sour looks. But Major Smith said from the first, “The man has come on a piece of business disagreeable to us, but he is, so far as I can see, perfectly honest; and if he is reticent about matters as to which we want information, no doubt experience has shown him the benefit of caution. His business ways are no doubt unpleasing, and he is quite unrefined and reckless of other people's feelings; but his efforts are directed with single purpose to the business he has on hand. In fact, he is a thorough-going, energetic agent; and, if he is obstinate and unaccommodating, it is because he does not see his way to yield any concession safely. As to your talking of his ‘treachery,’ that's nonsense; and as to his being a ‘bully,’ I don't wonder at him sometimes getting exasperated, considering the difficulties he meets with, and the sullen looks cast on him. Mind, I don't say that he is agreeable or amiable, and I don't say that his ‘principal,’ Sharp, is honest; but I say that Chalker is here performing a legitimate duty, and I say that he is not a bad fellow — and that the devil is not so black as he's painted”

But this was a stretch of high-minded Christian philosophy and judicial rectitude far above us. The household had sat upon Chalker and condemned him without appeal; some because of his being a “vulgar ruffian,” but the most because he was an “infernal bailiff.”

As I have grown older, I have attained more of the spirit of my early friend's wisdom. I have found that, while in humanity there is no perfection, there is no such thing as utter debasement. The good and the evil are so mixed up in men, that unexpected virtues spring up in the most unlikely quarters, quite as often as blemishes are met with in those high and tranquil regions where self-satisfied holiness is worn as a daily garment. Such views as those I have imbibed spoil one quite as a zealous partisan; for, after repeated experiences of the kind, you become chary of swearing to any clique, party, or sect, whether buff, blue, or green; but, at the same time, a pleasant and hopeful theory of humanity is thus evolved, for it is refreshing to see the flowrets spring up in the gutter and the kennel, and to know that there is bloom and fragrance beyond the narrow-fenced ring of creed or conventionalism. If I had to deal with any of the Chalker tribe now — which Heaven forefend — I hope I would discriminate fairly between the man and the business on which he might be engaged.

Meantime, while Jack went off in a fury, followed by his mustering party, I was left with Chalker and old James taking stock of the working

bullocks and other movable plant of the station. But first I made an errand to the house, and told Major Smith of Chalker's remarks — I could not digest such an aspersion on my old friend — “he make away with the cattle!” — he would as soon rob a bank! He came down at once, and spoke mildly, “I'm sorry to hear, Mr. Chalker, that you think the stock has been tampered with.” Chalker looked thoroughly confused and ashamed — I did not think it was in him — he blushed and stammered, “Indeed, Major Smith, I was irritated, and said what I did not mean. I was disappointed that the cattle were not ready for inspection. Giblets will be here directly.”

“I was sure there would be difficulty and delay, but neither I nor my sons wish to raise obstacles. You had better see if Mr. Giblets, when he comes, will consent to take the rest on the camp — that will be easiest for all of us.”

“I'll do what I can, Major Smith.” Chalker was always respectful to the old gentleman, while he swaggered and shouldered his way through us without ceremony. I understand the reason now. The Major spoke to him courteously, and treated him like a fellow man.

In a few hours, the crack of whips shewed that a mob was being driven in, but it was plain that they were not coming up in the quiet, orderly way customary with the Windabyne herd. They had, it was plain, to be driven hard and jammed together, for, as before, they were taking fright at every step; but still it seemed as if they were being rushed at a pace, and with a fury, beyond all reason. When they reached the track of the cyclone, marked by the open lane through the forest, and the high piles of fallen timber, the mob, in number about two hundred, could not be restrained, but split into several lots, and bolted in different directions. The riders did their best to head them and restore them to order. I ran to the stable to get my horse. Chalker always kept a horse ready, and he was off at once. Though not much of a horseman, he was wonderfully active considering his elephantine build. I found he had been once well-known as an athlete in Sydney. When I came back, old James was just shutting the gate on a few head that Jack had driven in, who was again disappearing, going at a terrific pace over the fallen logs after the other fugitives.

The old man laid his hand on my bridle. “Maister Reggy, what is the matter with Maister John; he's unco rash this morning; his face is burning red, and he looks that wild?”

“It's Chalker's damned blackguardism has put him out.”

The old man shook his head. “Patience, patience; bid him be patient; the lad will do no good behaving like a madman.”

I first went to open another gate at an angle formed by a wing of the herding yard, thinking that some of the cattle might face that more easily than the regular entrance, and before I re-mounted, the whips sounded again, and the mob approached, hurtling through the fallen tree-tops, and

rushed on in the same fashion as before. Suddenly, there arose a shout of warning, then came a rustling and swaying of branches, and a tree fell with a thundering crash. As I looked, dismounted horses, and cattle unheeded, were scattering over the ground. What could be wrong? As I galloped up, there was Chalker carrying someone. Who could it be? Somebody hurt, and apparently quite helpless. Gracious Heaven! it was Jack; was he dead?

“A tree fallen on him, Mr. Crawford; hurry to the house, like a good fellow; we'll put him in his bed — and get some brandy.”

And he followed, panting, but carrying the weight like a feather. I lost no time — I felt that it was best to tell all at once. I met Mary. I think I said, “Jack's hurt,” and I saw that his bed was ready, and brought some brandy and other things that might be wanted. When he was carried in he was met by his father and mother; the old man, cool and resolute, though heart-torn; Mrs. Smith, self-controlled, but clasping her hands tightly in her mother's agony. His father examined him carefully. “No, not dead, spine probably injured, violent concussion — will likely be insensible for some time; we must send for the Doctor to Burrumburrah.”

It appeared that some of the cattle had got entangled in the top of a fallen tree, on which was resting the stem of another half-fallen, just poised and hanging as it were on the edge of its broken stump. The rush of the cattle forced through the branches, twisted the tree-top, disturbed the balance, and the mass fell right on poor Jack and his horse.

One of the black boys came to me with tearful eyes. “Master Jack dead, you think it, Mr. Reggy?”

“No, Binebbera. I believe directly better.”

“Poor fella Doctor! I believe you go like it that fella.”

“What, is the horse not dead?”

“Baal, that fella altogether broke him bone; I believe you take him pistol.”

I went to my room, and then rode straight to the fallen tree. Alas! there was all that once was old Doctor, pinned to the ground, pierced by a pointed branch. He had been beating his head against the ground in the death agony; his shoulder was crushed — and he seemed dead in the lower limbs already. A clammy sweat now covered his once glossy skin: but even then, when he heard my voice he turned his poor neck, and looked at me with his large, lustrous eye. I patted his head, covered his eyes, and I believe kissed him; then I put the muzzle of the pistol steadily to his temple, and when I touched the trigger — with one quivering shudder the pains of the good horse were ended.

I dropped the pistol, fell on my face, and sobbed as if my heart was broken. I was only a boy, or little more. Yes; horse and rider were both gone. Jack, my friend, my chum, my model! — and this was to be the end of his gallant, hardy life — of his honourable, high-spirited

of an existence that, if spared, could not but both benefit and ornament any community; and what could heal his parents' wounds, and fill his place in the household, and in the hearts of those who knew him best?

But I felt this was no time for vain lamentation. I must go and make myself of use.

If we had now a house of sorrow, it was as well a house of tenderness and sympathy. How, in times of suffering, the kinship of mankind appears! Then, blood is shown to be thicker than water. How, in real danger and distress, our paltry jealousies, our social heart-burnings, our sordid strivings and squabblings all disappear, and men become men, and women become women! And, thank God, that it is so, and that this bond of kindness grows stronger every day. In that house, no one was more truly sympathetic than Chalker. He, whom we had disliked and abused, and not without some reason, had carried our poor Jack home in his arms with the tenderness of a woman; and his sad concerned face, waiting unweariedly in the verandah, anxious to be of use, showed that under that uncouth exterior, hidden by habitudes that were as a second nature, there lay a mine of kindliness.

It is the old mystery of humanity. The fountain, as of old, still sends forth sweet waters and bitter; out of the same mouth come, as of old, blessing and cursing; the Angel's crown of love and mercy is often yet seen along with the cloven hoof of the Satyr!

And what is the interpretation of the riddle? Does any evidence tell us any man, or race of men, either all good or all evil? To think so, we must read in vain the records of the past; and still the unexplained enigma meets us daily, in saint and savage — in the city and the desert. Does the universal fact bear witness to a fall of the race, or to a rise? If tenderness and sympathy are everywhere evoked by misfortune, whether does that show that the race is going down or up? Is this the cause to be sought in the doctrine of universal depravity, or rather in another direction — in a more beneficent law of creation?

The surgeon came from Burrumburrah that night; the danger was great, but a fatal result was not certain, and would not be immediate. The stupor would not last very long; he could detect no local injury beyond the spinal concussion. There would likely be little pain; indeed, acute pain would be evidence of nature struggling to recover. Quiet, coolness, care, were prescribed. It was a case in which nature, watchful eyes, and gentle hands must work the cure, along with the great ally — time. Complete recovery was not to be expected, at least not for long.

So the man of medicine had done his best, and went off on his hard road to other cases. Poor Doctor Mackenzie! He lived a toilsome and conscientious life, and died quite poor not long ago.

So poor Jack lay in the quiet, darkened room, while the breath flickered between his lips; but gradually and slowly the symptoms of peaceful

sleep appeared, and the anxious, watching mother saw, with joy, that her first-born still lived and might live. Next day, about mid-day, he awoke, but the haggard, wan, vacant look was not that of our Jack. Yet he knew his mother, and he swallowed a little liquid, and then, with an exclamation like a peevish child, he shut his eyes, and slept again. Perhaps his flickering thoughts had strayed back to his early days, old associations reviving with the sight of the fond, familiar face bending over him.

It was a week before he spoke connectedly, and for long he could not follow the events of the last month. At length, after weeks of silent reverie, he seemed to grasp the position of things, and begged to see his father. "Father, the Station's gone — give it up. I am as well as I can be. It's now close upon the date for delivery, and there is not the least chance of getting anything out of it, or getting any redress. I have thought a great deal while lying here, and I see it quite plainly. Better let us move to Girrah," — and, indeed, it was the best thing that could be done. Later letters from Sydney had made plain that there was nothing to be got by taking action against the mortgagee. Even the preliminary steps, before an enquiry could commence, would cost a large sum, and would occupy a year at least. Jack's advice was sound. Better make the plunge and have done with it — they would leave everything behind — go out destitute — for the mortgage covered everything in the house as well as the station effects proper; and this, after ten years' exertion! However, that moan was soon made and done with; the wants of the day had to be met.

It was as good a time to move poor Jack as months after. He was almost without pain, but he was a bed-ridden cripple, and might be so for years — for life. Practically, after the accident, Chalker had assumed the management of the Station, and he was putting men, appointed by himself, to carry on the current work, so there was no reason for delaying a day.

And so, one afternoon, there came from Girrah, driven by Rawson and Short, the old hooded carriage that we used to call "Noah's Ark," and the mail phaeton, associated with many a merry picnic; and Jack was lifted gently on a mattress into the carriage, his mother and sister sitting beside him, and Rawson drove slowly away, and then Short took the rest of us.

Chalker did not have the opportunity to make his adieux, and, perhaps, the form was well omitted; but, of late, a much better feeling had arisen towards him, and our last thoughts of him were not unkindly.

And old Kerella raised a wail, and lifted her hands to heaven — but, taking a sudden thought, she stopped her lament before it reached the full burst of agony, and, collecting her *trousseau* in a formidable bundle, she pressed a wretched mangy pup to her wrinkled bosom, and, taking a short cut, got to Girrah before sundown.

When we reached the ridge over the white gate, we turned our eyes on the old homestead — most of us for the last time — and the life of Windabyne was over.

And we got to Girrah in good time, and everybody came out with smiling welcome, kind looks, and ready hands, and stout old Mr. Hawthorne came along the verandah, flourishing a paper — “Heard the news, Major? War's declared, and there's an army off to the Black to the Crimea — wherever that may be. You'll see it all here.” And the spirit of the old soldier rose with the blast of the trumpet, and the hearts of the whole of us stirred strangely, and the blood tingled to our fingers' ends — for the memory of the old fighting days was bred in every one of us; and, till late that night, we read of the march of the Guards to the railway, and of the crowd shaking hands with them all along the column, and how the light-infantry regiments filed through the streets for the last time, to the rattle of the drums and fifes playing, “The girl I left behind me.” — Alas! Not many of them saw those they prized again! — And we read of the French steamers holding on for Malta and the Levant, crowded with fierce little Zouaves and bronzed veterans from Algiers, cheering our red-coats, and of all the laughable scenes that illustrated the *entente cordiale*. And the cruisers were sweeping the double-headed eagle from the seas, and old Charlie had gone off to take Cronstadt, — for he was a marked man, the head of the house of Napier. Had not our good Queen said to the Prince de Joinville, in Bon Gaultier's famous ballad:

“Gin ye meet wi' Charlie on the seas, ye'll wish yoursel at hame.”

But, when the Admiral got to Cronstadt, he did not like the look of it: only, if he did not get in, the Russians were not game to come out!

And so we were lifted for the time out of our personal cares by the great cataclysm which was tearing, rending, and resounding over the globe, echoing the glory and the fate of men of our own race. And then, what a grand cause! If there could be a good cause for a war, surely this was one. Anybody then, outside of the Peace Society, whether Whig or Tory, who said that the Russian War was an unjust one, would have been thought crazy by the simple folks of these times. Had we not seen the great northern empire steadily forcing out its frontier on all sides by blood, fire, and gold? Had we not seen the last lingering remnant of Polish nationality ruthlessly stamped out? Had we not seen the Hungarian army crushed by Russia for defending its country against the vulture-like old Austrian policy; and then Peter the Great's legacy, and the famous Catherine's doings — that job of the partition which she carried out along with that rabid old drill-sergeant Fritz. We knew all

these stories, and cherished a simple righteous belief in knocking on the head bears, double-headed eagles, and other noxious animals. Now-a-days, it is not easy to attain such simple satisfied faith in any of our public dealings, diplomatic, or warlike. In one magazine or newspaper, we read that the occupation of Cabul and the attack on Cetawayo are measures not only justifiable but absolutely necessary for the protection of the human race; while another publication puts forward equally good reasons for denouncing both campaigns as the deeds of robbers and murderers.

Opinion was then less divided; and we all gave what we could to the Patriotic Fund for the wounded, and in every sea-board town the young fellows filled the Volunteer ranks.

And our poor Jack, lying helpless, felt his pulses throb as the bugle notes and the martial clang echoed to us from afar, filled the air — it is well that there are such emotions, and that there are minds that can be raised above brooding over misfortune — for the page of his past life was blotted and turned down, and the time coming was still written in the air.

A fresh departure in life was now before me, too. I had little idea, when Short and I started with a lot of fat sheep for Melbourne, that it would be years before I saw any of my friends again, for in these days, time and distance had not vanished before Railway, Telegraph, and ubiquitous Post; but separations once made were often for good, and news and letters came seldom and with long intervals.

We said good-bye as if we would be back in a few weeks, and we never all met again.

\* The Archbishop of Sydney issued a series of Pastorals in 1879, which provoked much controversy, and resulted in all State aid being withdrawn from Denominational Schools.

\* Quoted from above.

\* A pretence.

## Chapter XV. Droving.

My own life has been commonplace enough; fairly successful in an ordinary sense, and not without enjoyment. After some eight years rather rough pioneering work, I found myself — from causes which I could never have forecast — in a sure and well-to-do position. I refer to my personal fortunes now, merely to show how they contrast with those of my earliest friends. I can see clearly, looking back, how both they and I drifted along on the current of events, individual merits or short-comings having had little to do, either with my success or with their misfortunes. Had our positions been exchanged, I would certainly have come to grief sooner than they did, while they would have graced much more worthily the modest independence which I attained.

I met with various new and rough experiences, unlike the pleasant home-life of Windabyne, before the fat sheep from Girrah were fairly sold by the stock-agents, Messrs. Callum, More and Co., of Melbourne.

In droving over the great thoroughfare, the Watling Street of Australia, leading from the oldest seaport to the richest goldfield, we had enough to do to make our way in the Babel of traffic that now covered this once solitary bush-road.

The hired men we got to help us were as nearly worthless as possible, and we were truly glad that we had taken Jack's advice and brought Binebbera with us. We had to work like horses, and live like pigs, and, as for matter of excitement and interest, adventures were to be met with without being sought for.

Short and I were “stuck-up” one morning by a sporting-looking bushranger, with three blackguard stockman-like fellows at his back. We had not a ghost of a chance, as, at the time they surrounded us, we were looking for our horses in the long, wet grass, *with our trousers off*. We had to submit with a good grace, and the ruffians marched us to our camp, chaffing us about our costume, and announcing that they proposed breakfasting with us.

Fortunately, they could find nothing to steal, except three horses — very low in flesh — and a spring-cart, and these they scorned to appropriate. They ate a frying-panful of chops, and all our damper, then they fresh loaded their firearms, and — we supposed to secure a safe retreat — ordered us to accompany them a mile off the road; two riding a-head and two behind, they escorted us a good deal more than a mile,

and we began not to like it. Shortly, their line of route brought us into broken ground on the banks of the Murrumbidgee, and they had to follow each other in single file. While the men ahead were out of sight, and those behind were pelting a black snake that wriggled across the path, we made a dash and jumped into the river, at the spot a deep and shady reach. A bullet grazed Short's ribs, but we dodged under the boughs, crossed at a narrow current below, and, after a run, got back to our camp. We managed to set the police after the gang the same afternoon, but we never heard more of them.

After this adventure, we kept a good look out, and in due time made a very successful trip of it. Mr. Callum, the head of the firm, thanks to his warm Highland heart, showed us great kindness. I can recall now his stalwart form, and the echo of his kindly, cheery voice comes back to me; but what impressed me most was his high tone of honour and rectitude — his scorn of trickery and lying. He was a splendid man for the pioneering days, and he was the only agent that the squatters of that time would employ; but with the general change of owners, and the development of finance, men of quite different stamp have become necessary in this branch of business. He took great interest in us, and advised us strongly to stick to the work we had entered on. He believed he could get us plenty of droving, and advised us to stay a week or two in town till a good opening offered. So, after getting our accounts settled, we took a short holiday and rambled about the infant city.

Melbourne was just emerging from the canvas-town stage of its existence, and was beginning to solidify into the handsome town of today. A few years before, the population living on the shores of Hobson's Bay was little more than that of a village, but the rush of new-comers attracted by the gold fields had filled whole streets with temporary erections of canvas, sheet iron, and paling. The young town possessed one advantage over the old capital of Port Jackson. Sydney was never planned, but grew up hap-hazard, the houses being built along the tracks opened by the traffic; but in the case of Melbourne, like all the newer townships of the colony, the ground had been regularly surveyed, aligned, and allotted, on a scale adapted to meet future requirements, and thus, the young city, though at the time of flimsy material, was growing in comely proportions, with well opened thoroughfares, parks and markets.

One day I was strolling about Williamstown with Binebbera, watching the strange scenes of the great encampment, and enjoying the comical wonder of the indigène! Hundreds of people were arriving weekly from all parts to share in the golden wealth that had made so much noise over the world, but when they reached the edge of the long-wished-for continent, many of them had not a penny in their pockets, and they found the dragon on watch, as of old. "Want" that they had left behind, as they

thought, met them again guarding the golden gate of the Hesperides. The fleece of Jason was not to be grasped with empty hands, for they needed food, lodging, and money for travel before they could face the long rough road to the diggings. And so, many had to camp where they landed, to earn wages and save money, and it fell out often that they fared better by taking again to the homely thrift that they had laid aside, than if they had struggled on to Ballarat or Bendigo.

Destitution there was none, for work was to be had at once. A builder landed in the morning, and before night he had engaged to put up a large store. Every man, able-bodied or not, could get a job at triple English rates as soon as he stepped on land. Some well-reared youths clubbed their pocket money, got a horse and cart, and began at once to deliver goods from an improvised wharf at a charge for carriage which would now seem fabulous; but every kind of service was the more expensive in proportion to the necessity. To replace a horse-shoe cost ten shillings. So that, though the new-comers were put to shifts and had to face the fact of work, whatever their former position had been, still, no one was really badly off for the means of living. Cheerfulness and activity prevailed everywhere, with a general colouring of hilarity and eccentricity, far more agreeable to witness than the dull level of grudging work and sordid class hatred to be seen on the same ground now, the genuine fruits of base politics and misapplied wealth. Everybody then was civil and kindly; everybody would lend a hand; and everybody laughed at the ludicrous things he found himself doing, while the pantomime effect was heightened by the fact that your neighbours and yourself knew nothing of each other, though you were on the best of terms.

In walking along the road to the Bay, I had met with proof of the genial spirit abroad. A young fellow — quite a swell — in passing me and my retainer, driving a light waggon, pulled his horses up with a jerk and shouted to us to “jump in,” and he drove us a mile handsomely.

Entering into the spirit of the scene, we had made friends with all we met, and had given several people “a lift” in putting up their temporary houses — besides partaking of tea and salt salmon with very nice people, whose names I never heard. Binebbera attracted much attention. All the young people gathered round him, and as he had a bright blue scarf round his neck and a sixpenny ring on each finger, moreover, his manners being like those of most well-reared blacks, quite irreproachable, I felt proud of having so presentable a follower.

Indeed, the young aboriginal, with his healthy brown complexion, his silky curly locks, and his flashing teeth would have looked well anywhere. His well-balanced figure possessed a grace and elegance in striking contrast with the frames of the labour-stiffened Europeans around, and his ways were very gentle and kindly.

I have become at times uneasily sceptical about the advantages of

modern methods after seeing this contrast presented again and again. Indeed, one does not feel proud of civilisation after comparing the forms, bearings, and manners of a British crowd, with those of a tribe of "savages."

So by degrees we had worked our way down to the water's edge, when suddenly a familiar tone of voice reached my ear, and looking round, I saw a boat drawing near the muddy banks full of immigrants, apparently from a barque anchored a cable length off. The words and accent I heard savoured strongly of the Clyde. "Rin her in — Jimsy — lay to your oar, man — ye hae'na the pith o' a cat — noo Rab — into the bank wi' her. It's as saft as pease brose. She'll no be a hair the waur."

"Ave a care, gents; if you stave in the boat, I'll get it 'ot from the mate." This last was in a totally different voice and accent, and I could see the speaker in the bows, a neat little London steward, in a gold chain and black whiskers. It was easy to understand that the "hands" of the barque either had bolted already, or could not be trusted ashore, and that the boat under the care of the steward had been lent to the immigrants to land. Not heeding the steward's remonstrance, "Rab" and "Jimsy" kept bruising the water with the most murderous and unscientific strokes, and the skiff came on with a handsome bump, and stuck fast in the mud, some yards from the nearest dry ground.

I was wondering what they would do next, when "First man ashore for a pound," shouted a voice that tingled to my fingers' ends, and to my utter amazement my old schoolmate Dick Kennedy stood on the gunwale, and balanced himself for a jump. "Hand-over-your-pound-then, Dick," stuttered another young swell, and with a spring they both well-nigh cleared the chasm of ooze and dirty water, but unluckily they jostled each other, and landed one on his knees and the other over his boots in the liquid soil of Australia.

Their fellow passengers in the boat seemed, as was natural, to enjoy the misfortunes of their neighbours. Some laughed till they were breathless, some of the tender sex till they sobbed, while the two young fellows scrambling on shore, seized each other by the throat, and exchanged threats and Billingsgate like two fishwives. Kennedy having most fluency of speech, might have got the best of his antagonist, but the latter with a long splash of black mud right down his face, and distorting his countenance frightfully in the vain attempt to stammer out his vindication, flourished his fist within an inch of Dick's nose, and held his own.

Of course I laughed, too, but Binebbera's mirth was something grotesque. He twisted himself about and yelled; he bumped his head with his fists, and took short jumps straight up and down; he sat down and whooped, and then he lay on his back and hammered his heels against the ground.

His noise at length interrupted the mud-stained combatants, and they both turned round to look with wonder on the antics of the indigenous native. "Man, Shewell," said Dick, in a tone of earnest remonstrance, "are you not ashamed of yourself, with that tobacconist's sign laughing at you? He'll be one of the 'Anthropophagi Australés,' that Dr. Memes used to tell us about! Stir him up with the long pole," and, drawing nearer, Dick came full butt against me — seeing me then for the first time. From the expression of his face, I realised how a man must look when he meets a ghost, and, indeed, it is somewhat staggering to walk against an old friend, unexpectedly, on the other side of the globe. "Mercy on us! — is that you, Reggy Crawford?" his tongue at length found utterance, as he laid his hand cautiously on my shoulder. "Just myself, Dick — that is — all that is left of me" — hinting at perils by field and flood, for I felt called upon to come the "veteran colonist" over him, and make him understand that he was a "new chum." Shewell now came forward with much politeness, assumed in honour of me, to call Dick's attention to something the people in the boat were wanting. But speech was, for the time, unattainable, though he made desperate efforts, and fearful contortions, and, as a last resort, he burst into song, and, pointing to a plank, lying some distance off, he trotted out, "To-up-with-it-and-stick-it-on-the-boat-with my right tooooralooral-right-tooooralay!"

The plank was long and heavy, and it would certainly be civil, as suggested by Shewell, to help the people ashore.

Feeling it was just as well to do a good-natured thing, I told Binebbera to "come on," and the four of us soon had a portable bridge reaching to the gunwale of the skiff, and were helping the women and little children to land.

First came a Lancashire sub-contractor, or Yorkshire woolstapler, with his "missus and childer." They were a hard-featured utilitarian lot, without a laugh in them, and without a note of music in their souls. He never even said, "Thank you," to us, and his wife was in a fuss about the dirt, and in a great funk about the victuals they were to get. I have no doubt, though, that he soon became a "great capitalist," and that she would, ere many years, grace the "upper circles."

Then came a type that I knew better — Rab, a stout ploughman, of the Cuddy Headrigg stamp, with his gude-wife, black-eyed, cherry-cheeked, and smiling. "My certes," said Rab, "if there's luck in dirt, ye should have walth o' good fortune here, Maister Kennedy!"

"Here, Rab, ye muckle gomeril," quoth the wife, "keep wee Elsie till I get across wi' the other bairns, puir things."

"Let — me — take — one — of — them, — Mrs Hood," said Shewell.

"Deed, and you're very good, Mr. Shewell — you're aye fond o' the bairns," she said, with a beaming smile; and so this family came ashore.

Last of all stepped across the plank a youth, prim and spotless, carrying

a well-filled carpet-bag. As he landed, he spoke first to Shewell and then to Kennedy, and put a slip of paper in the hands of each. They pencilled something on the papers, and, receiving them back, the youth went steadily on his way. We will likely see more of this passenger by-and-by. On coming on board the *Heracles*, he had invested his solitary ten-pound note so judiciously in cigars, medicines, perfumes, books, and so on, that he now had in his possession value for *fifty pounds*, beside the well-filled bag he carried. If you ask me how this young fellow came to think of such a speculation, I can only ask you, in return, how it is that, in his mature years, he is now well able to buy up all his fellow passengers, and the passengers of a dozen other ships. As he picked his steps along, he had a most business-like air, but there seemed to be no cordiality between him and his shipmates.

“Noo, Jeanie, my woman,” said Rab, after he had carried bag and baggage on to dry ground — “I jalouse the least ye can do is to scart some of the dirt off these young gentlemen.”

“I wonder ye dinna feel shame, Rab, at letting Mr. Shewell and Mr. Kennedy loup into the glaur. It would have evened ye better yoursel', ye thankless hash — and you nighering and girning at the puir lads,” said the warm-hearted Mrs. Hood.

And, indeed, Rab could not restrain a grin of amusement, even when taking steps to improve their appearance. He scraped Mr. Kennedy down with a butcher's knife and a curry-comb, and the wife dealt with Mr. Shewell more gently with sponge and brush.

While they were so engaged, Binebbera was gaining the good-will of the little children. His dark, laughing face, his harlequin finery, but, above all, some lollies judiciously exhibited, drew the little round faces and blue eyes around him, and, shortly, he had one on each side, with a chubby little warm hand tightly holding a brown finger.

Children and domesticated blacks always get on well together. There is a strong human feeling in infancy. Now, in Queensland, you will often see the black boys playing with the toddling little things, and the *male* Kanaka nursery-maid minding his baby charge, with the tenderness of a white girl.

So, after seeing them camped, we said “good-bye” to this kind couple, and we wished them well, but how they throve, and where they made their home, we never heard. Perhaps they are to be found among the great ones of the Colony; it may be that they live in one of the forest homes of bushland; not unlikely they may have found wealth and ease in the rising city.

A year after, on the distant Condamine, while half-asleep beside my camp-fire, Binebbera spoke, “Mr. Reggy, you think it little Kate and Elsie come up here?” “Who?” I could not imagine what he meant. “That fella — two piccaninny — boodgera little white fella Mary — alonga

Williams-town.” He was thinking of the two little girls whose hands he had held on the muddy shores of Hobson's Bay.

I escorted Kennedy and Shewell to our quarters at Scott's, and Bob Short was greatly pleased to meet two imported youths of so much promise. Their hearty enjoyment of life ashore, and their natural flow of spirits were contagious. The hotel was at times on the verge of an uproar, for there were kindred spirits there with like tastes, and the whole of us were ready at any moment — with or without notice — to eat, drink, dance, sing, steal sign boards, or make away with the flagstaff.

I fear some of us became known to Sergeant Finnigan. One night, the skipper of the *Heracles* and Binebbera fell into his hands, and became a kind of expiatory offering for the whole party.

But this pace could not last, and three days saw the end of it.

Shewell and Kennedy had to go on to Sydney to deliver their letters, and report themselves at certain business quarters, and on the same evening that they got their sailing orders, we received a missive from Callum, More and Co., requiring prompt attention, and so we went back to work.

Somehow, we did not feel as if we had parted with this pair for good and all. If you say “good-bye” to a man at the Williamstown Pier, it is just as likely as not, owing to the migratory habits of us Australians, that you will meet him six months after at Swan River or Cleveland Bay.

## Chapter XVI. To the North.

Short and I made two or three trips together with sheep, from the Edward and Billabong to Melbourne and the Gold Fields, at first droving by contract, latterly speculating on our own account, and time passed so quickly and with such constantly renewed interest, from fresh scenes, new acquaintances, and the engrossing occupation of the over-lander, that a year had passed when one day I found a note from Fred at a gold-buyer's office on the Ovens, where I was in the habit of calling. I had written frequently to Mrs. Smith and Jack, but, from my rambling mode of life, I got my letters very irregularly. What I had learned of the family since we left, amounted to this. After a visit at Girrah, necessarily prolonged by Jack's continued invalid state, and by the now frequent ailings of Mrs. Smith, the Major had gone to Sydney to secure the public appointment as to which he had been in correspondence. Mrs. Smith, Mary, and Jack were to follow as soon as arrangements could be made. Willy and Fred had found temporary occupation in the neighbourhood, and they would go into droving or look out for an opening in the North as soon as the household was settled in Sydney. A later letter said that Gully Trotter had been in that part of the country, and that he had called at Girrah on Major Smith after his departure. He had expressed regret at the result of Sharp's action — “unnecessary precipitance” he called it — and he thought that some arrangement, mutually advantageous, might have been come to without proceeding to such extreme action as depriving the family of their home; but he said that being of course concerned in the Station only as purchaser, he had no interest in, or knowledge of the mortgagee's proceedings. He had talked very frankly and pleasantly with Willy and Fred, and had proposed to join them, and Rawson too, if he thought fit, in taking up new country in the North. This project was now being discussed, and in the meantime he had asked Fred to carry out a transaction in draught horses for him. Fred had now taken these horses along for sale at Bendigo, his note stated, and he hoped to see me on his way back. As the date he mentioned when he expected to be on the Ovens was within a few days, I determined to wait for him, and accepted an invitation to take up my quarters with the gold-buyers.

It was a queer establishment. The owners were two young fellows not very long from home, but they had received some business training, and they seemed to have dropped into their avocation and adapted themselves

to the ways of the place with some success. The whole staff consisted of their two selves and a black Newfoundland dog, the latter having a great reputation on the Flat for ferocity, but being really the most good-natured, slobbery, friendly canine I ever saw. The main building was a large tent, which had developed outwardly till it was surrounded by a slab stronghold, the whole being divided into three portions — office, sleeping barrack, and a nondescript apartment, more chimney than anything else, serving the purpose of kitchen, dining-hall, and visitors' room. The inner room was garnished with a formidable display of fire-arms, a necessary part of the stock-in-trade. The proprietors had no attendant, either cook or porter. At that time, the most useless of men on the Ovens asked and got one pound for a day's work; but my friends managed very well without, and no doubt were much safer living as they did. Moreover, this led to a very pleasant Bohemian scrambling *ménu*, not by any means nasty or uncomfortable, and very suggestive of fun and mirth. I have often thought since what a blessing it would be if people could manage altogether without servants. There is a luxury, an independence, and a freedom from espionage in such life well worth some effort and sacrifice to attain.

As the gold nearly all came in for sale on Fridays and Saturdays (and then indeed it came in hundreds and thousands of ounces), there was during the week a great deal of spare time, more than could be taken up even in the absorbing occupation of cooking, and other domestic matters; but there was no want of interest or of resources for passing the time. There were plenty of books and newspapers to read, and the hut was a regular howff or rendezvous for kindred souls, among whom were many new arrivals, some of the settlers in the neighbourhood, and a scattering of frontier men from the far North. Among other sources of amusement, one of my friends made capital sketches of the surroundings and sang songs in various languages. There was a favourite exercise followed there, that I fancy had some meaning and purpose in it. We used to have a shooting match very often in the afternoon, and many a bottle was thrown up and broken before that hut door; and, I may state, that my hosts never met with any mishap during a time when robbery and crimes of violence had become common, and when the bodies of unknown men were occasionally found in deserted claims. Such a state of society as that then to be seen on the Ovens and on many others of the Gold Fields, could hardly exist now. To speak of the mass of human units thus thrown together as in any sense a community, would be indeed an error. Unknown to each other; without ties of blood or other association, except of the shortest and flimsiest kind; unmarked and unregistered by the authorities, they came and went unnoted; and when they disappeared, no man asked after them.

Without railway or telegraph, with an imperfect postal service, and a

police force entirely taken up with other matters than the protection of the population, a vast proportion of crime and casualty never came to light; and it is well known that numbers of men disappeared about that time, who have never been accounted for. So I have not the least doubt that this revolver practice was of the greatest service in the gold-buying business.

Some short time after, acting on the same principle, I gained great respect from a mob of Myall blacks, who came to call at an outside lambing-yard, by putting five bullets into the stem of a Moreton Bay ash, within four inches of each other, in about as many seconds. A nod is as good as a wink to other intelligent animals besides the traditional blind horse.

One day, an old colonist who had a station in the neighbourhood, came into the office, and lighted his pipe.

“Do you see what they are about across the creek?”

I looked, and could see a small gathering of people, as if for a sale. “An auction, is it?” I asked.

“It's the sale of a new township. If you have a hundred pounds with you, go over and buy an acre of land. It will make your fortune.”

“Buy land there? Why, there's nothing but the Commissioner's camp and the police stables. Who's going to live there?”

I thought that nobody but a madman would buy a piece of a granite ridge in such an outlandish place. That ridge is now covered with streets and solid buildings. It is called the town of Beechworth. I wonder what an acre there is worth now?

I waited a week, and Fred did not appear. I could not delay longer, because Short was waiting for me near Condobolin, on the Lachlan, with a lot of cattle which we had undertaken to deliver far North, near a place called Myall Creek, on Darling Downs. So I left behind me the city of tents on the stony hill-side, and I swam my horses over the Murray, and struck away by Geerogery and Tabletop to the oak-fringed Murrumbidgee, and then, with a hurried night ride through the waterless grassy plains, found my chum on the banks of the Lachlan, ready to start.

He had heard no more of our friends at Girrah than I had, and our engrossing occupation forbade us going the few days' ride that would take us to see them. A week's absence might, and most likely would, scatter all our arrangements to the winds. The men, on our return, would be absent — bolted — and the horses and cattle would be lost and scattered. So, needs-must, we had to hold on our course, away to the North, hugging the edge of the waterless country, up Gobang Creek, by Harvey's Range and Buckinbah, till we crossed the Macquarie, and struck along the Talbragar for the northern line, passing Liverpool Plains and skirting the New England Table-land, till we found ourselves on the margin of a tract of unsurpassed beauty and luxuriance — a black

upland, swathed in flower-specked emerald, swelling away North in rolling seas of grass, spotted with misty islets; for many a mile without mark of hoof or other sign of the white man — and that was Darling Downs.

And we travelled as the water, often scarce, would allow, sometimes a few miles in a day, sometimes ten or twelve, and we made many a wakeful sleepless camp; till, at the end of our six months' trip, we reached a scrubby gully that joined the Condamine in a dry tract of downs. The only water was at the bottom of a sixty-foot well, belonging to a little inn, better than the common public of the bush; moreover, there was a Post Office, a blacksmith's shop, and a general store, dealing principally in tobacco and hobbles — and that was the infant town of Dalby. As I cantered up ahead of the cattle, the horizon line to my right shewed some miles off, a long string of emus in Indian file, skirting along the crest of the billow-like plain; nothing else stirred and nothing reached the ear but the hush of nature's unbroken stillness, while, far across the prairie-like scene, appeared on all sides only endless waves of grass with islands of tree-tops floating cloud-like in the distance. Now, many a roof-tree rises along Myall Creek, and the locomotive snorts and screams across the Downs, and threatens yet further encroachments on nature's solitudes.

I found a packet of letters at the Post Office, and the news they contained saddened us for many a day. Our kind old friend, Major Smith, was no more. It appeared, that while living poorly in Sydney, hanging on and waiting for the appointment which he expected, he took the low fever that always haunts the crowded, ill-built, and poverty-stricken suburb where he had a cheap lodging, and the advice and care that might have saved him, came too late. Mrs. Smith and Mary made a hurried journey on the first suspicion they got of his condition, but they arrived only in time to cover the dear face for ever. While hanging over his last couch, the bitter mockery of fate reached them, in the shape of a Government messenger, the bearer of the long-expected appointment. The Commission went back to the Secretary's office, and the official, no doubt, made the needful memorandum.

And that was not all the mournful news. Fred had never been seen or heard of since he left Bendigo. A horse, believed to be the one he rode, was found on the Ovens, but he had absolutely vanished — without trace — like many more at that time. It was shocking, but not wonderful to me, who had seen the Gold Fields, and had heard so much of the digging life. I knew that it was quite possible for anyone, but especially likely for a stranger, either to fall down a deserted shaft, or to be knocked down one, without his fate ever coming to light. It was a wretched thought to me for many a day, that the poor fellow might have been lying within a mile of me, murdered or maimed, and dying by inches, while I

was waiting for him, spending that pleasant week at the gold-buyers' hut.

Jack had made shift to write to us. He did not say much about himself, but he was in Sydney, and, plainly, still often confined to his bed. His mother's health was greatly shaken, she showed symptoms such as Dr. Kroeber had feared, and required all Mary's care. Willy and Rawson had gone North sooner than they had intended. The business which Trotter had entrusted to them could not be delayed, and, indeed, it was not desirable that Willy should refuse such employment. They had sailed for Wide Bay before these sad occurrences, and were now in the western country. Luckily, Willy had been able to anticipate a portion of his earnings through Trotter's consideration, who had been very liberal and friendly, and this was sufficient for their present support in Sydney.

They had cheap lodgings in Surrey Hills. How they were to manage for the future — he, Jack, being unfit for any work? — they could only hope for the best.

What a sad picture was thus brought home to us of the ruin that crushed, and the fate that dogged our poor friends. I thought it terribly hard at the time. I have seen so much unexpected and unmerited misfortune since, and I have so frequently seen families, equally blameless and deserving as the Smiths, involved in the same utter ruin, that I have ceased to wonder. Death and misfortune are daily seen to break up whole families, while others, apparently as much exposed, pass safely through the self-same risks; and the ebbing and flowing of the tide of pastoral finance enriches and ruins hundreds equally, in their periodical recurrence, without any respect of persons. One thing only is certain in this lottery — honest men do not get all the prizes, if they get even a reasonable share of them.

But what a change of life to our friends! How hard would be the last days of the poor Major in the mean squalor of a town lodging, after so many years spent in the luxurious freshness and freedom of bush-life; and how ill could Mrs. Smith and Mary suit themselves to the candle-end pinching needful, the impure atmosphere, and the absence of the greatest of all luxuries — quiet, undisturbed privacy. Now, the grief that ate out their hearts, would make them indifferent to such surroundings, but, when roused again to the needful activity of life, how hardly would such matters, incidental to their pecuniary circumstances, press upon them. Our first impulse was to go to Sydney, but consideration reminded us that our time was already forestalled; we could not go, and if we could, it might be useless. We could only write to Jack and enclose a remittance, pressing it upon him as a loan. We had great scruples even about venturing upon that, knowing his high spirit, and his mother's and sister's delicacy of feeling, but we thought, on the whole, it was best to send it. It was only £30. They could not economise and *finance* as townspeople do, especially those connected with large business interests, who always

continue to live well, on other people's money, when they have none of their own. All such juggling was as far from our friend's knowledge as from that of the most helpless baby south of the line.

It was with saddened hearts that we at length turned our backs on this primitive post office, and proceeded on our way. We were for the time, perhaps for long, cutting ourselves, off from the chance of hearing of and communicating with our friends; but, young and reckless though we were, we had, as far as we could, acted on the promptings of duty and affection.

Our destination was Werenga, thirty miles Westerly. We had to deliver the cattle there, and, after completion of our droving contract, we had entered into other arrangements that would occupy us for fully another year. One of these was to inspect and, if approved, to buy 900 heifers on Charley's Creek, at £1 per head. They were cheap, even if they were, as we heard, a rough lot, and wild. The other engagement we had made was, to look out country for a New England cattle owner, who had agreed to pay us at the rate of £100 per block, for such run as we put him on, if approved. There was no little risk in ordinary cases in carrying out such a bargain in its integrity, but our friend was a gentleman — not merely a monied swell — and he did not require to be bound by cunningly-worded conditions and penalties. I have known, however, in such a case, the country shown to be disapproved and rejected, and yet tendered for at once and stocked by the person so rejecting. In such an arrangement, you cannot fully protect yourself; your putting a man on the ground leaves your claim at his mercy, for, what you are selling is not a title to land, or “country,” as it is called, but simply information — most valuable information, certainly, and well worth a handsome price, but a matter difficult to negotiate successfully, for the reasons I have given, except with an honest man.

Thus, Short and I found ourselves by degrees up to the eyes in matters that occupied us fully, and required our constant personal attention. A successful exploring trip Westward not only procured our friend Durham the country he wanted, and put a handsome cheque in our bank account, but it placed us in possession of that upland valley, a portion of which I named Strathclyde, and there we put our 900 heifers.

These results, however, did not come in a day, but followed acts of effort, patience, and endurance, which brought us in contact with the vicissitudes of frontier life. This period has left me a page of experiences, enjoyable to look back to, and, indeed, most valuable at the time in the education of character, but involving privation at times, and some hard and perilous work.

When we had settled our droving accounts at Werenga, and paid off our men, I camped for a time with the wearied horses and black boys, while Short rode to Harvey and Cameron's station, up Charley's Creek, in

order to carry out the preliminary condition in our contract to purchase. We were bound to attend at a certain date, in order to inspect the heifers, as to character, and accept or reject.

If Short approved of the stamp of animals shown him on the run, then further arrangements for delivery would proceed; if the cattle did not please him, then he would intimate his rejection in writing, and the affair would be at an end.

Meanwhile, being left alone, I wrote my letters, read all the books and papers I could get from the township and the neighbouring station, got our saddlery and equipment into good shape for the proposed exploring trip, talked to everybody I fell in with, trying to learn something about the country to the Westward, and, at last, was very glad when Short came back in a fortnight. Harvey and Cameron were very decent fellows; they had taken him right through the herd, showed him everything they could — and he approved. The animals were wild, and some of them rough; that was the reason they were cheap. They would have the nine hundred head ready for delivery in six weeks from this time, so that was all right.

He had, moreover, he said, taken a short cruise round among the Downs stations as he came back, to get information, and he found that all along the main river the country was already applied for — covered by tenders, as he said. To the North-West, however, back from the lower part of Charley's Creek, there was rough country, said to be waterless, and, for that reason, little known. Bob, reasoning on a theory that he had formed from what seemed good data, argued that there must be more good country beyond this sterile tract, and his quotations from explorers' journals and appeal to our travelling chart, seemed to bear him out. He pointed out the uniformity in character of Australian country.

Wherever you travelled along the table-land, you found a series of parallel valleys, divided by mountain chains, thickets, or sterile sand-ridges. Cross this inhospitable tract, and you come on alluvial flats, plains, and open forest, wherever you go? Would this instance prove an exception?

“But,” said I, “do you think it likely that there can be anything good, within a hundred miles or so, that the nearest station owners do not know of?”

“I think, if there is good country within that distance, one or two of the neighbouring squatters are almost sure to know of it, but they may not at the time have the means to secure it themselves, and they may wish to keep it ‘dark.’ A few men in every district are willing and anxious to help newcomers to get runs, but there are always others, who, in a more business-like spirit, try to ‘forestall’ and ‘blackmail’ such as us, and nothing that one could believe would be learned from these last.” We talked far into the night, and I had to admit that my companion's logic

seemed to hold water.

Next day, we began our preparations. The grass being excellent, the horses had already begun to show signs of renewed vigour, and we managed to pick out enough to serve the purpose. The remainder of our stud, with the cumbrous part of our camp equipment, we stowed away, under the care of the obliging store-keeper in the township.

## Chapter XVII. "Fresh Fields and Pastures New."

All exploring trips are much alike, and though they possess an engrossing interest for the run-hunter, and are not without pleasure, still, they usually want the incidents that give dramatic character to pioneer-life in other countries. For Australia is singularly bare of life; within her wastes there are neither the wild beasts of the chase, nor the wild horsemen of the prairies and the steppes.

Much of the enjoyment of pioneering arises from the freshness of feeling with which one enters upon nature's solitudes. There is a beauty and fascination in the virgin wilderness, unlike any of the most prized associations of civilised life. The billowy plains and bountiful forests of the South, when first seen by the European pioneer, show no mark of habitation or labour. In time you get to notice scanty signs of indigenous occupation — a sheet of bark stripped here, and a tree notched there; but these slight tokens of the wandering race do not affect the general aspect, and they are quickly effaced by the two great forces always at work — vegetation and fire. The marks of the last are to be seen everywhere in the blackened stumps peering above the grass, and often in the scorched barrel, hollowed to a shell, the remnant of some gnarled and scathed forest giant, standing like a ruined chimney stack. It used to be held that fire must have come with man, but there is reason to believe that it is quite as often a natural phenomenon as a proof of human presence. Indeed, we may ask how could there be such prolific growth, with fermentation and decay on such a scale, under a semi-tropical sun, without occasional ignition?

In travelling through new country, in nine instances out of ten you see nothing of the primitive inhabitants. They are so few in number in proportion to the surface, that you may ride through the bush for days and weeks without meeting with them, or seeing signs of their presence, but for all that, though nomads within their own bounds, every spot, whether plain, scrub, or swamp, is apportioned, and jealously owned under a well understood tribal tenure.

The penalty for trespass in pursuit of game is *death*, and a visit from one tribe to another can only be paid after due notice is given, and under conditions well defined by traditional law and ceremonial.

We had not found it easy to learn much about the outside country, but the nearer we got to the actual frontier we found that information was the

more difficult to get, and at the last two stations we were told positively that no more country was to be had, Boggs and Nipper swore that there was nothing but scrub and sand to the westward for hundreds of miles, and Mr. Raynard smilingly told us that we were just a month too late. Mr. Samson had come in, and he believed he had dropped on a small patch of country, but anything else in that direction he might say had already been as good as secured by himself, and there could not be more than a block or so. He would strongly recommend us to go North. So far from being disconcerted by these warnings, the fact of this Mr. Samson having got a run in the very direction we meant to go, and Mr. Raynard's obvious wish to send us on a wild-goose chase, confirmed us all the more in our determination, and we held on our way by compass, aided by a rough chart that we compiled from all the fag-ends of yarns and gossip that we had met with, and this we added to and amended daily from our own observations.

The tract of desert — or, as some called it — impassable country, began as we had heard beyond Raynard's run, and for the first two days that we were in it our progress was not promising.

We had to depend on our water-bags, and our poor horses, for a stage or two, had to do without a drink, as we scrambled through scrubby ridges and sandy gullies where we could not see two yards ahead. But by mid-day on the third day, Binebbera, who was as our right hand, climbed a high, naked iron bark tree, which towered high above the forest, and, struggling up, tomahawk in his teeth, and clinging with toe and finger to each new notch he cut, he at length reached a giddy height, where one would think that nothing but a crow or an eagle-hawk would feel at home. Clinging to the tree-top with his right hand, he shaded his eyes with his left, and scanned closely the forest-clothed horizon. At length he saw a break.

The sunlight smote but for a moment on a patch of yellow-green, and he gave a joyous shout, "Ghindi! I been find him. Plenty boodgere country that way."

We got, before night, to the open tract described by Binebbera. It was good. A true type of the Arcadian beauty so often seen in the primitive forest pastures of Australia, as unlike the wilderness of jungle and sand that we had toiled through, as Eden to the Sahara. At our feet, the tufty blue grass, that we had learned to look for, grew uncropped, and the ground was covered with beds of wild carrots and porculine. Away down, following the gradual fall of the sloping landscape, by wooded glade and rolling plain, we could dimly make out what we assumed to be the principal watercourse, the *main creek*, as we called it. The valley was a good width, if we might judge by the distance of the blue hills on the other side.

Plainly, we were out of the desert tract, and on the edge of good,

available country. But where we had got to, and whether the country was as yet unclaimed or not, it behoved us to make sure without delay. So we camped at the first water, laid our chart on the ground, and proceeded to work out our dead-reckoning. If the country was unclaimed, we could secure it at once by putting in tenders. If it turned out to be already secured, our course was clear. We must cross this valley, and when we got on to the next watershed, we had reason to believe we would *then* be on ground open to the first comer.

It might be good, or it might be worthless, but we would need to examine it carefully, and, if we found it large enough and good enough, we would mark it out and take legal possession. We were quite sure, from a careful comparison of the features, and the compass bearings, that we had got on to a *system* quite apart from either Charley's Creek or the main river. The fall was distinctly towards the South-West. So far, we were safe from competition with those pioneers who had followed down the main northern stream; but what about Samson? Short worked out our route on the chart, and looked about him all round from the high ground we stood on. "I doubt this will be Samson's, but we can only make sure by finding his marks."

We wanted country as to which there could be no conflicting claim, and we expected that this point could be disposed of by a careful search the next day. These marks would certainly be found, if they had been made, at the points where the tributary creeks joined the main watercourse on the banks of the lagoons or large waterholes, on the edges of scrubs, or on commanding eminences; and, most likely, they would be at intervals of five miles along the main channel, because, at that time, all *runs* were tendered for in blocks of five miles square. All this would involve a good deal of riding; but it was part of the work we were engaged in, and it was most important that we should make sure of what we were doing before going farther.

So, next morn, betimes, we paced over the park-like solitudes, crushing under our horse hoofs the juicy herbage that was soon to be turned into beef and mutton, but which had grown uneaten, save by the sparse denizens of the forest, for uncounted ages; and I know that seeing this hitherto undiscovered and unused wealth led me to reflect that the world was a good deal bigger than we had learned from our school books and almanacks, and that there must be many more things in Heaven and earth than the paltry nothings set forth in the common standards of "practical life" — the life of business, of politics, of pulpits and stipends, and of newspapers. Here had been the full powers of Nature — of an energy that seemed to fill all space — at work for aeons of ages, evolving a system upon which would, ere long, arise an Empire of human life and labour as great as any of the historic dominions of the North; and all the Continent, the field of this growth, was less known to Greek philosopher

and Latin priest, to Jew and Phoenician, to Arab, Teuton, and Goth than the other planets of the solar system are known to us.

In an hour's ride we dropped on a big *S*, cut deep into a white poplar-shaped gum that grew on a knoll, where an acacia-fringed tributary "junctioned" with the winding gravel bed of a dry channel, which seemed to run the whole course of the valley. Our *home* readers may ask "and was this a river, a stream, a brook?" It was that indeed, and as well marked with alluvial banks, and a bed full of round pebbles and sand, as the rippling and murmuring streams in the old land. Indeed, I have often thought the beds of the Australian rivers, such as the Murrumbidgee and the Lachlan, the Burnet, and the Mackenzie, even better marked and looking as if they bore witness of a greater age than our native northern streams. You often see along these newly-discovered southern watercourses, a succession of high banks formed of alluvial drift, the mould heaped up through the ages; accumulation of grass, wood, and leaves; and these follow the windings of the river bed in shapely terraces of thirty and forty feet high, reaching back parallel with each other for some hundreds of yards; and to the eye of a new-comer the immense masses of deposit, and the wide margin of grey sand and black shingle present a strange contrast with the slender stream generally trickling down the middle.

But the new-comer learns by and by that these same sham rivers become at times roaring torrents, spreading into inland lakes and seas, and when you hear that the "creek is a banker," you understand that the Water-God has got his innings, and that a break has come to the long-enduring "dry season," which is the chronic weather of inland Australia.

Five miles more down the main channel found us another *S* tree, and two more were got before the afternoon was over, so there was no doubt now that we were on "Samson's Creek" — and our next step was to get out of it.

The tenders put in by Mr. Samson would be drawn up so as to include, provisionally, all the good country on this watershed; therefore, we decided not to run the risk of coming into competition with him for any part of it.

In the parallel valley beyond we would look for our country, though we were quite in the dark as to whether, in order to reach it we would have to traverse such a wilderness as that dividing Raynard's run from Samson's, or whether the access might be easier. The barrier between the valleys might be a precipitous range; it might be a trackless jungle; it might be the swell of a long dry plain, on which it would take days to find the crest where wind and water shear.

The best plan was to camp where we were for the night. We found a little limpid pool beneath a black rock of basalt, with water enough for ourselves and the horses; and after our evening meal we lay down and

slept, *but away from our small fire, and with our guns under our heads*, for we knew the tricks of our aboriginal brethren, and entertained a wholesome caution of them, while we were still strangers to each other.

We were tired enough to sleep well, though our hopes and fears might have kept us awake, only that we were getting inured to the chances of explorers; but we awoke filled with a sense of absorbing interest, as if the crisis of our fate was at hand. We were playing for a prize that was almost within grasp. The strain and suspense hanging on the fate of a battle, the event of a race, the *denouement* of a drama, the intense expectation of a gambler, were all burning within us, and evidenced in the suppressed eagerness with which we put on our saddles and packs. But we filled our water-bags, and stowed our food and ammunition carefully. It might be a week of fatigue, thirst, and, perhaps, more fatal peril, that was before us, ere we reached the pleasant fields beyond; or it was on the cards that we might drop on a real pastoral paradise before twelve o'clock.

It needed all our training and acquired endurance for young pulses to beat calm with such chances on the table.

The sun was beginning to tinge the tree-tops, and lighten the waves of the downs behind, when we ascended from the valley of Samson's Creek and got on the top of a gentle undulation. Beyond, there rose before us a well-defined Hog-back basalt range. Keeping this land-mark in view, we pushed down the other side of the hillock, and followed a slight depression that wandered among the grass-clothed knolls. There was hardly a break in the turf to show that water had ever flowed over it. This runnel continued for half-a-mile, — still for a mile more, — till it opened into a well-defined gully, marked by dwarf myall bushes, and then, at every hundred yards, it seemed to assume a more definite character, till it became a decidedly well-marked creek, running West-Nor'-West, and again — still West. We were perplexed. The Hog-back range still loomed before us, and the valley of Samson's Creek was quite at our backs, shut out from view.

We rode up to the highest ground near, to look round and puzzle it out. We came to the conclusion that this little tributary, that we were on, most likely took a bend and joined Samson's Creek some miles lower down, so we made up our minds to leave it, and strike by a "bee-line," straight as the bird flies, to the Hog-back range, for, by the shape of the ground, we concluded that the dividing line must be there.

As we left this perplexing little gutter, the picturesque mountain-mass before us showed a line of black columnar rock crowning the summit, glowing ruddy in the morning light, above a wealth of pine and jungle foliage. The effect was magnificent — the tints seemed to woo the hand of the painter.

We made good way, for the ground was open and easy, and in ten

minutes, without any obstacle, came again on the bank of a creek. We stopped and looked at it. We had passed no high ground — we had followed one fall the whole way — where did this creek come from?

*It was certainly the very same creek that we had left, and we could now trace its course away down to a wide valley that trended West-Nor'-West.*

We got off our horses and looked, and better looked — and wondered and tried to think, and then the fact all at once burst upon us, that we had passed the watershed of Samson's creek, *and were actually upon the country that we were in search of!*

And well worth searching for it was.

We rode for an hour through open, grassy glades, intersecting park-like forest, and then, at the Hog-back range, we came to the edge of a plain, dotted with the weeping myall, and showing through its midst a line of those deep-green casuarina groves, that tell of shade and water. We could hardly believe in our luck. Instead of the two valleys being divided, like those of Raynard's and Sampson's Creek, by a tract of desert, sand, and jungle, they met on the crest of a grassy swell — smooth as a tennis-lawn — and we would never have known where the natural boundary was, unless we had traced the watercourse down from its hardly distinguishable head. A superficial examination of the country would have led us to believe that the basalt range — Takilbarau — as afterwards we found it was named — was the real division.

We were now in high spirits. The rest of our trip was a labour of love, but it took us a good ten days yet to ride over, examine, and mark the country that we took up for Durham and ourselves. As we went on, we found that we were on no mere creek or tributary, like Samson's, but on a watercourse of the chief magnitude, to be reckoned, perhaps, among the standard rivers of Australia. We traced its course for thirty miles through a fertile and picturesque country, of varied herbage and soil, and with water showing more sign of permanence, and in greater volume than we had seen in any inland river since we had left the Macquarie. We rode for miles by long, clear, brown waterholes, that appeared as if — by their depth and width — they would float the *Great Eastern*, with solitary giant blue gums growing on their banks; and then we would come to where a stream ran with a home-like murmur over beds of gravel, under the deep shade of the river-oaks. We spent each day in tracing the main features, following the natural boundaries, and by compass observation and distance, measured by the carefully-timed pace of our horses, we mapped out the country in our rough chart.

We came on no trace of a former pioneer, neither mark of horse-hoof nor axe, but we left it marked in a fashion that could not be mistaken. On the lower part, ten honest blocks of five miles by five, were marked with a big D for Durham. At each measured distance, wherever we crossed the bed, wherever a prominent tree stood out, the D was cut deeply in

through the bark into the solid timber, with toma-hawk and chisel. The upper part, which we believed would measure something more if we went right back to the natural boundary, we marked effectually also, ending with blazing a prominent blood-wood on the head of the little watercourse which we had run down. It was essential that the magical S.C of Short and Crawford should hold this strategic point; and should be clearly seen by all concerned.

So, with light hearts, and still lighter ration-bags, we took the backward track. Binebbera had been our factotum and scout-master general through all this important work, but in going back, he sent on ahead his protégé, Toby, a small Warro boy, whom he had enlisted some weeks before, and he rode behind us in a mood of "dolce far niente," smoking much, and saying little.

Toby, under the influence of that inspiration which makes the stomach of a small, hungry black boy a far truer guide than the magnetic needle, brought us by a surprisingly straight short-cut to Mr. Raynard's station in two days.

That gentleman made the most of giving us a hospitable reception. With unctuous smiles he supplied us with the food we craved, and then, with the aid of a bottle of pale rum, he tried the pumping process; but he found that the limpid waters of truth were deep in a well that he could not bottom, for he could get nothing out of us except original remarks as to the very remarkable character of the season, apocryphal yarns as to some trees marked L on a red granite creek to the North, and enquiries as to what price he would take for the unoccupied country that he told us of.

Having thus indulged our love of humbug by putting him on a perplexity of false scents, we spent the night under cover of our little travelling tent, in writing out tenders on printed forms that we had kept ready for the occasion, so that, before morning, we had the whole in duplicate, with rough charts appended. One set was made up in a strong package to be sent to Jack by post, and to be delivered by him to the Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands; and the duplicate set was, as a needful precaution, kept by us.

Having passed the night to such good purpose, we had a swim in Mr. Raynard's best waterhole, and we received his morning salutations and call to breakfast with much pleasure. Thereafter, we expressed a wish to buy some few store articles, and Binebbera and Toby were made happy with a bright scarlet, woollen shirt each, a gaudy silk handkerchief, and unlimited tobacco, while our own personal needs were very modestly satisfied.

Our kind host, seeing Short pull out a business-like cheque-book to pay for our purchases, was seized with a desire to sell us some horses, and in the fullness of his heart, brought out some more pale rum. But his blandishments failed of their purpose, though we did him justice and

drank his liquor, and we took our leave, parting with him looking melancholy and wistful, standing by his slip-rail.

A month after we heard that Mr. Raynard described us as two of the most unsatisfactory young men that he had met with: untruthful, drunken, ungrateful for hospitality. We had abused his confidence, and had taken up country that properly was his, and of which he had informed us in honourable confidence. We had finally misled him by false descriptions so as to blind him to our treachery. We had drunk out his stock of liquor, and refused to buy his horses. It pained him to see the class of people entering the squatting ranks — a pair of young brutes — Scotchmen — at least one of them was a Scotchman, and the other was something worse! We had sent the black-boys with the horses on ahead, to go steadily till we pulled them, so we had nothing to look after, but only to mount and follow. My companion burst into a song of triumph as soon as we had ridden out of hearing of the station. I felt tolerably elated, too, but I did not see that we would benefit by getting the reputation of going howling about the country, and begged Bob to “shut up.” However, his hilarity was contagious. His favourite chestnut Warigal, though his fiery spirit had been dulled by many a weary stage and hungry camp, seemed now to have recovered the gaiety of his youth. He pranced and danced, tore at his bit, and at length fairly broke away with his rider sheer down the side of the stone-strewn hill, clearing the fissures that yawned in the deep soil, and topping the fallen trees like a deer. I managed to reach him before he was quite out of sight, and he settled to a moderate pace. By shifting our saddles daily, we had saved our poor nags from being worked down till they were dog-lean and heart broken. They had too been feeding on the stimulating downs grasses, and though they carried no spare flesh, yet they were fit enough for a short canter. My friend had finished his song, and his face now bore an expression of dignified self-satisfaction and acute intelligence.

“Horses all the better for that glass of grog, Reggy?”

“Why, Bob, you're as drunk as a fiddler,”

“Like your impudence to say so. Why — look — here — if you were'nt so big, I'd knock your head off.”

“Lucky for me, then — as it is.”

“Reginald Crawford — moderation — as you are aware — is my rule. There are occasions, no doubt — there are occasions — as all moralists allow — — ”

“Such as that Melbourne spree, of course; or what do you say to that grand blow out you had with Rawson and your friend Cubitt?”

“Don't be a fool. You must be aware I countenanced those doings in Melbourne merely for the sake of interposing a friendly restraint on you and your companions. As for the other affair, it's a long time ago — four years, I believe. Ah, well!” with a hiccuping sigh, “what is it old

Horatius Flaccus says, ‘Labuntur anni.’ ” Yes, ‘Eheu! fugaces posthume posthume labuntur anni!’ And think of all that's passed since then — what will we hear next of our poor friends in Sydney?” — and the good-hearted fellow was getting lachrymose, when a turn of the track brought us up to our attendants. They had come to a halt. Toby was on the ground fast asleep with his hat over his eyes. The horses were enjoying themselves, scattered over the grass, those carrying picks and saddles paying no regard to the care of their accoutrements, while Binebbera appeared, *sons culotte*, up a tree in the distance, gathering wild figs.

A little black mare, carrying one of the principal packs — ammunition and our papers — had got into a deep mudhole, and was turning herself round with the view of lying down and rolling in it, when Bob, with a yell, rushed Warrigal at her, and brought his whip down on her flank. This loitering on the road was not to be encouraged, so we started them off, determined to get our important dispatch into Her Majesty's post office before it came to grief from the tricks of horses and black boys.

Now, I must say, in justice to my friend Short, that he has always been one of the most temperate and sober fellows in the country. For many a week on the road we never had a glass of grog — and never wanted it; but after some days' privation and a sleepless night, a couple of glasses of Mr. Raynard's rum were enough to set his brain in a slight ferment, and the effect only appeared when the fresh Downs' breezes blew into his nostrils.

We shortly reached Messrs. Boggs and Nipper's fence. We did not stop, but held on round the paddock, at a swinging trot, as we wanted to reach the post office by the next forenoon. I could see Nipper come to the gate in a pair of white moleskins too short for him, and *blootcher* boots, as he would call them. He was chewing tobacco, and hitching up his nether garments, and I could almost hear his disparaging remarks on our appearance and proceedings. I would have much enjoyed listening to Raynard and him discussing us. Their remarks would be sure to be amusing and characteristic, if not strictly truthful. We posted our dispatch to Jack in time for the weekly mail, and we found a letter waiting us from Harvey and Cameron, giving us notice that the heifers would be ready for delivery at the time agreed on, namely, in ten days from the present date. We changed the horses we had been using, for those left in a gully hidden among the Bunya hills, and leaving the first to rest and enjoy the mountain grass, we started, ready for the work waiting us. Half-way on the road we met Cameron. He was coming to meet us. They had met with a mischance, which would delay the carrying out of the contract, and they wished to save us from entering upon any arrangements prematurely. We had not thought it necessary to hire any men yet. Short was told that he could get a couple of hands from the

station, who would go with him, and the principals had promised to see us fifty miles on our way. We had, consequently, not incurred any expense as yet, but it was considerate in Cameron coming to warn us.

It seemed that the muster had been more than half carried through, when a rough lot, run out of the Dogwood Gullies, had carried away a wing of the fence, and had got adrift. They had only about six hundred. There was not a horse left fit to ride, and until the fencing was repaired, it was useless to attempt getting in cattle so fresh and wild. Would we take delivery of the lot they had in, and give them six months more to deliver the rest?

We went on to the station to see the cattle that they had secured before considering what was best to be done. A look in the yards shewed us that our vendors were keeping faith with us as to quality, and that we were not getting a bad bargain; but as to the animals being rough and unhandy, there could not be two opinions. They wanted yarding and taming badly.

Then, as to their suggestion, we needed to weigh well all the pros and cons. To take the heifers in two drafts would involve the expense of two trips, two sets of men, and very nearly double the money spent in droving that the whole would cost in one draft.

Four hired men would be needed to take the six hundred — to watch by night and drive by day — while another man would be enough for the nine hundred; but if we had to make two separate trips, we would need to hire very nearly the same number each time.

If it were not that we were losing the season, the increase, and our time, it would be much better to postpone delivery of the whole. At the same time, we did not shut our eyes to the advantages of our bargain, and the risks contingent thereto when we entered upon it.

We were getting the cattle cheap, entirely because they were wild and difficult to work.

The two partners tackled us over our pipes, after giving us a courteous welcome, and letting the evening meal pass without allusion to business. They urged us to take over the cattle they had in, and give them time for the rest; but we demurred. We rightly claimed the whole lot to be delivered now, as per contract, and pointed out the alternative of damages provided in that document.

“They would meet us half-way, but they hoped we would be reasonable,” and there was some fencing and encounter of wits.

They were very nice gentlemen-like fellows, and quite fair in meaning, and the delay was not intentional on their part; but then it was still our loss.

So we agreed to be reasonable. “What did they propose?”

It ended in their engaging to herd, or “tail” as it is called, the heifers now in their hands, provided we postponed delivery for six months; and they further agreed to place our brand upon them, so that we might get

the benefit of all calves dropped in the interval, but it was specially provided that through such branding the risks of ownership should *not* devolve on us, but that they should be bound to deliver the full tale of nine hundred head, with their increase, on that day six months.

This was about the best arrangement that we could make. The cattle from being “tailed” would be greatly *quietened*, and we would not lose the six months' increase; but we grudged the delay and enforced idleness to which we would be committed.

## Chapter XVIII. Mr. Ludgate's Statistics.

Short and I thereon fixed our camp on a height that over-looked the Condamine plain, and we lay, resting and recruiting, black-boys, horses and all, dreaming the sunny days and starlight nights away mid the sea of grass waving around us. This was pleasant after the work of the past year; the weary days in the saddle, the long trudges often on foot, behind the weak and lazy kine, the sleepless night-watching, and then the *fatigue drill* of exploring — to spend the fleeting hours in doing nothing at all. For solace and mental food we had the only books we could get — a saddle-bag full of yellow novels. I think we cleared off the storekeeper's whole stock of literature. They were principally the works of Captain Marryatt, Mayne Reid, and Grant, and we read them over and over again. One night we were thinking of bed, when a traveller rode up. We gave him the usual welcome, as he seemed to be the sort of man one might ask in. I must explain that we would have given food and shelter to any wayfarer who wanted such aid. Still, unless a man looked what we emphatically called *right*, we would not have asked him to our private fireside for reasons understood by all old colonists.

We were perhaps as little admirers of “privilege,” and as much “radicals” in feeling, as young fellows could well be; but still, we were fully sensible of the inconvenience of admitting all comers from so heterogeneous a population to terms of intimacy. Any person who shewed that he could behave like a civilised man, was generally “asked in,” without enquiry being made as to who or what he was; but a vast proportion of the travellers of those days could not behave like civilised men; and, indeed, a good many of them are tolerably uncivilised yet.

Our visitor, though “civilised,” was plainly not a denizen of the “back blocks,” and had not graduated in bush-travel. This we could guess by his city-bred form of speech, and the bluff, business tone of his voice. He gave us a blunt “goodevening,” and asked, like a man who “could pay his way,” if we could give him “anything of a shake-down, and some supper?” In answer, we asked him to get off, and said we would make him comfortable if we could, and Toby was called to take away his horse and hobble him with the others, while we set forth, in due order, the inevitable beef, damper, and tea.

Our guest sat down in a fussy sort of way, rubbing his hands and smirking as if he was in a city luncheon-room. We could hardly keep our

gravity, and we half-expected him to call for beer or mustard.

His remarks shewed that he was not sure into what sort of company he had got, but, apparently, he guessed that we were either sly-grog sellers, or horse-stealers; that we would, as a matter of course want money from him, and that, so far as a little coin went, he did not mind.

Under the influence of this reflection, he obviously decided that he had better make the most of things; so, as he fed, he patronised us in a bluff, gruff John Bull style, very unlike the manner of up-country men of good stamp, and to us, very laughable.

“By-the-bye,” he said, as he finished his meal, “could you direct me to Short and Crawford's station?”

“Short and Crawford,” Bob remarked, “have no station as yet. We are Short and Crawford.”

“What! You Short and Crawford, the large Northern squatters?”

He spilled the tin mug of tea that he was raising to his lips, his eyes protruded in wonder, and his mouth remained open.

“Well,” I said, “I did not know that we were large squatters, but we are the only people answering to the name in these parts.”

“Oh, indeed! I really had no idea,” and he became painfully ceremonious. His manner changed at once. He had been speaking to us exactly as a good-natured city Don would address a cabman or railway-porter, and now he demeaned himself as if he were meeting, for the first time, valued business correspondents. “I have a letter for you from Mr. Durham,” and he proceeded to open up his valise. We grinned at each other, and thought his ways very absurd. Accustomed to the freemasonry of the bush, and to a less formal — and more natural — form of intercourse, we felt almost ashamed and angry at the artificial manner which he had put on.

If either of us had come to a strange camp in the dark, we would simply have told who we were, and, in these days, we would have been invited, as a matter of course, to join the party at the fire. If we happened to drop on men of our own grade, we would have been sure of a cordial welcome. If the camp turned out to be occupied by carriers, stockmen, or even by characters at enmity with the law, the great Australian virtue of hospitality would still have befriended us.

A confident, good-humoured address would, in ninety cases out of a hundred, lead to your being treated like a prince, would place you in the best seat, and give you the best of what was going, without money, or even thanks being expected. To ride forward, to dismount, and say, “my name is so-and-so, I'm going up the river;” the answer would be, “Will you come in? Glad to see you;” or it might possibly take the form of, “Right you are, mate — git off — just in time for a snack.” In the last case, supposed to be a camp of stockmen or shearers, they might give you “mate” to start with, on the principle that all men are alike and equal

in the dark; but, shortly, they would defer to you in conversation, and even give you “sir” now and then. In short, the great secret for travel, is to have one manner for all — courteous, good-humoured, confident, and out-spoken; and if you present yourself always under the well-founded conviction that you yourself are a gentleman, and that you are ready to treat others as such, as long as they deserve it, you will lose nothing, and gain much.

This is by no means inconsistent with what I have said as to the risks of promiscuous hospitality.

You must be jealous to keep your own private nest tidy, and if a gang of loud, rough fellows want quarters, you must exercise the office of seneschal with decision, and give them their proper places below the salt.

But our guest, as I have said, had not got into the ways of bush-land. He was a little dumpy man, with a big straw hat on that nearly covered him, and as his trousers were short, and worked half-way up to his knees in riding, he did not give one the impression of a gallant cavalier. The letter which he handed to us from our friend Durham, merely acknowledged receipt of our communication as to the run offered to him, promised to give the matter immediate attention, and introduced to us the bearer — a gentleman entering into station investments — Mr. Ludgate. We soon found that he was a character of a peculiar stamp. Though he had so much the style of the traditional new-chum about him, we found that he displayed a marvellous power of conversation, and that he had acquired an immense knowledge of squatting matters — in a business aspect.

He had spent all the time he had been in the Colony — which was something less than two years — in travelling over the squatting districts, and the information that he collected in these peregrinations was contained in a big black leather note book, which he pulled out when he entered upon this topic. He had, in his habits, hardly adapted himself at all to bush-life. Though an awkward horseman, and ludicrously out of place and helpless in the little vicissitudes of frontier-life and travel, still he stuck with a dogged persistence to the line he had marked out for himself, and entered on the career of a squatter with perfect confidence, being entirely guided in his course by the statistics of station matters which he had laboriously compiled. Probably, no one in the Northern Districts, then, or since, knew so much of the business records of stations, and nobody certainly knew less of the practical minutiae of pastoral life, usually learned under the name of “Colonial experience.” The more we saw of him, we knew not which to wonder most at, the dogged persistence with which he worked out his own ideas, or his wrong-headed devotion to his statistical crotchets. With more adaptability, and wider grasp of mind he would have been an able man. As it was, he never gave one the impression of being more than an

eccentric, obstinate Londoner.

Having waited till our letter was read, he proceeded, formally, to deliver himself of his intentions.

“I am justified in stating,” said Mr. Ludgate, “that we mean to enter largely into pastoral investments. Our capital, I may say, is practically unlimited, and I now propose to form a nucleus from which to extend our future operations. With this object in view, I have, under the best advice, bought eight blocks of country, on Samson's Creek, and I have four flocks of sheep going on that country, which are at present camped eight miles behind, in charge of my overseer, Mr. Pearse. I mention this in case you have stock in the neighbourhood, as I wish to be perfectly above-board.”

Being assured that we had no stock with us, he continued. “May I ask if the grass is good farther out?”

We told him it was capital. “The season, I suppose, may be considered fairly good in this district? On the coast they are complaining of want of rain. May I ask if you have seen much of this climate?”

“No, we had been in the North only a few months.”

“Indeed, I make a rule of collecting all the practical information I can get. I don't know whether your experience of stock results will confirm my deductions. I have compiled data from some thirty-five stations between latitudes 30 and 25 degrees, and I make out that sheep pay 191/2 per cent. on capital invested through an average of seven seasons, and that cattle yield something less; but I find a difficulty in averaging the capability of runs to carry stock from year to year, and it is almost impossible to get any reliable figures as to increase and decrease. For instance, I asked Boggs and Nipper if they could oblige me with the result of their experience in figures — but Nipper is an extraordinary man. He stuck a plug of tobacco in his cheek, hitched up his breeches like a boatswain's mate, and said, “Look yeer, Mr. Ludgate — I don't bother with figures, but I know this is the best ‘blooming’ run in the country. Our lambings is always ninety-nine per cent, every year, and I have not seen a dead sheep for long, except one last winter that a dog killed; — so there now; what do you say to that? I can sell every two-year-old-wether in Brisbane for twelve bob, and the wool is always at the top of the market. Talk about Mudgee! — why, I can lick them. Now, what's the good of my telling you a lie about it?”

“Ask any man in the North, and you'll larn that Boggs and me has made our pile, and that we're going to Kingland for the edication of our families. And you mark my words,” with another chew and another hitch, “you'll be a bloomin' fool if you don't buy us out. I'll allow you five pound for every bad acre you find on the run. For why, because we sold all the rubbish. We got a good cheque out of young Swallow, from Sydney, for 1,000 cattle and forty mile of scrub, and he'll make a fortune

when he manages to muster them.” “Now, did he really expect me to believe him? I think this kind of thing is not only uncalled for, but positively unbusiness-like.”

It was all we could do to keep our countenances while we concurred in this mild condemnation. Boggs and Nipper were certainly unbusiness-like, and even ‘more so,’ and Short blurted out that they were ‘lyre birds’ of the most pronounced type.

We could not aid our guest with his statistical enquiries, but we assured him that the country was good, and we believed in it so much that we had taken up the whole watershed beyond Samson's Creek.

“Indeed — ah then, we'll be neighbours, and I shall be glad to establish neighbourly relations — without prejudice, of course, to any interests which I have acquired through any purchase from Samson,” he added.

The little man was wide awake as to business bearings, and he was civil and cordial after the way of city folks, but his priggishness and his one-idea'd craze for statistical facts entertained us greatly, and we were thinking what a funny brisk mannikin of a squatter he would make, when he dispersed our surmisings on that score by remarking:

“I shall see the sheep on the country with Pearse, and then I must get back to Sydney to attend to my correspondence and banking business.”

“What; you're not going to live on your station then?”

“Oh no, indeed! I wish I could. I have not leisure to lead a quiet bush-life. I am so much taken up with important matters. I send copies of all my correspondence to my partners. I am negotiating for three other stations, and I must watch the wool market, with a view to the disposal of the coming clip.”

“But,” said Short, “don't you think a new station in outside country will need a good deal of looking after for a few years?”

“Pearse is fully competent. He is a thoroughly practical man, a regularly-trained sheep-overseer, and I have broken him in to keep all his accounts in duplicate, and send me weekly abstracts of the count of the flocks, orders drawn, and rations consumed.”

“But, Mr. Ludgate, you must not forget the one inevitable risk in new country — the blacks.”

“My dear sir, I have here the report of the Police Department, with returns of the outrages by Aborigines for the last three years, and I find that we are, on Samson's Creek, quite outside of the area within which disturbances have taken place. These outrages, I can prove to you, are confined to certain localities, and never occur except from causes that cannot arise on a well-managed establishment. You see, I hold that all questions are best solved by the arithmetical method. Only let us have our facts tabulated, and the precise results to be looked for can be easily determined.”

This made Short and me open the eyes of astonishment, and we both

pointed out plainly the fallacy of his reasoning. We told him that the occupation by stock of every new station — of every fresh valley — opened another page in the Aboriginal question. We shewed him that these seeming solitudes were claimed and jealously guarded by the wandering hunter race. We said that caution, justice in dealing, and humanity, certainly did influence the relations of the two races in the aggregate, but could not determine particular cases so as to prevent collisions, and that a sheep-overseer, however efficient he might be in that capacity, was generally not the sort of man to deal with the risks to which the undertaking would be exposed.

“I cannot follow you,” he answered. “I can look only at the business aspect of the question. If there is another point of view, I cannot see it. I make arrangements under the best advice, guided by carefully-ascertained facts, and protected by a formal guarantee of indemnity. Moreover, I enter into certain contracts with the Government, and pay certain sums annually to the Treasury; and if these payments do not provide me with protection against the Aborigines, what are they for? If my interests and my hired men are to be exposed to danger, then Mr. Samson, who sold me the run and guaranteed quiet possession, and the Government, to whom I pay rent, are responsible for the consequences.”

“Mr. Ludgate,” I remarked, “I don't think that is the precise state of the case. What guarantee Mr. Samson could give you, I cannot guess; but, for the rest, we all come out here, not by invitation of the Government, but positively without even the knowledge or sanction of any official, well knowing the risk, and with our lives in our hands. I am sure that the Survey Department never knew anything of the country that we have just taken up and called Strath-clyde, till we sent in our tenders, and we have, in reality, of our own free will, extended the area of the Colony by pushing out the frontier some twenty miles, without asking anybody's leave. We pay our rent and assessment, not as claiming thereby any special protection, but mainly that our squatting right may be made good as against any other squatter; and you, as standing in Samson's shoes, are precisely in a like position. The Government will likely, to a certain extent, afford us protection, but still that fact will not release us from the responsibility of our own actions. If we take out a party, and form a station which comes to grief, involving loss of life, we must blame our own want of precaution and forethought, and not the neglect of Government. Moreover, if you do make the authorities and the seller of the run ‘responsible’ as you say, what will that avail you if Pearse and his men are butchered, and your sheep eaten?”

“But, my good sir, I bought the run under the distinct guarantee that there were no blacks upon it. Samson did not see one all the time he was out, and the evidence of his men confirmed his statement. What better proof can there be to convince me of the fact and of Samson's good faith?”

What is the use of any business agreement if you cannot depend upon it? If I buy a lot of goods under contract, I do not cavil at them as not being up to description until I find that there has been misrepresentation, and I assume, as a matter of course, that the country is as guaranteed."

"But," continued I, with mischievous pertinacity, "what will your guarantee be worth if you find the blacks all round you some morning?"

"Then, I shall certainly make my claim upon the vendor of the run."

There was a grotesque wrong-headedness, mingled with habitual business shrewdness in this. Ludgate was an honest, city-bred Englishman, but he could not grasp a subject in all its bearings. Clear headed in a microscopic way he was, and with confidence and doggedness enough to attempt the labours of Hercules, but he could not see, or rather would not look, beyond the narrow limits of his business training.

"But," Short said, changing the subject, "you have surely someone with you besides your overseer — I mean someone you can depend upon besides the hired men?"

"Oh, yes. Sharp sent me two young fellows, lately from home, to get colonial experience and make themselves useful, but I don't care about them. They are quite new-chums — Kennedy and Shewell."

I jumped up. "What! Kennedy and Shewell. They are friends of ours. We saw them in Melbourne two years ago."

"I daresay. They have been on the Dawson with me for some time, but Pearse says he can do nothing with them. He does not believe in *swells*. He would much rather have regular hired labour."

"Well," said Short, "I don't know upon what experience Mr. Pearse founds his opinions, but you may depend upon it that two young fellows like these are much more likely to stick to you in any difficulties that may arise, than such hired men as are to be had in these parts. I have had no long experience of outside districts, but I have seen quite enough since I came up here to convince me that the ordinary hands on a station are generally useless in collisions with the blacks." And Short gave him an account of a recent night attack on a newly-formed coast station, on which occasion some twenty hired men rushed into the only building there was, bolting themselves in and smothering each other in fright. One of their mates was too late, and was speared outside the door; while their employer, his nephew, and two black boys fought the wild blacks and drove them off.

"Well, Mr. Short, if there should prove to be any risk of a collision, I shall write for the police; but my proper business remedy for whatever may ensue is against Samson. As for Shewell and Kennedy, I am glad to hear that you know them. They seem decent young fellows, but I have no time to see much of them. Pearse says that they are not of the least use for shepherding or other work, and the men grumble at seeing them

differently treated from themselves. I'm sure I don't want them to stay with me if they have the least wish to go elsewhere. Two shepherds are talking of leaving, and Pearse says it's because the hands are jealous" — and thereon Mr. Ludgate sought his couch.

Shortly after, lying in our open tent, I said, softly whispering, "What do you think of that, Bob?"

"I think that Ludgate is a confounded little prig, and I believe that he'll make an infernal mess of it," said my candid partner.

"I don't believe Shewell and Kennedy are such useless beggars as he makes out."

"Don't you see that Ludgate has put them under the orders of this working overseer, who is evidently what these fellows call a 'master's man,'<sup>†</sup> that is, he is a sneak and toady to Ludgate, and being a coarse-minded brute, you may be sure he is as disagreeable to the two young fellows as he dares, and rather countenances the men being impudent to to them. They, of course, being out of their proper position, avoid any intercourse in the camp, and such work as they do, is gone through without any heart. Probably they would have left Ludgate before now but they are tempted by the hope of change or adventure to go out to this new country. You may be sure that they will want to come to us, but we must give them no encouragement. Let them be clear of their present employment first before we listen to them, but in any case I don't see that we could be-friend them further than by making them welcome to our camp, and giving them the 'run of their teeth' for a bit."

Short was right; it was all that could be said for the present; and I lay silently musing and wooing balmy rest.

An open-air couch was always grateful to me. There is a solace in the hush and silence of bush-land, and in the waking moments of such nights, the images and reflections of the busy day pass across the mind with graphic distinctness. I felt this, and began to believe that there was nothing like lying on the grass and gazing up at the southern stars for giving a fellow a habit of thinking. These great solitudes around, and the vast star-specked empyrean above, seemed to me to prompt reflection and open up pages of thought other than those gathered either at the student's desk or the office ledger.

Something like this came home to me when I compared our way of looking at things, with the cut-and-dry business nostrums which formed Mr. Ludgate's intellectual stock. On going over what the day had brought forth, a strong impression came over me that some new experiences, not unmixed with portent, were before us, but the anticipation of seeing Kennedy and Shewell soothed my sleep with pleasant imagery, and gave a rosy tinge to my waking moments.

<sup>†</sup> Master's man — meaning a parasite.

## Chapter XIX. Of Old Hands and Other Problems.

The next day, I remember, was a Sunday. It was in the glorious winter of these southern table lands under 25 degrees latitude, cool by night, bright and exhilarating by day. My friend Bob and I had settled down to another pleasant, lazy afternoon's reading, and Ludgate was busy writing up his statistics, when Toby, basking in the sun beside the black-boy's humpy<sup>†</sup> raised his head and ejaculated "Ki!" We looked, and there, a mile over the plain, appeared what must be Ludgate's cavalcade. The column of teams, sheep, bullocks, horses, and men "stretched many a rood," and all seemed to be driving on as if the "great enemy" was behind them. When they came nearer, we saw in advance, a red-faced man riding a stumpy-tailed chestnut cob, and he, we opined, was the redoubtable Pearse. He was turning round, raising his hand, and shouting to the drivers and shepherds, seemingly trying to moderate their speed, but his exhortations produced no effect. By-and-bye, observing our camp, he made straight for it, and Mr. Ludgate went out to meet him, and bid him take the sheep and teams wide of us, but before they could be stopped the Philistines were upon us. The leading man of the whip, faithful to the traditions of his kind, seeing the overseer stop beside the tents and fire, drove with the full force of ten bullocks close past us, and "*wae-ing up*" stopped, and with a volley of curses butt-ended the polers over the horns and eyes.

The team following, blindly impelled by the dynamic instincts of working-bullocks, came on in the tracks of the first, and the driver barely managed, with a "*Come hither wae! Spot!*" and a round-handed flogging of the off side leader, to clear the dray ahead; while on his near side he just escaped carrying away our tent. Seeing that for the first time, he opened his mouth as if he was going to swallow it, and demanded in stentorian tones "what the *rosy paradise* a tent was doing there?" The spare bullocks then, with bells jangling, trode through the midst of our little private demesne, trampling all before them, and at last the sheep, followed by the shepherds, both quite unconscious of where they were going, clattered, tramped, rushed, and crowded right over our private and sacred premises and belongings in spite of Binebbera and Toby, who belaboured them with sticks and pelted them with stones. As the last of the perverse brutes drew past, the shepherds and bullock drivers, after the manner of their kind, crowded round the fire without asking to whom it

belonged, or feeling in the least that they were intruding.

Perhaps they did not see us. We were standing on one side, anxious to see the whole lot take themselves off. As they lighted their pipes, each man bellowed out a brag or a grievance and all spoke at once. They criticised their master and the overseer in the plainest terms, and then they discussed whose might be the camp they had got into, seemingly not caring whether they were over-heard or not.

“And what's the game now, Jim?” said one ill-looking scoundrel. “I'm blessed if I think Pearse knows where he's taking us — or the “Cove” either for that matter.”

“Oh, him!” said a gentleman with a gait and a wriggle suggestive of the flogging days. “He's a hinnocent if ever there was one. As to where we're going, I'm *blooming* well sure by the lay of the country that we're getting near Melbourne — somewheres about the Mallee country where them niggers was always bad. — Blast me if I don't get my cheque from Pearse and stash it.”

“Jimmy Pearse: who's Jimmy Pearse! it beats all to see the likes of him an overseer. Why! I know'n him when he carried rations for Fred, the Garman, on the Sovereign River, when there was hardly a white man on the place. Jimmy, he was a sneaking wretch as could not stand up to a man; and Fred he wants me to take charge and be superintendent, but I ups to him and says that it won't run it. ‘Look here,’ says I, ‘if ye want your sheep to do, put white men after them and none of them Chinamen and furriners;’ and Fred he didn't like it half, but he knowed too much to try the bounce with me.”

This contribution to the conversation was by a particularly mean looking man, with his face twisted to one side, and wearing a pair of moleskin trousers which presented a solid japanned surface of grease and dirt.

In a few minutes, the gang, with their horned and hoofed charge, had left us in peace for the time, though they did not go farther than the foot of the ridge half a mile off, where they camped at our private bathing-place. However, we were glad to have them out of sight on any terms. I saw enough of Mr. Ludgate's men subsequently to be perfectly tired of them, and I must say, that, though by this time the Australian bush-hand was no stranger to me, I had never seen then, and indeed, never since fell in with such another lot of unmitigated rubbish in the guise of humanity. Some of them were able-bodied men, but all appeared to be utterly without any sense of reason, responsibility, or conscience. Almost the only individuals in the camp who seemed to be actuated by any promptings of duty or industry were a Chinese cook, and a stray Belgian barber. At first I used to wonder at finding so little sense, brain, or foresight in grown men. Accustomed in my boyhood to live among the peasantry of the West of Scotland, and used to their clear insight and

kindly natures, the shallow, lying brag of these hounds disgusted me, and I was amazed when I learned that the ideal of cleverness and capacity held up by them, centred in the twopenny pint-pot tricks of shanty-keepers, card-sharpers, and receivers of stolen goods. The heroes of that day were a couple of fellows who had managed to rob a bank by driving under the cellar, guided by the compass bearing. This robbery was, in the eyes of the camp, an intellectual achievement of the very highest order. As fulfilling their conception of a patriot, the deeds of "Bould Jack Donohue" were ever sung.

It appeared that Jack was an escaped convict, who took the bush for a time, and was at length shot by the police. I never learned whether this Donohue of the early days, was akin to our old acquaintances at Rover's Flat.

The conversation of the gang was most nauseous, unwholesome, and offensive, and it was generally pitched in so sonorous a key, that there was no escape from hearing it if you were within twenty yards. Their employer, whose chief fault towards them was, that he had patience with them at all, we could here them speak of, as if he were a half-witted creature, and they called him, among themselves, "Creeping Johnny." But, above all, these men were particularly distinguished by dirty habits. I never saw one of them wash. The loudly avowed belief was "that cold water took the strength out of a man." And yet the Sunday shave was a religious institution among them. Perhaps it was valuable as a fetish in linking them by even so frail a tie to human habits and observances. Along the chops of each you could trace, during the early part of the week, til covered by the accumulated accretion of dirt, the line of high water mark, shewing the limit reached by the soapsuds and razor at the Sunday ceremonial.

It turned out that they had been in a ferment to reach their Sunday's camp, and they followed Pearse, driving their four-footed charge recklessly, and blindly rushing our quiet quarters, for they meant to spend the day — as was their practice — in cooking duff and other material for a feed, in the shaving ceremony, and in exchanging yarns, the lying records of their criminal lives. It was one satisfaction to be aware that not one-fourth of the foul deeds that they bragged of, had any foundation in reality.

Such were some of the "old hands." They are now all but extinct, and though our modern Australian democracy is perverse in politics, and often uncouth and unreasonable to deal with, still, they are infinitely more like human beings than their predecessors

As the ground cleared, we could see behind, a group of horses, and expecting to meet our friends, we walked towards them. There they were, much browned, and greatly rougher in the outward man than when they landed, but their faces told that they were the same jolly, kindly fellows

as ever. One was driving a spring cart. The other was bringing on the mob of spare horses. Kennedy, when I accosted him, put on the same ghost-struck look as he did when I met him at Williamstown, and Shewell was ten minutes before he could stammer out his emphatic satisfaction. We went down with them to Ludgate's camp, and helped them to get their horses turned out, but, seeing that they had other work to do, we went up again to our own quarters, hoping to see them again in a few hours.

In the evening, Toby brought us a written note from Ludgate, and in compliance with the request contained therein, we went down to see him. We found that he wanted to shew us the tenders and chart of his country on Samson's Creek.

He was installed in a large tent, well lighted, with lots of books, papers, and office material about him. We pretended to be surprised at finding that Kennedy and Shewell were not with him, and asked for them. He said he supposed they were in their own tent, and it was quite plain that he habitually took no notice of them. Evidently, it had never occurred to him that he should treat them as companions, but, out of civility to us, he sent for them. Presently, we heard the following dialogue outside:

“Bill, lad, tell them young chaps the ‘Cove’ wants them.”

“You be shot” said the Chinaman.

“I say, John, you run fetch him that two fellow jackeroo.”

“No savee. Plenty cookee-cookee — no timee lun about,” replied John, from the Flowery Land.

“You be saved — you blooming idolater,” was something like the rejoinder made by the highly endowed Caucasian.

Ludgate heard all this, for there was no attempt made by the speakers to modulate their voices. They did not care twopence for him, and no wonder. Pearse had impressed on him that the men were always on the edge of a strike, and that half of them would, for two pins, “hump their drums,” and be off to the nearest township. Entirely engrossed with his pen-and-ink work, the employer never interfered or enforced his authority, and the overseer and the men equally did as they liked. Finding that his order was not to be obeyed, he went himself and brought our two friends, who seemed quite surprised at such attention being shewn them. It was the first time that they had the opportunity of any conversation, except with the working men. Ludgate began to get out his plans and papers, but some more of the “hands” had gathered close to the fire before the tent, without the slightest respect for their employer, or any regard for his or our convenience, and they were jawing, blowing, and lying with their customary assurance and fluency.

Consequently, it was quite impossible for us inside the tent to hear each other speak, or to give attention to the documents we wished to examine. Pearse also thrust himself in with the excuse of seeking for instructions,

his ears no doubt itching to hear what was going on. Short and I felt very much disgusted, and Ludgate too was so much annoyed that he asked Pearse if he could not induce the men to make less noise. The overseer said the men would not be interfered with, and if they left, where would the lambing be? Hereon his master ejaculated a muttered curse, and looked as if he did not like it. It is not pleasant to see a man look foolish in his own house, so as there was not the least chance of quiet and privacy there, I proposed that we should go up to our camp, where we could compare our own papers with Samson's, and where we would run no risk of interruption.

On examining the charts and tenders side by side, it was plain that an understanding would be desirable in the interest of both parties, We tried to make Ludgate see where the hitch lay, but he had no distinct comprehension of the data on which the descriptions of his run were based. These purported, like all similar tenders, to follow water-sheds and other natural boundaries, but we pointed out to him that the identity of these boundaries with the red and blue lines marked on his chart had yet to be proved. Our friend could not see this, but appealed to the plan as if it represented an actual survey of well-defined property like fields and town lands, and he did not for a time see what we were driving at, when Short and I proceeded laboriously and critically to compare the respective documents and sketches, tender by tender, and block by block.

The distances as measured by the pace of the horses corresponded tolerably well, and we identified the upper four blocks of Samson's Creek unmistakably, but when we tried to fit in block No. 5 on the west bank with our corresponding tender, an amazing discrepancy appeared. According to our notes and sketch the main range at this point came within a mile of the channel of the Creek; but by Samson's description, it ran back "five miles more or less towards a prominent precipitous range, including all tributaries and branch creeks debouching within the limits of five miles frontage," and, moreover, drawn upon the margin of the tender, for the surer identification, there appeared a characteristic pen and ink sketch of an isolated mountain. I stared hard at it. Though I did not recognise it at once, it looked so familiar to me, and it was no wonder that the outline was impressed on my memory for we had ridden round it, and within sight of it for some days; but seeing this prominent landmark described as being on the Samson's Creek country mystified me for a few minutes. I gazed into vacancy, racking my brains, while Short, in an excited way was turning over the pages of his note book, and tearing at his hair. Suddenly we both jumped up from the ground where we had been sprawling over the maps, and looked into each other's eyes. "Bob," I said, "it's the Hog-back range!" "Yes, and Samson has made the same mistake that we nearly dropped into." It turned out to be so. Samson, seeing the range standing out prominently some distance back from the

water-course, and observing nothing like a barrier between, had assumed that it formed part of the natural boundary, and had framed his tender accordingly, without testing the fact as we had done by riding over the ground. Consequently, as his tender was drawn up so as to cover the space only within the basin of Samson's creek, when the boundary came to be ascertained, the right of the buyer would be reduced to a much small area of country than what was sold to him.

Ludgate was hard to persuade that there was a flaw in his title, and even when the discrepancy was made plain, he was not disposed to admit that his right was prejudiced by Samson's mistake as to the water-shed. "He had bought by Samson's description, and the Hog-back range, identified unmistakeably, was clearly shown to be within the tract conveyed to him. The locality was beyond doubt. The question raised as to the watershed could hardly be held to be decided yet; and for that part it did not follow that it was essential."

To this we rejoined that our tenders followed the watershed exactly, while Samson professed to do so, but deviated materially; and that the Commissioner of Crown Lands, when he came to report, would on the evidence, to a certainty, confirm our right. This was perplexing to Ludgate, but his business discernment shewed him clearly that the final decision must depend upon the correspondence of the watershed with the description in the tender. After reflection he agreed to abide by the boundary when proved by actual survey. In one respect he could protect himself against loss — in as much as the purchase money had not all passed to Samson yet, and he could retain an equivalent for short area — the extent in question was about twenty square miles or 13,000 acres.

"Then it appears," he remarked, "that Samson sold me what he had not got to sell." "Not knowingly or intentionally," said Short. "He has fallen into a very natural mistake, and you would understand this if you went over the ground. Crawford and I were quite at a loss for some time, until we puzzled it out. By-the-bye would it not be the best thing you could do to look over the country before you take the sheep on? You should fix on a site for your station, look out for suitable water, and so on. Suppose we go, the lot of us? We have plenty of horses here that want riding, and we two will be idle for some months yet."

In consequence of this, we started next day with Ludgate, and accompanied by Shewell and Kennedy, who begged hard that we would get them into the party. Pearse was to keep the stock on the plain in the meantime, and as there was both grass and water in abundance on the spot, he could hardly meet with any serious mischance, ass though he was.

The further progress of Ludgate's enterprise caused us much uneasy reflection. It was not the party that we would like to face the taking up of new country with. The overseer might be well enough for carrying on

routine work under a sharp manager. He could ride about the flocks, count sheep, look after rations, and run up huts and fencing, but he was quite without the thought or tact to foresee and direct in critical circumstances. Two-thirds of the hired men were likely to leave at any time under the influence of some caprice. Shewell and Kennedy having been made ciphers of, from being kept out of their proper position, had neither experience nor authority, and, including Ludgate himself, there was not in the camp a man of capacity and action fit for the job in prospect. And this could not be a matter of indifference to us. The occupation of a new run, cut off from the last formed Stations by some seventy miles of desert and jungle, was a critical step in pioneering, and our being preceded by such a gang of nondescripts as composed Ludgate's party, equally cowardly, braggart, and useless, as most of them were, and sure to be unjust and inhuman to the blacks if they got the chance, would be apt to affect our relations with the first inhabitants most injuriously. So, glad that Short's suggestion had been responded to so readily, we hailed the delay of a few weeks which our trip entailed, as a postponement of trouble, and we half hoped that further experience would open Ludgate's eyes to the difficulties ahead, and would lead him to delay his expedition, or make more suitable preparations for carrying it out. We expected to be about a fortnight away, four or five days going out, an equal time in the country, and the same coming back.

On laying our heads together, Bob and I came to the conclusion that we might make our way lower down the river by a pass or gap, that would take us clear of both Bogg's and Raynard's stations. We could trust to the instinctive faculties of Binebbera and Toby to pick a feasible road through any tangle of scrub, rock, and ravine. Of course, we were not guilty of the absurdity of asking *them* if they could find a short cut. Your aboriginal is strictly conservative in his ideas, and having made a trail once, will follow it step by step ever after. So we simply started the way we wanted to go, and held on for the distant gap. Toby, less accustomed to the eccentricities of the Caucasian, stuck up at Bogg's and Nipper's track, and yelled, "Here road!" But Binebbera, more used to our ways, told him to "come on and not make a fool of himself — that all white men were mad — they could not help it — and that he had better keep with the flour, beef, and tobacco, as these supplies would certainly go with us." At least, I assumed that this was the meaning of the speech delivered in mellifluous Wiradgery — the lingua franca of the western plains. The younger boy glared about him for a moment as if he unexpectedly found himself among lunatics; then he spurred his filly up beside his companion, "Min yango? Win'ye-layan? Ulla tchin-tchin bakoother!" Meaning, "what's up next? Where are you going? There's a big scrub right a head!" The two, however, presently warmed like hounds on the scent, and so true was their native-born bush craft, that

they brought us without a check, on the fourth day, to the tree from the top of which the open downs of Samson's Creek had first been spied.

But even the quickest travelling on horsback is apt to become dull with the sameness of the eternal waste, without cheerful companionship and incident, or, unless the traveller has an eye for the forest life, and reads and comprehends Nature as he moves along.

On this occasion, the minor vicissitudes of the journey afforded us a good deal of occupation. Our companions, being inexperienced, needed looking after, and it fell entirely on us to see them duly under way, and the pack-horses properly loaded. When Ludgate began to feel at home in his saddle, his natural flow of conversation found vent. If he was versed in little outside of business topics, and if he was quite helpless in the emergencies of up-country life, still, his city rearing had endowed him with two valuable faculties — a great power of talk and unlimited self-confidence. He had a habit of plagiarism, too, which exasperated Short, and amused me greatly. As soon as he had mastered, swallowed, and digested an idea, perhaps after we had hammered it into him with reiterated demonstration, he would deliver the same back to us in pompous bow-wow language, as if it were an original conception of his own. On this morning, he tried the dodge on to such an extent that, at length, he got all the talk to himself, and he lectured and held forth on statistics and stock management, till, irritated beyond endurance, Short let a yell out of him, shook up his horse, and dashed at a gallop right over a boulder-strewn plain of black soil, ploughed with yawning cracks. Toby, in advance, roused by what he thought a “view hallo,” drew his filly together, and glared with his coal-black eyes over the crest of the downs to see what was up. It happened that an old emu hen was roused from her eggs on a grassy knoll, by the strange sound, and she stalked, eight feet high, peering towards us, listening. Suddenly, she saw the horses, and swung round with the ludicrous shuffle these birds make when alarmed, and with her plumes shaking and dangling under her, strode along at a good fourteen miles an hour. Toby dashed away like a rocket, shouting the war-whoop of the Warro tribe, and the whole cavalcade was in a second stretched “ventre à terre.” An emu makes a grand chase. The stately bird, striding straight over dale and down, and increasing her speed as she gathers way, far beyond what the apparent action would indicate, will put a good horse to his mettle. Many a time I have run them neck and neck in a chance encounter, but I never killed one for mere sport, and would not do so. I have eaten them, certainly, when on expeditions outside, but I have always disliked and regretted their wanton slaughter. They are such beautiful, picturesque objects, and being comparatively scarce, unlike the modern plague, the marsupial, they soon disappear after the country is stocked. On this occasion, Short and I, with our black imp, headed the field, and the three began to gain

on the old feathered dame after the burst of a mile, when she doubled cleverly on us under cover of some myall bushes, and ran right back in the channel of a dry watercourse before we saw where she had gone. Meantime, before we could pull up, the cavalcade was upon us. Ludgate, mounted on an old stock horse, called Staggering Dick, was enduring a species of equestrian purgatory. Dick had been selected for his use on account of his sense and steadiness. He could cut out cows and calves, or fat bullocks by himself. He could bring his rider back to the camp in any strange country, and you could ride him past a corroboree in full swing, or fire a rifle between his ears, so iron were his nerves. But though possessing all these high qualifications, he was not perfect. He got his name from a rolling, lurching gait that he had acquired, or inherited. His motion was easy enough at the walk or at a slow canter, but now the old brute had become excited. He tore at his bit, rolled from side to side, humped his back, and tossed, jerked, and rattled Mr. Ludgate so as to cause that gentleman to suspend his discourse suddenly, and try to appease and stop his ramping steed. But as the field was in full flight before him, Staggering Dick's courage was up, and whether the rider liked it or not, he was ready to face anything, whether "bank, bush, or scaur." Ludgate flying about in his saddle, the point of contact varying with the eccentricity of the motion, began to feel the woes of attrition, for no skin, flesh or bone would stand this kind of thing long.

Now Dick would, for a second, stop dead, crouching at the edge of a chasm, and then he would clear it with a rebound that churned his rider's viscera and made his teeth chatter: anon he would take a black trap boulder, flying it like a brick, and the old "cuss" would vary his performance with a blundering stagger, his nose scraping the ground as if he would go head over heels; but he never fell, though the last feat brought his rider over his neck. Alongside him at racing pace went one of the pack-horses, galloping well with his ears laid back, and his well-fitted pack never shifting, and close behind came Shewell and Kennedy going much as their horses chose. Far to the left appeared Binebbera in pursuit of the other pack-horse. Cock Robin, a raw colt, irritated by the rattling of a hobble chain against a quart pot suspended at his croup, had gone to work bucking, had sent everything on him flying, and had broken away.

At the first clink of the metal he simply, in the gaiety of his heart, gave a leap, and a kick or two; but feeling the surcingle tighten on and gall his brisket, set up his temper, so he lashed his tail tight between his hocks and began plunging with his head between his knees. This did not relieve him of the cause of irritation, so he proceeded to exhibit the equine *chef d'oeuvre*, the special accomplishment of the Australian horse. He sank his withers and raised his croup, till he took the shape of a grindstone; he began to squeal; he took sharp jerking jumps backwards — then from

side to side, then in a circle, going higher and higher every spring. A little of this exercise usually suffices, so in a few seconds the crupper snapped, saddle pack and all flew over his head, and Cock Robin, free as the wind, with head and tail erect, ramped over the desert wild. Since, I have heard hunting men at home express incredulity about this “buck-jumping.” I have seen *better* exhibitions than Cock Robin's. I once witnessed a screw-tailed New England horse buck himself clean out of saddle, girths, crupper and all without breaking strap or buckle. The extraordinary shape he got himself into, and the fiendish writhings and wriggings that he achieved might explain it. Anyway, there it was. We stopped till the black-boys had secured the horse and pack. There was no great difficulty or delay, as the runaway, after a prance round, galloped back to his companions, and the pack with its contents was soon picked up and re-fitted.

After this little episode Ludgate's conversation became a good deal subdued. The abrasions he had received predisposed him to melancholy, and indeed he was very *mum* and little disposed to converse for the best part of our journey through the desert tract.

† Humpy — a diminutive shed or hut.

## Chapter XX. Bush Lore.

On the evening of the fourth day as we got on the dip to Samson's Creek, we found the whole country dim with smoke. Except a few green patches, all the grass was burned, and the black-boys became very uneasy. "I believe," said, Binebbera, "plenty black fellow all about." The reasons he gave had a colour of probability. He said he could see that it was not a chance fire, because the smoke looked as if it advanced with a wide front, exactly as if caused by a long line of gins carrying firesticks, and throwing these in the grass as they moved on! The tribe might have been hunting Samson's Creek for some weeks, and according to their custom, they would burn it before leaving, so as to have fresh grass for the game by the next rain.

"They might be going some distance, or they might be only going to the next water. It was quite likely we might see something of them to-day or to-morrow."

There was nothing surprising in this. It was one of the inevitable contingencies of taking up new country that we were sure to fall in with blacks sooner or later; for of course we were quite aware that when Samson told Ludgate there were no blacks on this creek, he was either deceiving him, or talking about what he was ignorant of. We had no wish to avoid meeting the tribe, as we felt that if got on friendly terms with them now, and gained their confidence, much danger and annoyance might be averted. At night we camped in a green gully shaded from observation, keeping our horses near, and watching in turns, and at dawn we started down our old track. There was no chance of grass for lambing on Samson's creek for two months; that much was certain. The surface was charred black, and as we rode lower down, the curtain of smoke kept rising and retreating before us till we got opposite the well remembered gap with our first tree marked S. C., opposite to Samson's block No. 5.

Here the boys stopped in great excitement. "Plenty myall black fellow!" said Toby, throwing up his hands, opening and shutting his fingers, signifying decimals infinite. Binebbera sometimes spoke good English in order to show his superiority to the newly-caught indègène. "Toby is right, I believe." Ludgate had no belief in savages. Bush lore he thought little of, indeed he believed in little except what he read in the *The Times*. Moreover, he wanted his breakfast, and he was falling back on his self-satisfied statistical theories of life; so in a bluff and burly tone

he blurted out "What humbug!" Toby stared at him. He guessed what this little fat white man meant, and could not help thinking, that even for a white man, he must be a very ignorant person. To the boy, the signs of recent traffic on Samson's Creek were as plain as a string of cabs in George Street would be to a traffic inspector; but our city friend could perceive nothing unusual, and he did not see that anything could be proved by a little smoke and a few burned sticks.

"Show him, Toby," said Binebbera with a condescending smile. The boy dismounted, and he first lifted up and held out for inspection some strips of bark burning at one end. These gave *him* much the same impression as finding a parasol on a road would give *you*. He then went on a few paces and pointed to a wisp of grass inserted in a notch fresh cut in a tree, and placed so as to point down the creek. This, to Toby, read like a four line telegram. It purported to give notice to all and sundry following, that the head quarters of the tribe were moving down the creek. "Ah, how did that get there?" said Ludgate. "Ki! baran-do-ei!" said Binebbera, "what for baal you read him blackfellow newspaper, Mr. Ludgate." There was more "sign" yet. Toby beckoned us to a muddy hollow, and there, plain enough, were the clearly imprinted foot marks of women and children following each other in scores. "Now, don't you see?" said Short, "you must not under-rate the bush lore of our guides. The men have kept along the hill most likely, and the women and children have spread across the low ground, burning the grass as they went. Here, where the creek narrows in, many of them have come together; perhaps to get a drink of water, and so they have left their tracks in the soft soil."

We had started early, and we decided to have our breakfast here by the same clear rocky pool where we camped two months before. There was no occasion to hurry away, or alter our arrangements on account of the blacks. Most likely they had seen us by this time, and, if so, they would never doubt that we had seen their tracks; so to stop for an hour or two where we were would shew that we meant them no harm, and confidence might inspire confidence.

As to the risk of their imagining mischief and trying to rush us, we were prepared. The spot where we camped was clear of cover for a hundred yards round, and our double-barrelled carbines were always close to our hands. While we sat eating and talking, we had suddenly telling evidence of the unseen presence of the aboriginals. A faint "cööéé" behind was answered by one far ahead floating over our heads. It had an eerie feeling, this signal call, proving that these desolate-looking glades were fairly haunted by the wild race; and Ludgate, though a stout-hearted Englishman, jumped up and cocked his revolver. "Sit down, sit down," said I, laughing; "if they were coming on there would be no cööéé." Something was coming, though, plainly, for the black-boys

kept gazing up the creek, and listening intently. In a few seconds a clatter of hoofs sounded faint. "Yarraman, I believe," said Toby. Another "cööéé" from a stentorian pair of lungs shortly rang among the old iron bark trees, and a peal of laughter followed from an unmistakable English throat. "Ghindi! a gentleman coming!" said Binebbera, and our friend Durham alighted among us with a shout of welcome, and the clank and trampling of half-a-dozen steaming horses. He had written to us by Ludgate, whom he met a month ago at Brisbane, and after getting all his mustering over, it occurred to him that he had better come on and take a look at the new country himself. So he had reached our camp and run our track at a hard canter with his two attendants. One of these was a little black boy, called Tiger, smaller than Toby, rigged up something like an English groom, an awful little dandy: the other was a lithe, sinewy, keen-eyed stockrider from his native table-land at the head of the Clarence, called Hardy. We have read many wise things about the Anglo-Saxon and Celt of the southern hemisphere in connection with the deterioration of race. We have heard a smart little imported haberdasher at the exhibition hold forth about the loss of "stamina," resulting from the dry atmosphere and hot sun of Australia, and we have received the verdicts of authorities across the seas to the effect that each succeeding race of the Austral-Briton is gravitating nearer and nearer to the kangaroo and the idiot; and I think, except one well argued magazine article by my friend Rolf Bolderwood, on the "Australian-born type," I never read a word on the other side. However, the future, and no distant future, will shew which is right. Meantime, our countrymen at home may safely admit that our sons, nephews, and cousins are fairish cricketers, and that some of our boatmen can handle their sculls. Well, this young stockrider was a pure bred Austral-New-Englander, having been reared on the granite table-land near Armidale, 3,000 feet above the sea, in latitude 30 degrees. He had been brought up by Durham, as cow-herd, post-boy, groom, and under-stockman, and he was now the most perfect specimen of a bushman I ever saw. He possessed all the instincts and faculties of the savage, or the wild animal, combined with the head-piece and distinctive qualities of the civilized race. His father had been a London butler, and his mother was a Highland woman, but his temperament and idiosyncrasy were far more those native to the soil, the outcome of the bush life, the country and the climate, than such as he might have been expected to derive from either of his parents. In appearance he had nothing of the horny-handed toiler — the northern ploughman or mechanic. Tall, lithe, erect, the very model of a horseman, his whole equipment, from his simple, well-cut clothes to his trim, workmanlike saddle, looked fit, and he looked "to the manner born," He was like part of his horse, and his eye, quietly scanning us, seemed to take in the whole party, and the situation at once. Durham in telling of his journey,

referred to him as to some part of the track they had followed — I think it was at the place where we scattered after the emu — and Hardy, in a few words of unaccented English, made plain that he had reckoned up at once the incident which had puzzled his master, and, moreover, that the whole surface of the country they had crossed remained photographed on his memory.

Townspeople in Australia do not differ very much from their congeners at home, but the inland life and climate do certainly tend to produce a peculiar type, distinct altogether from their northern kinsmen, and this type often indicates great capacity of a certain kind. I knew a lad of the same stamp as Hardy, reared as a cow-boy and stockman, who, at two-and-twenty, being by some strange mischance without a horse, and without means, made his way through a very sparsely settled country on foot to a northern gold field. In a very short time, through inborn shrewdness or luck, he became the joint discoverer and third owner of a quartz reef that turned out gold by the hundred-weight. In a short time, he went out as sleeping partner, with £20,000 and a fifth share, and bought a cattle station that he had seen and taken a fancy to while walking through it. The price was £30,000 and he paid part cash. In eighteen months, by shrewd and timely sales, he cleared off all the incumbrances on his purchase, and owned, clear of debt, a run fit to carry 12,000 head of cattle, with 3,000 cows on it. He then took his mother to live in Sydney and built a nice suburban cottage. She is a fine-bred looking old lady, and as she is very silent, she often passes, with plenty of lace and tulle, for a woman of family. He speaks little, but reads much, and is daily learning something and acquiring a reputation for shrewdness and intelligence. But I notice one deficiency in his character, and I think it marks this highly capable type of the Australian universally. His range of thought never rises above money and personal interests. Though an excellent son and a good fellow, little moves him except material results. Politics he cares nothing for, except so far as they may touch his pocket, and public duty he does not understand, while history, literature, and science, are perfectly meaningless to him, unless as means to *get on*. And this type includes many, not only of the ablest but of the most blameless in life of the Australian-born. Perhaps we want some sterner discipline than the peaceful, easy, prosperous life of these sunny Arcadian fields to bring out the qualities that make a nation of men. The northern cradle of our fathers was first rocked amid blood and tempest. The swords of the Roman legions carved it out; the raven of Odin croaked among the northern tempests, and inaugurated the union of the races mid the smoke and ashes of sacked villages. May Heaven shield Australia from such grim teachings; may some milder regimen free her from the disease of huckstering, pettifogging, and jobbery, which now threatens to sap the manhood of her youth!

But as it is, the best Australian brightens up only with a good haul of hard cash, or with successful sport, with high prices, or cricket matches *won; not lost*. He will hear with vacuous good-humour that Kaiser Wilhelm is into Belgium; or that the Muscovite fleet has left the Amoor, one hundred steamers strong. It has been said, as a joke, that if the Czar's troops *did* land at Botany Bay, the Anglo-Australians' first idea would be to sell their fat beef. This is chaff, but there is a mixture of the real in it. The young community has been reared under the broad folds of the Union Jack. Unconscious of rough weather outside, because they have lived always in a covered pond, they have escaped all the sterner experiences shared by the other nations of the earth. A peaceful and prosperous money-changing life has been their highest ideal, and it is plainly not the life to develop humanity to its full height. When the awakening comes, as come it will, no doubt higher and sterner qualities will be evolved, but till then, the Australian character will remain only half made. It is, and has been, for two generations, that of a clever, good hearted, money making lad, precocious for his years, but only a smart boy after all.

Durham looked the true northern English squire, jolly and ruddy. His face told of kindly home rearing, and of the household music of the old hall and parsonage. He was a most welcome, moderating addition to our party, and in deference to his years and social weight, we called him at once to assume the position of head and leader. By his own account, and the inferences that unavoidably were suggested by his details, he had come off in a restless fit — under an attack of the old Viking craze — as every Englishman, born north of the Humber, worth his salt, will do at times.

I suggested to Bob, in our quiet hours, that Mrs. Durham had, like Miss Judy Macan, become melancholy and mopish under the effects of piety and dyspepsia, and, indeed, the way Durham objurgated certain sermons by one Doctor Talmage, left us little doubt on the subject. It seemed to us that, one day after writing up his muster-book, with Mrs. Durham sighing on the opposite side of the table, he looked up and said, “Now, old woman, I'm off for two months.” The good lady raised her eyes from the cheerful volume in her hand, and thought him mad, of course, but she would pray for him all the same. And so he stepped to the back verandah, where he saw Hardy flirting with the cook — for they will do it, you know, even in the most irreproachable households — and he told him to get in six fresh horses, and look up two light pack-saddles; and he went into his private smokery to gather together spurs, bits, cartridges, et cetera, and smacked his hands when he thought that in a week he would be far from Doctor Talmage, and would be sniffing the breezes of the untrod waste.

So, in three days, he was away past Bukulla and Bonshaw, and had

watered his horses in a stream that rises eighty miles from Brisbane, and falls into the sea near Adelaide. Just as you might say, rises at Tipperary, and falls into the sea at Venice; for that is about the distance across the solid continent of Australia. Finding that we had left our camp, he had followed hot foot. Indeed, he could have followed our horse tracks at a hard gallop, for to such eyes as those of Tiger and Hardy, the slightest trail through the grass was as plain as a parish road.

With this addition to our party, the examination of the country proceeded rapidly. Horses were always kept at hand, meals were always ready cooked, small luxuries appeared from Durham's pack. No time was lost, and the expedition became like a prolonged pic-nic. Sometimes, we all rode out in a body; on other occasions, a portion of the party, with the pack horses, remained in camp to rest, fish and shoot, and the principals concerned only went, taking with them the charts and tenders. Strange to say, though daily close to the blacks, they kept out of our way, and we did not meet them, but we learned afterwards that they had observed us minutely, and could mimic each one of us. Toby, getting up the horses one morning, got a glimpse of a little dusky nymph dipping her "coolamin"\* in a lily-covered tarn, but she vanished like a Dryad with her vase, shaped like the primitive Etruscan, on her head.

The grass being young and fresh on the Strathclyde side of the range, the fire did not spread far beyond Samson's Creek, and thus, we had good feed for our horses, and could camp anywhere with comfort until our work was completed.

In a few days, the runs were all looked over, the ranges followed and determined, and the boundaries approved and confirmed. I do not think Ludgate ever quite understood how we made out that Block 5 had been erroneously described. He had no clear conception of territorial features. A complicated interest account was much more easily read by him than a map. But Durham recognised the point at issue as soon as he saw the ground, and he remarked that he had seen the same thing before — a barrier range running out to a flat, or apparent hollow, and causing a doubt to arise as to the position of the watershed. "Of course," he said, "Samson ought to refund the purchase money, pro rata, and no doubt he will." To ourselves, he expressed himself highly pleased with the run we had marked out for him, and offered us his cheque for £1,000 there and then. Short reminded him that until the Commissioner's Report after inspection of the country, was received by the Department, the transfer of our title would be of no use to him. He then proposed that he should go to Brisbane and see the Commissioner, who represented the Sands' administration of New South Wales, and point out to that official the inconvenience of important matters being delayed by this routine; but consideration shewed him that to canvas and hawk about a matter of the kind in a public office, was not unlikely to suggest some trickery to

habitueés of these precincts and their friends. Tenders fraudulently copied from original papers had been repeatedly put forward by Commissioners and clerks, cooked to bear prior date; — even as had happened to poor Major Smith twelve years before!

Making a fuss might suggest some such trick, while if left to take the ordinary course, the tenders might be passed through without attracting attention. So he decided to *chance it*, but like an honest fellow, “he did not see,” he said, “why we should lose our well-earned money because there were rogues in the public service, and he would pay the amount into our bank account in Sydney.”

It was pleasant to deal with a man like Durham.

This was on the last night of our camp on Strathclyde, and having got through our business, we prolonged our evening smoke with much friendly chat, and in prospect of a future tinged with rosy hopes, we spent some hours round our fires before we sought our grassy couches.

Before lying down, I looked round on the starlit plain from the knoll where our tents and gunyas\* stood — I began to think now that my home for many years was here. The work of my youth, and perhaps of my middle age, was perhaps to be amid these quiet forest scenes, and I felt how much better such a career was, how much more enjoyable and luxurious than the pinched business life of towns, or the uphill toil and close calculation needful to extract a becoming maintenance from the wet mosses and wintry shaws of Drumdhu. Not that I failed in affection for those same “paupera regna.” Indeed, my great ambition was some day to be able to pay off a certain wadset or mortgage, contracted to the firm of Wylie and MacConochie in Wallacetown, and to rehabilitate the old tower, adding thereto a Gothic wing, and a handsome louping-on stone. I had got a great chance, and a glorious life was before me, and I thoroughly appreciated my good fortune.

One little puzzle occurred to me just as I laid my head on my extemporized pillow. Ludgate had no grass on Samson's Creek for his lambing, and if he was really going to fetch his sheep on, why had he not asked us for the temporary use of some of our country? He must know well enough that there was no use in trying to keep his flocks on his own side of the range until the burned grass grew again. This was mysterious, as Ludgate, though inapt in bush-craft, was never in the least opaque in apprehension, or slack in action, where his own interests were concerned.

In the morning Short's voice awoke me — “the devil you have!”

“Yes,” said Durham, “I have bought out Ludgate, stock, lock, and barrel — *eight thousand* sheep with the country at 15s. per head, 7s. per head to be allowed for sheep more or less — I to have the lambs, and he the wool, horses, teams, plant stores given in; and he has given me the option of taking the wool for £1,200 if I take delivery at once. What do you think of it?”

“Um — by Jingo!” said Short, for the great idol of the Tories was even then sworn by; “the little beggar! — yes, beggar, he will make £2,000 by this squatting spec. By Jove! he has wriggled well out of a bad job. Reggy, man! what do you think of that? you long-legged, pumpkin-headed Scotchman, lying snoring there! you will need to eat plenty more parrich before you will be able to get round Ludgate! And as for your bargain, Durham, — I don't think you can lose by it after all, but I did not know you wanted more run.”

“No, but I like the country well, and thought it a good chance. I can sell the sheep after the lambs are weaned, or keep them a year and get a second fleece off them, and I could put a thousand cattle on, and sell the place at a good profit. Samson's Creek will carry ten thousand head, if it will carry a hoof, and for an understocked run like it, I believe £8 per head could be got.”

“So, ho! I had no idea you were such a speculator?”

“Well, Short, I'm not, but I took a fancy to it; and in any case my neighbour Barton will take it off my hands, or go halves with me. He asked me to look out for something for him.”

There was no mistake about Ludgate. He had played his game well. Talk of pioneers, explorers, inventors, authors, and other men of mind and action! The true Jason of the day who wrests away the golden fleece is the trained trader. The born and bred dealer can beat all other men out of sight in the race of life. Here was this little city man, who knew almost nothing either in theory or practice, beyond the art of dealing, and the mysteries of contracts and invoices, and he had by a well-timed sale netted a sum that many an able man may spend half a lifetime in amassing by real work and technical knowledge.

Durham now explained how he proposed to arrange for the management of his new purchase. He would lose no time in sending up a superintendent with shearers and supplies. He would arrange that everything necessary would be on the ground in four months, so that shearing might commence then. He continued, “I want you two fellows to look after the concern for me till then; get the lambing over, and put up a rough wool shed and so on for shearing, anywhere you like. It does not matter where for the time. Keep things together the best way you can, and I will pay the cost and give you £200 for your trouble. You can employ your two friends, and give them the current rate of wages. They seem likely young fellows, and I will leave you Hardy. He will be willing to stay with you for a few months. That's a queer looking gang at Ludgate's Camp — not much good I expect. However, any man is useful with sheep in the busy season — but I would not wonder a bit if we found some of them had bolted when we got back. Still, your two selves, with Shewell and Kennedy, Hardy, and the black boys should be able to make shift, and I will send you some men by hook or by crook if

Ludgate's make off.”

This proposal involved a responsibility that we were by no means anxious to assume. Nevertheless, there was no valid reason why we should not undertake what Durham wished, especially as it would be some months before the cattle at Harvey and Cameron's were ready for delivery, and in many ways it was much better for us than having Ludgate for a neighbour, with his ill-conditioned, disorderly followers. So, after a little reflection we consented. Perhaps we agreed the more readily, because thereby we pleased Durham, and he had acted towards us in so friendly a spirit. Shewell and Kennedy were frantic with delight on learning the new arrangement. “Of course they would go with us — they only wanted the chance.” How they brightened up! They owned that they had been heartily sick of Ludgate and Pearse, and that they would have gone off to seek jobs as shepherds, or they would have gone to the diggings, or done anything else, if we had not turned up. Indeed, being without funds, and the business correspondent in Sydney to whom they had letters of introduction having merely handed them over to Ludgate, there was no other course open to them.

Many a youth of good family and nurture drops thus into the rough by-ways of life in Australia. Some turn up again, better men than ever, having recovered their original status by their own exertions. Others remain among the toiling many on the gold fields, in drovers' camps on the inland plains, or at times they are found doing lumper's work on the wharves of Port Jackson. The other day a lady came by the *Orient*, with a mother's letter, and carefully packed box for her two boys; and these treasures were made up in an old country house among the pollarded elms of the midland counties; and the lady was pledged by the mother's tears and blessings to find her sons. When she stepped on the Circular Quay, she stopped for a moment to look at the bright ingots of tin that were passed along to be stowed in the hold of the *Smyrna*, and she learned, some days after, that two of the rough men handling the tin were the youths she sought. Some of these rolling stones, no doubt, go to the dogs, but the most of them are not “black sheep”; they are merely the waifs of circumstance, as Kennedy and Shewell would have been if we had not chanced on them; and who knows that this discipline is positive loss to them, or eventual loss to society? May they not bear a refining and humaning influence into those strata where the heart beats most strongly, and in which impulse most needs direction. Indeed, in the bush, and on the gold fields, this element is now so prominent, as to lead one to think that it must tend towards the “levelling-up” so often advocated by the thinkers of the day.

\* A native water vessel.

\* Small huts of bark.

## Chapter XXI. Forming a New Station.

When we reached Camp, we found Durham's forebodings, as to Ludgate's men, verified. Half of them had taken themselves off, and the rest threatened to leave. Pearse only wanted some excuse to sneak away. There had been an awful mess. A grog-seller, one of those vermin that haunt the bush — and yet from such, many a wealthy colonial family has sprung — had been to the camp. Other loafers had appeared, and stories about the blacks in the outside country had been circulated. The dogs had got among the sheep. Articles had been filched from the stores on the drays — all was dissatisfaction and confusion. As Ludgate and Durham wished to settle at once, Short and I took charge, and dealt so, that Pearse, before night, was riding for Myall Creek, and the only men of the whole gang remaining were the Chinaman cook, the Belgian, and an eccentric old cripple — a Glasgow butcher's journeyman, who had been in all the iron gangs between Mount Victoria and the Derwent, but whom some Gallowgate tradition of loyalty, or else a hereditary proclivity to contrariness or non-conformity prevented joining in the stampede. He was a most troublesome old scoundrel, though he would never leave us in a pinch, but his insolence and fondness for argument were intolerable. Once, when Short found fault with him for getting his sheep boxed,\* and went towards him making some impatient gesture, old Gorbals *hirpled* up and stuck his nose within three inches of him, "Wad ye streek a crupple?"

"Go to — —" said Short.

"Efter you, sir. I hope I have proper respec' for my betters."

Gorbals stayed with us till all the troubles of that season were over, and then left one day in a pet about some trifle. Two years after, we got a letter from him, saying that he had married a widow with seven children — a model woman, who could do no end of washing, and "drank nothing" — and he wanted to come back to us, with this treasure, to stay all his life. He did not want any wages, just food, shelter, peace, and quiet, and the advantage of our countenance and occasional conversation; for he had never enjoyed life so much, or had met with such rational treatment as from us. Being prejudiced, blinded creatures, we avoided the temptation, and declined the friendly proposition.

In a few days, Durham and Ludgate left, and we began to prepare to move the flocks on to our own country. Durham took Hardy on the way,

so that he might send back with him any men he might succeed in hiring, and the foresight of this arrangement was speedily proved by the arrival — within a week — of two Chinamen, engaged as shepherds at thirty shillings a week. Those sons of the morning, from the verdant shores of the Yang-tse-Kiang were willing to go anywhere, and do anything within their capacity — to shepherd, watch, cook, wash, build yards, or move hurdles — at this rate of pay, with rations found. With pigtails streaming behind, and tightening their scalps so that mouth and eyes opened to their widest stretch, these cheerful followers of Con-fu-tsee trotted up, and with vivacious flourish of fingers recited, both together, in weird chorus, the articles of their agreement.

“Goo' day — massa tellee me you shephal tilty shilling wan week — vely good — me look out sheepee — no lossee wan — all litee.” They told us, moreover, that two white men, bullock drivers, had started with them, but that they had got away and left them behind.

“No goodee whi' ma',” said those men of peace, hinting at the overbearing ways of the Caucasians.

It turned out that the superior beings tried first to make the Chinamen carry their swags and cook for them, and then they objurgated them for not knowing the road, where-on the moonfaced of the ancient race walked away from them.

The Aryan bull-punchers arrived with Hardy two days after. They had lost themselves in earnest, after they had been abandoned by their Oriental brethren, had got footsore and half-starved, and were only found by Hardy running their tracks. The fellows, nevertheless, when they saw a prospect of victuals and rest, began to bluster after their kind. In bluff accents and with burly bearing they gave voice all over the camp, testifying not only against the Chinamen, but against ourselves, the Government, and all the other powers supernal and otherwise concerned in their misfortunes. That two “white men” should be lost in the bush was a scandal alike to Gods and angels; and they bellowed their grievances manfully!

When Ah Kin and Dan Ti saw them limp up, they expanded their Mongolian mouths, until their heads looked as if they had been sawn half-way through, and the obliquity of their almond eyes became pantomimically grotesque as they inquired, “you all litee now? you losee load alonga bushee?”

With these new hands, all hesitation about a start ceased, and in a fortnight, without any difficulties or incidents beyond those ordinary in moving live stock, the flocks and teams were across Samson's Creek, and feeding on the green plain under the Hog-back range. Shewell and Kennedy were becoming quite different men now that they were trusted and had responsible work to do. We sent them a-head with the black boys to pick out a good road for the drays, and blaze the line selected. A

good slice of bark chopped off a green tree makes a conspicuous beacon, to steer by which even the perversity of white bullock drivers and shepherds can hardly pretend to mistake. When we reached the run, they were sent to select camps for the different flocks, and with the black boys' help they did this with much judgment. We divided the sheep into three lots, namely, two lambing flocks of ewes, and one of wethers and other nondescripts, and we proceeded to make rough yards at the spots selected, these being each about three miles apart.

The distribution of our disposable staff in prospect of the lambing, which might be expected to begin daily, received due consideration in the evening councils held by Short and myself, at which Kennedy and Shewell sat as watchful and attentive auditors, while Hardy's opinion was often asked, and was received with serious attention.

There were two aspects in which our arrangements had to be considered. The primal and essential requirement was the successful carrying out of the work of the season, the most critical of all matters in the management of sheep. To this end the most advantageous disposal of the flocks on the spots selected for stations, and the allotment of the men to the work for which they were best fitted, were carefully discussed.

The other point which could not be left out of view in our arrangements, was the ever present shadow that hangs over frontier life, the risk of collision with the blacks. The fact of the tribe having avoided us hitherto, might be held to augur timidity on their part, or it might be interpreted as evidence of a hostile disposition. No positive inference either one way or the other could be drawn from the circumstance. On the other hand, if they had shewn up frankly, and made friendly professions, there would have been no more reason for attributing to them any deliberate intention of either peace or enmity.

My own matured opinion as to the Australian savage is, that in his pristine haunts, his conduct is too entirely impulsive to be calculated upon, and that being momentarily accessible to any suggestion, hint, opportunity, or even to the contagion of a shout or gesture, the apparently merry child-like creature of this instant, may, in the next, shew the ferocity of the blood-lapping tiger.

Also, savages are equally likely to be prompted by impulses of kindness and humanity, as the hundreds of wanderers found, cared for, and restored by the blacks, even at times when on terms of hostility with the intruding race, testify.

I have known a "Myall," while hunting, come upon a shepherd fallen in an epileptic fit. He did not leave him there, or pass by on the other side. He carried him in, four miles, to the head-station on his back. The savage is in truth a child, with full animal development, neither good nor evil, but plastic to influences of both kinds.

With such a temperament, it is obvious that professions of goodwill

expressed by wild tribes, though sincere at the time, are liable to change instantaneously under some imaginary or unintentional provocation, or possibly under the prompting of the omens and superstitions that dominate their minds so strongly. Moreover, it is never to be forgotten, that the hostility of race, though sometimes lulled to rest by good offices, and nearly always disguised, is still a fact; that the black considers himself the lord of his hunting grounds, and that according to immemorial aboriginal law, the white intruder has incurred the death-penalty, invariably inflicted on the trespasser of an alien tribe caught in the fact.

With the views held by us, and perhaps justifiably held, as to the rights of industry and civilization, it may seem unreasonable that some fifty families of savages should keep for their own use a piece of country as large as an English county, which they probably do not hunt all over above once in two years; but still the savages look upon these demesnes as *theirs* to all intents and purposes, and by our own professed theory of law, it would be difficult to shew that they have not an equitable claim, if not to the whole land, at least to fair treatment, to a livelihood after their own fashion, and to protection against wrong. None of these concessions has any legislature in Australia secured for the unfortunate race. The best they have got of late years, has been the Algerine law of the frontier, unmitigated by any supervision of the authorities, and brought home to them mainly in the blood-hound raids of the native police. The Aboriginal question never comes to the surface in any Australian Legislature, and the reason of this is, that “nothing is to be got out of it.” Nobody cares, and few know anything about such matters, as almost none of the successful grocers, publicans, and police-court lawyers, who form these Assemblies, ever saw the inland districts for which they make laws.

In the Eastern Colonies, a great opportunity has been lost of dealing uprightly with this question; but the time for an achievement so magnificent, the real blue ribbon of Australian statesmanship, has drifted past. Many white men, escaped convicts, and shipwrecked sailors, have lived for years with the tribes, and have in time made their way to the settlements. By them it has been pointed out that among the savages, there are many men intelligent enough to understand that the country most valued by the whites comprises the open forest and plains, while those tracts most important for the native race are the thickly timbered wood-lands, the scrubs, the mountain ranges, the swamps and salt water estuaries; and it has often been remarked that a policy of reserves under a Native Department based on the suggestions so shadowed out, might have provided for the interests of both races, might have evidenced the existence of wise foresight and public conscience in the more powerful people, and might have done honour to the Crown and the Empire. Since

the doomed Aborigines have disappeared from their old haunts, the kangaroo has increased in such numbers as to destroy the grass in the open country. Many runs, once valuable, have brought their owners to ruin through these ravages of the marsupial, once kept within limits by the hunter race; and one cannot help thinking that if the ranges and scrubs, the fastnesses wherein these animals are bred, had been secured under legitimate authority to the original owners, this evil would not now be what it is.

The balance of nature may not be disturbed with impunity. Short-sighted interest looks only to the question of immediate profit, but it becomes those who rule to look ahead, for the sake of permanent results, if not for the sake of humanity.

Those who are aware of the humanising influences which modify the nature of domesticated blacks, will see no impossibility of carrying out such a policy under intelligent, consistent, and humane administration; and there is no reason to doubt, that with the balance held evenly and equitably between the races, through the agency of a Native Department, with a staff of competent interpreters — such as those white men returned to civilization after living among the tribes — the problem might have been solved which has left a blot and scandal on the page of Australian history.

But the discussions in our Council did not extend to such recondite questions of policy; only we were honestly anxious to avoid strife, and to make friends with the local community which we had rubbed shoulders with a month before. They were now, to all appearances, off the run. There was not a smoke to be seen, or a fresh track. They had vanished in space. Still, we remembered that they were certainly within thirty miles, and might appear swarming over the plain any morning.

The arrangements decided on were the following: — The headquarters camp — the head station to be — was fixed in the plain, under the Hog-back range. Here was placed one of the lambing flocks of ewes, to be tended by Shewell and Kennedy, with the Belgian, Henry. There were also at this camp the two bullock-drivers, who were bush carpenters as well. They were to finish the lambing yards, and then cut timber for the frame of a wool-shed; and Short and I, with Binebbera, fixed our abode on the same spot. The other ewe flock was handed over to the three Chinamen, who were stationed at the lower yards, three miles down the river, on a small plain. We judged that those three compatriots would work better together, than with aliens, and that a wholesome spirit of rivalry would prompt them to make a good job of the lambing.

The third flock — the wethers — we handed over to old Gorbals. As from his crotchety temper, he could never “get on” with any “mate,” he was put by himself on a tributary creek that joined the river on the opposite side. It was a beautiful little black soil valley, lightly timbered,

well watered, and clothed with tussockry blue-tinted grass. All up and down it presented the most picturesque glimpses of woodland glade, and gently undulating pasture. Whether Gorbals appreciated the scenery or not, he had, at least, the advantages of good grass for his sheep, and solitude for himself, and the old sinner, I opined, should be happy.

On putting him on his ground, I pointed out these blessings to him, showing how specially favoured he was — in order to get a rise out of him — for I was quite as fond of humbug as ever; but he scorned to be pecked at by daws. He took a sardonic and intelligent glance about him, and then proceeded, ostentatiously, to load, with buck shot, the old double-barrelled gun he carried. He stuck two caps between his teeth, and held them there while he pounded away with his ramrod, driving home the charge with fell energy.

When his weapon was to his mind, he cried to his dog, “Away roun’ them, Wallace,” and taking no further notice of me, *hirpled* away to the head of his wethers, which were racing over the fresh-burned grass, a very torrent of wool and mutton.

We did not leave him wholly to solitude. It was arranged that Hardy, with the little black boy, Toby, should stay at night at Gorbals’s camp, and look after him and the Chinaman during the day. Short, as captain and general manager, would be, as it were, everywhere at once, and I, with Binebbera, would find plenty to do keeping things right at the headquarters camp, and lending a hand wherever it was wanted. Cook, and other domestic service we dispensed with. Household matters had to be attended to by any one who happened to have half-an-hour of leisure, so Kennedy was to be seen presently sweeping for his life with a *besom* made out of tea-tree; and Shewell, up to his elbows in dough, improving the shining hour before the sheep were let out, making a damper.

With plenty of work, the days sped fast. The lambs shortly looked like drifting snow-spray over the face of the downs, and the ceaseless bleat filled the air for a mile round each yard. Every day, the news of the doings at one camp was carried to the other, and the Celestial shepherds were stimulated to emulation.

“Good morning, John,” said Hardy. “Mr. Short been tell me five pounds prize for most lambs. How many piecy lamb you got him? Mr. Kennedy got thousand.” “Hi ya!” quoth Dan Ti, “me gottee two thlousan — you lookee — plenty — plenty — baa-baa all about.”

Gorbals was made happy with some copies of the *Glasgow Herald*, which I carried out to him one afternoon, and he read them with great gusto, while the wethers spread far over the open ridges. “A man has no call to be burstin’ himsel’ after sheep on grun’ like this; I let them get a spread and fill thirsels. There’s no fear o’ losing them here. I see they’re biggin’ iron boats all down the watter to Greenock. When I was there, the steamers were just starting. Auld Jimes Anderson was Provost the

year. Yinst when he was Baillie I was brocht up before him about some ploy a wheen o' us callants was in, and the toon offishers thocht they would screw evidence ott o' me against the others. So the Baillie took my 'precogneetion,' as they called it. I would answer naething but my name, and stopped at that. They might badger as they liked. At length, Maister Anderson spak me fairly, 'My, lad, it will be better for yoursel' if ye tell the truth;' and so, to have done wi't, I said, 'Weel, sir, I'll tell ye all about it' and the clerk cocked his eye and had his pen to the paper as gleg as a pyet at a bane.

" 'Do ye ken the goose-dubs?' I speered. 'Aye, aye,' quoth the Baillie. 'And do ye ken Weedow Macleerie's eating-house?' 'Yes, yes,' said the Inspector, for he thocht he was gaun to hear something to the purpose.

" 'And ye'll maybe be acquainted wi' the pump-wall forenenst the eating-hoose?' 'Aye.' 'Weel, ye can gang and pump there, for ye'll no pump me.' "

This edifying reminiscence of judicial proceedings in the good town of Glasgow, made the old sinner's face glow with gratification.

The sun was now higher in the heavens, and the days longer with the advance of the season; so that I rode home in something like a short twilight, and arrived just as Shewell was yarding for the night the youngest and tenderest lambs with their mothers, to get them out of the way of the older flock, which could be seen beyond, streaming over the hills homewards. Moving columns of ewes were coming along every spur and gully, with cloudlets of lambs bursting away from them, to skirr round and come back to hail their anxious mothers with noisy greetings.

Toby came up to say something while I was unsaddling my horse, but with the noise of 'baa-ing,' I could not at first hear him.

"What is it, Toby?"

"Black fellows here."

"Where?"

"Close up."

"How many?"

"I believe two fella."

"Where are they?"

He gave a peculiar cöoéé, throwing up his hand, and there stepped out, some thirty yards off — where from, or how they had been hidden, I could not guess — a straight, statuesque-looking young fellow, with a gin of almost child-like age. He had a broad grass necklace, or collar, on, a red-tinged cord round his head, to which hung an ornamental piece of bone or shell, and nothing else. His chest, back, and shoulders were serrated with ridgy lines — cut by a square-edged stone, so as to convey the idea of his wearing a dark, close-fitting under-shirt, knitted in "rig-and-fur" pattern. This skin-carving is universal in Australia, and the distinctive pattern stands for the tribal insignia, or armorial bearings.

Each black has thus indelibly marked on him the brand of his birth-place and his people, and no male is considered a man — or warrior — who does not bear this characteristic “imprimatur.” The process by which it is imprinted is extremely painful, and often throws the novice into a low fever.

He bore in his hand some eggs of the scrub turkey — the Tallegalla. His companion wore only a kangaroo skin below her waist, her hair was twined with the scarlet melaleuca blossom, and she offered — with a timid smile — a “coolamin,” half full of wild honey. His keen, watchful eye, as he stalked forward, scanned my every movement, and it was plain that he needed all his courage to fulfil his office of ambassador. From the first look of him, though he came alone with his fair partner, I never doubted that he represented the tribe, and that they were at no great distance. Neither could speak a word of English, or rather of the gibberish that usually serves as a vehicle of communication, but Toby, through the Warro dialect, managed to converse with them. “They wanted to be allowed to stay here. They would cut bark for me. The tribe was a long way off. They had seen us here some time ago — some months.” He pointed to the precise spot in the heavens which showed the meridian altitude of the sun in July, and signified that there was fire there on the ridges, and thin ice in the mornings on the shallow water in the Creek — which was true — and he described Durham's arrival with Hardy and Tiger, pointing to Hardy who rode up at that moment. These facts he seemed to put forward as witnessing to his good faith. He had not a weapon, not even the little stone “Mogin” that stands for axe, and carpenter's chest in general, with the blacks. Of course, I understood all this. He merely meant to show that his intentions were peaceable; but I had no doubt that the tribe was not far off, that he himself had among the long grass in the creek half a *gin-load* of weapons, and that a wave of his finger would send off flying the little timid girlish thing to come back in a minute bending under spears and boomerangs. I told Toby to ask him the name of the Hog-back range.

“Minye weel unga?” asked the interpreter.

“Ulla Takilbaran,” he replied in clearly accented syllables.

I gave them a few trifles, and they sat down to eat and rest. Though accepting our hospitality with all show of politeness and good manners, I could see that his coal-black eyes never slackened their scrutiny for a moment. It plainly tested his courage to trust himself among the terrible white-faced strangers. He might be a spy, and if so, he could not feel very comfortable, for he must have guessed the risk he ran if suspected of treacherous designs. The gin on the other hand would know that *she* had nothing to fear from the whites, but indeed the poor creatures are generally very passive, and are little given to trouble themselves about anything beyond the trivial wants of the moment. That night Short and I

had an earnest talk. The blacks were close at hand — all round us most likely. What should we do? We both decided that it might be better to have the tribe in sight than not, since they were on the run. We could not act with severity to this young pair, who had, as it were, put their lives in our hands. There were white ruffians, overseers and others, who would have stock-whipped them both into the river, just as likely as not to lead to a shepherd being murdered a week after in retaliation. The next step in the course of events would be to send the native police after them; when most likely the wrong blacks would get the punishment, and the tribe would never show up afterwards, except when they made a dart from their fastnesses to tomahawk some victim, spear cattle, or carry off sheep. To enter on such a course of outrage and reprisals appeared most odious to us.

Our sincere wish was to gain the confidence of the tribe and live in peace and good-will with them; but we were not blind to the possibilities of hostility, so we determined to be prepared to continue the daily patrol of the run even more systematically than hitherto, and to lay down a fixed rule and make it thoroughly understood that any more blacks who came in must camp at one place, namely, the big flat on the creek under Mount Takilbaran.

A few weeks more brought the lambing near a close. All had gone on smoothly, and as we had poisoned the dingoes pretty well down, the flocks could be allowed without risk to spread over the downs. A strange black or two was always turning up; one morning it would be a young hunter, who would leave some skins and would be delighted to get in exchange a fig of tobacco; then a few gins would come, to look at the ewes and lambs, and then, all at once a lot of picaninnies would appear playing on the flat.

It came about, that insensibly, and without any deliberate purpose, we got into the habit of employing them. An old woman would get some lambs to mind. She would mind them well, and would be quite pleased to get a pint pot full of flour at night as her day's pay. A young gin, who had a few words of English, signified that she could wash clothes, and shortly she was with two or three of her companions down at the creek equipped with a bar of soap, and all were rubbing with an energy of "elbow grease" that realized the adage of "new brooms." All those who came about were smiling and obedient. The novelty of our life and ways was pleasant to them, and we found them so willing to fetch wood and water, to bring up the working bullocks and horses, and do other little jobs, that there was a great risk of the needful precautions, at first laid down as rules, being disregarded. One idea Short carried out, which he had always insisted on as a safeguard, namely, the necessity of having some "stronghold," if it was only a log hut. He pointed out that the value of such an erection was not so much as a place of refuge in the event of a

sudden attack, as on account of the suspicion and dread with which the savages would look upon so mysterious a structure. Such a shanty, even though frail and pervious to the weather, if they could not see into it, and did not know what might be hidden there, would affect them with something of the same horror that a rustic of Attica would feel on approaching the Delphic shrine, and would influence them as a powerful deterrent to attempting any mischief. This idea was not Short's own, but was derived from well tested veteran experience of the savage nature. A child of the woods, for the first time, looks on the rude hut put up by the bushmen, as if it were something supernatural, unheard of, unknown to his fathers, and, therefore terrible. No doubt there were a few of the tribe who had met with whites before, but the majority were for the first time in contact with the strange race, and were subject to these first impressions. Of course, a short experience enables the wild race to get over this feeling, and the domesticated black boy laughs at the childish awe felt by the Myall, when he first sees the miracles of the white race. The hut was soon put up. It was easy to get logs cut and carried in by the two or three blacks always lounging about, and the curiosity and interest which the operation excited brought a fresh one every now and then to look at the wondrous creation, and be called on to lend a hand.

But there was one thing that we could not get so readily, and this was required for the wool shed as well as the hut, namely, roofing. The quantity of bark wanted to cover both would be some hundreds of sheets. By entering into a separate diplomatic negociation with each grinning and garrulous barbarian you might in an afternoon get a couple of sheets brought in. But this was an unsatisfactory way of doing business, and it became clear that we would never get the material wholesale in that way. Experiment showed that more success would be attained if we took out some half-dozen blacks and stuck to them till they stripped off and stacked in piles, the material procured, and indeed the quantity so got made the operation both advantageous and economical. For some days, accompanied by Binebbera, I went out with a few Myalls, and by keeping them in a good humour, and looking after them, I got them to strip six or seven sheets each. When the piles so made became dry, then one of the teams went round and collected them. But on the occasion of marking the lambs at the Chinaman's yard, all hands were engaged there, and as the necessity was pressing, I thought I could carry on the bark-stripping by myself. So, having seen all right about our headquarters, I took an early lunch, and called to a boy named "Bandicoot," who had got into the way of following me, and had learned a few words of English, to fetch "some black fellows to get bark." I walked on ahead, taking for granted that they were following me, but on getting beyond the creek I became aware that there were far more blacks about than I had any suspicion of.

Another cluster of gunyas and fires had sprung up within the last twenty-four hours within half a mile of our tents, and the flat fairly buzzed and swarmed with the native race. I knew that they had been creeping up in twos and threes as they gained confidence, but here was distinctly a new feature, it seemed as if all the blacks in the western scrubs had come in upon us in a body. Bandicoot and the regular workers now joined me, but the boy did not seem to like walking through, or close to this fresh encampment, and the demeanour of my other followers expressed more of policy and civility than cordiality towards some of the new comers. Most of these were plainly strangers, and there were many of them apparently of note in their tribe. Among the older were grizzled heroes, proud and defiant looking, and there were plenty of strong youths, full of animal life and confidence. At the same time there were some with mild sensible-looking countenances, who looked with curiosity and interest on my party, but without any unfriendly intent being apparent. Different from these were a few with the blood-hound glare in their eyes. These last would walk up to my party, whisper to one of them, eye me over, and then indulge in a saturnine chuckle, or a roar of coarse laughter. I spoke to one of these characters by way of doing the civil, and his face was immediately wreathed in a hideous fantastic grin, even more suggestive of throat-cutting than the open defiance of the taunting laugh. I was conscious, at the same time, that some old men were moving about, apparently exercising a moderate influence, advocating peace, trying to prevent any ill-will arising, seemingly explaining that my presence there meant them no harm. The old grandfathers of a tribe are very often peaceable and reasonable in their way; but the old ladies — Heaven save them! Accidentally, we got close to a fire round which sat a group of old skinny duennas. Bandicoot, with terror in his eye, begged me to go wide of them. “Old woman, no good,” he said. I asked why, and begged him to translate the conversation. He explained, so far as I could follow him, that they were calling the white fellows, “dog's meat, and even worse things and nastier,” and they were saying that “if the men of Takilbaran were like their fathers, the pale-faced vermin would soon be feeding the kites and crows.”

It was rather eerie work, walking through such a crew of “Myalls,” and being cursed by the ladies in this fashion, but I had a good six-shooter belted tight on my thigh, which some of these present had seen me use at a mark, and I thought that, as I was in for it, and could not well get out of it, I had best put a good face upon it. So I flourished the bright steel tomahawk which I carried in my hand, and promising tobacco and mutton to all who would cut bark, I strode through the crowd and up into the iron-bark range, followed by a good many more than my ordinary gang.

If I had been accused of being in a “horrid funk” the whole afternoon, I

could not well have denied it; except with the saving clause, which, perhaps, frees me from being convicted of absolute cowardice, namely, that I grinned and joked with them all the time, as if I was enjoying myself heartily; moreover, I cherished a deep-rooted confidence that if the murderers among them tried any pranks, I would “score off them” well with my revolver before I was finished. All the same, I was very well pleased to make a short afternoon of it, as some of the company were not nice. One of the new hands had a particularly wicked eye, and seemed to be always making jokes about me, and, at last, he took to amusing himself by taking sudden springs from behind trees, and giving yells, as if to startle me. In stripping a very big sheet of bark close to me, he had to reach a great height to chop it clear, and, in doing so, he took the opportunity to emit a tremendous whoop, and flourish his tomahawk almost over my head. I had the muzzle of my revolver within six inches of his right eye in a second, when his countenance turned a sickly yellow, and a hypocritical smile spread over his features. “Boodgerie fella me,” he whined.

Having so far kept up appearances tolerably, and having had quite enough of this work for once, I examined some sixty sheets of bark, got them piled in six or seven lots and proceeded homewards. The politeness which marked our return was far beyond what is maintained in Parliamentary life, or even, I am told, at Court Receptions.

In crossing the creek, it was a point of honour to give me the “pass,” but, as “men and brothers” with that peculiar eye, and lethal weapons in their hands, are not comfortable behind one's back, I took care to proceed, courtier fashion, and, I believe, took off my hat and made them a low bow, when I was fairly across. I began to breathe more freely when I was right through the oak-scrub, and, as I got over my funk, a reaction set in which could only be relieved by some piece of tom-foolery. Taking a “rise” out of the savages would be both revenge and enjoyment.

As I followed the track from the creek up to the yard, with my followers a little behind, there was old Dolphin, one of the pole-bullocks, just released from the yoke, swinging his way leisurely down to the water, and I saw, in his presence, the chance to pay back to my aboriginal friends some of the nervous torture which I had endured, and which I began to feel rather ashamed of. The honest old beast was going straight to the creek. There were some trees between him and the blacks, and they had not seen him yet, but he was coming right down the path, and he was so quiet that he would pass so close to me that I could lay my hand on him. Nevertheless, as he came in full view, I gave a howl as if he were the incarnation of Satan, and bolted as if I were flying for my life. When I got away forty yards, I looked round. Dolphin was standing in utter astonishment, wondering what was up with me, but every tree-top presented the blanched visage of one of the warriors, for their hearts

had become as water, and they had fled up the trees before the awful face of this four-footed white-fellows' devil. I then came forward, and hooted and laughed at them. The good-natured ones thought it was as capital a joke as I did, and came down from their trees in great glee, but some of the savage brutes, though they had been quite as frightened of Dolphin as the others, felt their dignity hurt. They spat on the ground, glared at me furtively, and thought it was no joke at all.

\* Boxed — two flocks mixing together.

## Chapter XXII. Frontier Warfare.

That night, in our tent, we spent some anxious hours in consultation. We felt much concern as to the number of blacks on the run. It looked as if our arrival on this piece of country had acted as a magnet in drawing-in all the outlying clans — more or less akin to the local tribe — and we did not like the spirit that I had seen displayed that day. If we could, we would have preferred to pick out the bad ones, and deal with them separately, for there were plenty of the race quiet and peaceable, whom we could manage easily, and their labour, though requiring peculiar management, was both useful and cheap. But the ill-scraped tongues of some of the old gins, and the hardly-disguised ferocity of some of the leading men, were disturbing elements in the situation.

We had talked on to near midnight, when a horse drew up suddenly, and Hardy came to the entrance. He had ridden over in the dark to let us know that he had found blacks hanging about the Chinamen's yards, and had ordered them off. He suspected that they were “sneaking” the sheep, and proposed going there again, and waiting till daylight, to watch. He had left Toby with old Gorbals, and he recommended that someone should go out there as soon as possible. We approved highly of Hardy's proceedings, and determined to be on foot before daylight. We decided that we would adopt a definite course with the blacks as soon as interference became necessary. This was, to pick out a small lot, and allow them to remain on the station, and to turn the rest off. This action would bring matters to a crisis, and would lead to a mutual understanding one way or another.

Before daybreak we were astir, and were eating an early breakfast, with our horses saddled beside us, when Hardy came in again at the gallop.

In the moonlight he came on seven blacks, each carrying a sheep on his back, stealing from the yard into the bed of the river. He followed them, but they were among the thick timber before he got up. They yelled at him in derision, and one of them threw a spear. He fired three shots from his revolver in the direction they went. He then warned the Chinamen to keep their sheep in the open ground, and came in as fast as his horse could carry him. There was no time to be lost now. The blacks must be turned off at once; so we slung our carbines and revolvers, and rode across the creek towards the camp. We were met almost at once by the quiet lot who usually hung about, Bandicoot and his mother, a few boys

and young gins, and another woman with several children. They were whining, pointing to the camp, and trying to tell us something. As we got nearer the ground that had swarmed with life the day before, we saw only smouldering ashes and smoke. All had gone. "Where?" I asked Bandicoot. He pointed up to the mountain — Takilbaran. Binebbera examined him further. He said that the gins and picaninnies had gone up the mountain, *but a good many of the men had gone in the night to the Chinamen's yards.*

This was alarming. A large number must have been hiding somewhere near when Hardy left. We started Kennedy at once, at the gallop, to Gorbals' to stay with the old man till he was sent for, and watch against the savages; and then we warned Shewell to look well after the camp and the men remaining there, and to keep his firearms in order. I did not like quite to leave him by himself, as the head station, where all the supplies usually are — the treasures of flour, blankets, and tobacco — offers a tempting prize to blacks purposing mischief, and he would need to be all about in the course of the day, seeing to the sheep and the men working at the wool-shed. But he himself did not mind it. He had the cool courage of an Englishman, and he rather liked being placed in command for the time. So I put his horse inside the log catching-yard, and saw him trudge away round the ewes and lambs with his gun in his hand, and a pocket full of cartridges. Having so arranged for the best, I followed Short, who had already started down the river at a racing pace.

Ah Kin and Cookee John had their sheep within sight, on the plain. Dan Ti had taken the remainder of the flock — the dry ewes — further down. We followed the river half-a-mile, and saw no shepherd, but only some groups of sheep huddled together. When we came near, they ran a short way, as if scared, and then ringing in a close circle, stopped to gaze. We found several of such mobs crowding together with fright, and then starting away as if from some sudden panic, but though we went all round for another mile, we saw nothing of the Chinamen.

After some hours search without seeing further sign, we took the sheep back to the yard, and then proceeded to hunt the ground carefully, to quarter it back and forward foot by foot. Late in the day, on a spot less trampled by the sheep, Binebbera came upon some unusual traces. He followed them and came on a solitary sheep with a broken leg, and a little further on, below a clump of brigalow bushes, lay the body of poor Dan Ti horribly mutilated, with the sign of blacks in numbers all round. If the ground had not been so much trodden, we would have found the tracks of the murderers much sooner. They had stolen upon him while going round his flock, and after putting him to death had fallen upon the sheep with their nulla-nullas. Most likely they had driven a number off, breaking their legs to prevent their escaping, as we had heard of blacks doing before.

It was dark before we had buried the remains of the poor stranger. This misfortune affected us deeply. The risk of death at the hands of the savages is one to which all dwellers in frontier country are exposed, but we felt that for the fate of this poor foreigner in our employment we were yet in a sense responsible. Still in the individual case, we could not blame ourselves for any recklessness or neglect, and in a wider sense, as a matter of general policy, the contact of the races could hardly occur to us, at our age and with our limited experience, as a matter for *our* consideration. We may possibly have assumed that such questions were duly studied and forecast by wise men in high places. If so, we knew precious little of the habits of thought cultivated by the law-makers and rulers of our race. Mature experience has shown me that, now as then, such questions are left entirely to blind chance, though statesmen may wax eloquent over a road or bridge vote or a disputed publican's license.

But, however we might reflect on ourselves, the time was not one for brooding. We were well aware that there was the greatest risk of further outrage following immediately, and we determined to stay all night with the remaining Chinamen. They, poor fellows, though downcast at the death of their mate, saw to the sheep as usual, and did not show any symptoms of panic. Our sorrow and anxiety seemed to please them as a proof of our human sympathy, and they exerted themselves to make us a meal of chops, tomatos, rice, and tea. Trivialities sometimes hang in one's mind mixed up with the most tragic matters.

I remember on this occasion having a smile about "chops and tomato sauce" in *Bardell v. Pickwick*, when the poor Celestials brought us in our meal in their kindly, humble way.

Hardy had gone off at sundown to stay with old Gorbals and Kennedy. The savages might rush any of the camps in the night, but we thought that they were much more likely to make an attempt on one of the outlying stations than on our headquarters. Shewell had with him Henry, the Belgian, and the two bullock-drivers. Moreover, we calculated that the small mob of quiet blacks, with Bandicoot, would give him warning of any danger. The night passed for me with little sleep, and Short sat at the fire and paced about till morning. It had always been the case with blacks that if a murder passed unpunished another followed immediately, and painful misgivings haunted us in the dark hours. I had kept my horse starving in a high log yard and before dawn I had him saddled and rode hard up the river. When I got to the top of the iron-bark range that looked down on our camp, the pale rose tint of daybreak was stealing up the eastern horizon. The flat, half a mile below, lay in a haze, but a flavour that reached my nostrils told more of smoke than vapour. When I rode down a little further, I stopped and rubbed my eyes. I could not see the white forms of the tents, the angular shaped bark gunyas, nor could I see the white fleeces of the sheep in the yards, but smoke rose all round. I

urged my horse fast down the stony path. Good Heavens! all was gone. Smouldering fire marked the spot where our temporary dwelling had been, and the log yards were in ashes. As I gazed, a feeble moan near made me turn, and a creature that looked dazed and stupified staggered to my side. It was Henry, the Belgian! "Blackfellow," he said "kill us altogether and take away sheep." He sat down moaning. He could not stand. A heap lay on the ground half way to the bullock-drays. I went towards it. It was one of the white men, stuck full of spears and with his head pounded into fragments. I next saw a piece of white calico on the ground, apparently a fragment of one of the tents. I raised it and there lay some one below. It was Shewell, lying on his face, bleeding copiously, but seemingly alive. I turned him over, looked for his wound, chafed him, poured water on his face, and at length saw signs of returning consciousness. He found voice at length to tell me that he and Dawes (the white man killed) were keeping watch alternately, and about midnight, he thought, the blacks rushed them. Some one fired a shot, but before he saw the blacks, he got a spear under his shoulder. He pulled it out, but must have fainted, as he remembered nothing more. The other white man, Clarke, now appeared with Bandicoot. The blacks, at about twelve at night, had rushed the camp. He fired two shots at them, "but as it looked as if they had killed all hands at once he hid himself. The quiet niggers found him and had acted the square, and covered him up till the "Myalls" were gone. He wasn't a man as held with them cannibals, but Bandicoot and his mob, they was right." I made beds for Shewell and Henry with the fragments of clothing scattered about and rigged up a tent over them. The gins now came and I set them to attend to the patients. Henry's injury was merely a stunning blow with a nulla-nulla, that fortunately for him knocked him down and so he escaped further notice. Shewell's wound I could not judge of. The spear had gone in in front, under the shoulder blade, and passing through had protruded at the back below the fourth rib. The loss of blood had been great, but it was possible that no vital part was touched. Having bathed him with warm water and given him hot tea to drink, I left a gin to watch him and begged the poor fellow to go to sleep if he could. The same treatment promised to pull Henry round quickly. I then looked round to see what had escaped destruction. Most of the articles in the tents had been carried off or burned, but the stores in the log hut, rations, ammunition, and other valuables, had escaped notice. A futile attempt had been made to pull the building down, and then to burn it, but this only resulted in the door and a portion of the roof falling inwards and screening from the gaze of the plunderers the chests containing the principal stock. By the time I had made this discovery, it was broad day-light and Short arrived.

We decided on the course to be taken without a second's delay. We must follow up the savages at once. These unprovoked murders deserved

severe punishment, and the night attack would certainly be repeated if we delayed action. Toby was sent off with two of the fastest horses and a note to Dr. Jennings at Kianda, a hundred and thirty miles off. Jennings, I may say, came on at once and had treated Shewell before a week was over. He never asked who was to pay him, but brought a pack of implements, medical material, and his books on surgery, and he took the deepest interest in the case for two reasons which may appear remarkable to many thriving practitioners; the first being a genuine spirit of humanity, and the second an enthusiastic love of his art. When we got back, there was the little man, tidy and well-shaved, in speckless white, reading aloud to Shewell a new book just arrived, called "The Newcomes," for his patient was low and feverish — but of that anon.

The further arrangements made were that Kennedy was left in charge. He was to keep his horse up constantly, sleep every night at the Chinamen's station, and come in to the head station during the day. Gorbals was brought in with his flock. He and Henry must keep their sheep apart if possible, and they were to get horses to ride round the flocks if necessary. Bandicoot and his family were regularly adopted, and they were to be employed as far as possible, on condition that they let "Mr. Kennedy" know if any strange blacks came about. If the sheep got "boxed" for the time, there was no help for it, but as there was plenty of grass and water, perhaps no great harm would be done.

Having so arranged we started in pursuit. The party consisted of only Short, and myself, Hardy, and Binebbera, few in number certainly, but quite enough to teach the blacks the lesson that they could not rob and slay with impunity; moreover, inspired as we were by the doings of the last two days, we felt reckless of danger so long as we caught the offenders. The action we took was not so hair-brained as it might appear. Armed as we were with double-barrelled carbines and revolvers, a sudden well-timed attack might, and most probably would, produce such a panic as would save us from the chances of a stand-up fight. Besides, if we were compelled to retreat, we believed that while our ammunition lasted, we would be able to fight our way back in safety through a crowd of naked savages. The track they had taken was plain enough. We soon came upon the flock of ewes and lambs scattered about in all directions. In three miles we came to the relics of a great feast. Some score of sheep had been eaten, and bags that had contained flour and sugar were lying about empty. Some few of the flock were here, but most of them seemed to have headed back towards the station. From this point the tracks diverged. One path, evidently made by women and children, turned towards the western shoulder of Takilbaran, which was clothed with dense scrub foliage, while a trail plainly of men, struck right across the open country South-West. The range which formed the boundary of Strathclyde Run, was about fifteen miles off. It consisted of low, broken,

abrupt ridges densely wooded. We had not been far into this wilderness of rock and thicket, but no doubt it contained some fastness which the blacks were steering for. They had passed some hours before us. We crossed the plain quickly and ran the track into the ridges. Binebbera went a little way on foot, and shortly came back. "Horse no good now. I believe camp not very big way off." The horses were hobbled and we went on through tangled brakes and stony gullies. It was rough walking, and we could not get on without making a noise. "Hush," said Binebbera. "Stop! I believe best wait till blackfellow sleep." The situation was critical. If the tribe was so near as Binebbera thought, we could never get close to them without raising an alarm. In fact they might see us long before we saw them, and might surprise us by an attack in the rear, instead of us surprising them. They were quite able and likely to do this if they found us to be off our guard, careless, or in appearance irresolute. On the other hand, if we did see them and went at them in broad daylight, the probability was that they would avoid our attack and would disappear at once, to hang round till they found us unprepared. A morning attack was certainly the best plan, but, to make this successfully, we must make sure of the position of the camp beforehand. Following Binebbera's advice, we waited where we were in a rocky dell, while he, peeling off his clothes, and taking only his revolver in his belt, glided away noiselessly through the thick bushes and over the rocks and gravel. He came back in half an hour. The blacks had made a camp "close up other side. There were good many blackfellows, 'myalls.'" "How many? Seventy?" "Yes, more — thousand." They were fishing in a big creek close up. Some had been hunting and were bringing in kangaroos. There would be a great feast and corroboree to-night. Some of them were painting themselves and sticking feathers and swan's down on their heads. There was lots of plunder from the station; coloured blankets, shirts, axes, tobacco, and so on. He proposed that we should go quietly back to where the horses were, as, if we stayed here, some black might come on us and raise the alarm. He could take us right on them an hour before day-break when they would be all asleep. This was the best plan. We assumed, allowing for Binebbera's liberal ideas as to numbers, that there would be sixty or seventy warriors in the camp, a fighting party not to be trifled with; so we crawled quietly back, our wary scout-master brushing the ground carefully with a green branch where it was disturbed by our steps. We rounded the horses up into a hollow and muffled their hobble chains; then we made a small fire under an overhanging cliff and had our meal. The moon was now nearly full, and by starting an hour before day-break we would have light to get to the camp. Before dawn the native race is always drowsy. They sleep heavily and waken with difficulty. They are too thoughtless to keep watch, and a surprise at that early hour is almost sure to produce a panic even in a strong fighting

party. We smoked and talked but little. We were too fearful of letting our presence be known; but we tried to rest and pass the time in patience. Two hours after dark the distant sound of the corroboree reached us. It grew louder as the night went on, till we could note plainly the rhythm of the savage chorus, the rattle of the weapons, and the tremor of the accurately-timed footfall. In these performances, their own exploits, and the destruction, sufferings and terror of their enemies are all dramatised. The poor Chinaman walking round his sheep, and his shrinking fear on seeing them would mimicked: the sleepy, careless, big white man yawning beside his fire; and Shewell gazing into the darkness to see the cause of the disturbance, would all be represented; then the shower of spears and boomerangs and the rush of the heroes on their foes would be acted; while the wealth of spoil captured would be pointed out, and the glut of fat mutton that followed would be signified by intelligible gestures. A song of victory, in which all voices joined, accompanied the dramatic action and dance, a sustained chant, with little melody, but the cadence accurately timed, and the whole ended with a ferocious yell. Wir-r-r! Wah! Wah! Wah! Wah! followed by an abrupt silence.

This, rising in the night air, probably from a mile's distance, along with the *thud* of the accurately falling feet, came distinctly to our ears, and was repeated several times. We listened with much satisfaction, as it augured well of the long and sound morning's sleep which the heroes would enjoy after their festivity. At length, as the moon sunk down to the tree-tops, all was quiet, and I thought I had barely shut my eyes, when Short put his hand on me. "Come on, Reggy. Leave everything behind but your arms and cartridges. It's a pity we can't go like those two." I looked. Binebbera had nothing on but his shirt, with a cartridge box and revolver slung over his shoulder, and Hardy was equipped precisely in the same way. He could throw off civilised encumbrances when he liked. I was surprised at nothing that this bush-rider did now, as I had once seen him pull off his trowsers and boots and run down a horse that had broken away with his saddle on. Binebbera went first, and the others followed in Indian file. Half-an-hour's silent creeping brought us in sight of a long, crescent-shaped lagoon, shimmering in the last rays of the moon. Along the near bank there gleamed a line of fires burning low, and by their regularity looking like a row of street lamps. A few bark gunyas had been hastily set up, and there were other breaks for shelter formed of sticks covered with our stolen rugs and blankets, but we could see that most of the blacks lay in groups sleeping with their feet near the ashes. We got to one end of the line of fires, and crouched down unnoticed. No one stirred for a while. At length a hard-featured, pock-marked savage, with a long, silvery beard rose up yawning. He was evidently a man of mark, and his face expressed plainly that he thought himself "society." He had wrapped round him a beautiful rug of black squirrel skin, faced

with scarlet, which Shewell had just got made to send home to his sister, and I felt very much disposed to send a shot through his ribs; but Binebbera, who was watching him closely, whispered, "you stop a bit, look at him." The early riser had raised a pile of loose grass, and took therefrom two fine fish, gigantic perch of the species we misname the "Murray Cod," then he raked out his fire, and making a bed of thick white ashes, laid in the fish and covered them up. "Boodgeree breakfast belonging to you and me," chuckled our indigenous epicure. "Now," whispered Short, and touched Binebbera. The ready carbine was raised, and with the report, Wando, the son of Bingi, a Prince of Takilbaran leaped high in the air, and fell dead with his face in the grass. Then, there took place precisely what we expected. The blacks jumped up and gazed half-awake in groups, and we raked them with a double-barrelled volley. A terrific yell rose. They were waking up; though many were still dazed with sleep.

"Load," said Short. They had now left the nearest fires, and huddled in a crowd at the far end, so we got into the shadow, and, screened by some bushes, placed ourselves between the enemy and the thicket, whence we gave them another discharge. There was now confusion among them. Some of their leading men rushed to the front clashing their nulla-nullas against their shields, quivering their spears, and yelling their war-cry; but many hung back, and our third and last volley, which told chiefly on these desperadoes, broke them up like the sheep they had scattered the day before. Cut off from the covert of the scrub by our fire, they threw away their weapons, jumping in a body into the lagoon, and we emptied our revolvers at their heads as they they came to the surface. In five minutes there was not a living black in sight, except a few maimed ones whom Binebbera, faithful to his traditions, wanted to tomahawk, but we gave them, instead, water to drink and bits of tobacco, and moreover favoured them with a lecture, translated more or less faithfully, on the advantage of peace and brotherhood, as opposed to the principles of glory and Jingoism. We then piled all their weapons and the tools, goods, gear, and inside plenishing (stolen) with the bark of their gunyas, and made a big bon-fire. We could carry nothing away that we recovered, and we were determined to leave them nothing. After this morning's work, we went leisurely back to the shady nook where we had left our horses and equipment, Binebbera carefully carrying the fish which he had not forgotten to extract from the ashes, and found to be capitally cooked.

These large perch have sometimes a muddy flavour, but the two captured that morning were excellent, and we made a hearty breakfast, without indulging in any qualms as to where the banquet came from.

It was decided to continue the chase. The punishment which the blacks feel and remember longer than a few lives lost, or quickly-healed

wounds, is the fag and fear of being continually followed, and roused out, the want of food and rest thus entailed, and the terror which prevents them lighting a fire. The persistence of their white enemies, and the dodges by which they sometimes circumvent the childlike savages, also tend to impress them with an idea of demoniac cunning and ferocity, for the Aboriginal never quite shakes off an uncanny feeling that the white man is something more than a man — that he is partly a devil.

The persecution which we proposed, was meant to work on this feeling. We would, if we could, rouse up the next camp they made, and if the tribe dispersed, we would circle the country round, so as to cut their different tracks. Even if we did not pull trigger on them again, this hunting would impress on their understandings a lesson that they would not forget, and would teach them to leave harmless white men alone.

So we pursued them for two days more, giving them no rest, till the gang broke into small parties, and we finished our patrol by circling beyond the track for some distance, making a demonstration whenever we came upon signs of the fugitives' presence, but there was very little more powder burned.

Enough was now done, and as continued rain had set in, we took the road homewards, and got in after being away a week. Among other matters that we got some insight of in this excursion, we learned the fact, that in spite of all the yarns told on the frontier by run-jobbers like Boggs and Nipper, Raynard, and such, there were still great tracts of grass country in Australia unexplored and unknown. Since the days of the first Surveyor-General, Mr. Oxley, his official report of the “desert” has been repeated of each newly-found district.

After a partial examination of the Lachlan River, in the year 1817, that officer reported, “that he had demonstrated, beyond a shadow of doubt, that no rivers could fall into the sea between Cape Otway and Spencer's Gulf, at least, none deriving their waters from the Eastern side of the Continent, and that the country South of the parallel of 30 degrees, and West of the meridian of 147 degrees, 30 minutes East was uninhabitable and useless for all purposes of civilised man.”

Unfortunately for prophecy, at this day Oxley's wilderness contains two thirds of Victoria, the whole of the Riverina country, and a part of South Australia, the only navigable rivers on the Continent, about a million of people, and twenty millions of sheep; and, since that time, every fresh start in pioneering has pushed “the desert” a little farther away, but still to turn up again and again in the reports of run-dealers, who have just “the very last piece of available country” to sell.

And with this expedition, we took farewell of the Aboriginal question, as I mean to do now in my narration. We had never any more trouble with the blacks. Our small “mob” at the home station kept with us faithfully. Every now and then a face would appear at their fire that we

would remember having seen among the gathering on the flat, but the presence of such wayfarers was distinctly understood to be on sufferance, and subject to good behaviour.

It was always said by our blacks, that the murders had been committed by the “Myalls” from the scrubs farther West — not by the local tribe — and that the punishment had fallen chiefly on the first. Whether this was wholly true was doubtful, considering how readily the wild beast instinct in savages responds to the promptings of blood and plunder. At all events, we were good friends ever afterwards, so much so, that Binebbera took to wife a daughter of the reigning house — a dark brown princess, with a merry laugh and flashing teeth, her trousseau consisting of a gorgeous regatta shirt, and a cutty pipe stuck through the cartilage of her nose.

If my reader, after this unvarnished account of a real episode in frontier life, concludes that my views on the “native” question are incongruous and inconsistent with my actions; that I have denounced the lawful authorities, and the native police force without stint, while I have taken the law into my own hands, I answer that the weight of responsibility rests with those who have governed and govern these colonies, inasmuch as they have exercised neither fore-sight, sense, nor humanity, in devising a policy to regulate the contact of the races, and have left the safety and interests of European and Aboriginal alike, to blind chance. The native police is an immoral and, strictly speaking, an illegal force, maintained hitherto chiefly in the interest of absentee station owners, who care nothing for questions of policy or humanity. I say, moreover, that the police force is often employed to carry out a system of military execution for very trivial causes, and that when “out” they shoot the innocent blacks quite as readily as those guilty.

*We* did justice on the Takilbaran murderers, and the blacks of the district understood and appreciated our action.

## Chapter XXIII. Pallida Mors.

On getting home, we found plenty of work waiting for us, and a pile of letters.

Mr. Edwards, Durham's superintendent, had arrived to take charge. Three carriers teams, with a gang of shearers, were close to the station. Harvey and Cameron had the nine hundred heifers ready, and they hoped to see us in a fortnight to take delivery. Poor Shewell stretched out a wan hand to us. He could not leave his bed. "You'll be — going — for — the — cattle? I — was — hoping — to — go — with — you. I doubt — I'm — not — fit — for — much — now." We soothed the poor fellow and told him he would be all right when we got back. "Dr. — Jennings — is — tinkering — me — up, but — I — don't — get — strong — somehow." Short sat talking to him, while Jennings gave me a look, and I went outside.

"I don't like the state your friend's in," said the doctor. "I thought first that the spear had passed outside the ribs, but there are symptoms as if more mischief had been done than would be the case if it were so. I wish it was possible to move him, but he could not stand a journey."

Short came out with an anxious face. "That poor fellow seems badly, doctor."

"I have been telling Mr. Crawford that I don't like the state he's in. All I can do for the present is to prescribe tonics, order nourishing diet, and leave him to your careful nursing. With such an injury one cannot tell what may be wrong. If he were a little better it might be advisable to take him down the country and get more advice — and the sea air might help to restore him. I am sorry I can suggest nothing more."

"We can answer, doctor, for careful nursing, and anything else you can recommend we shall do our best to provide."

There was little satisfaction in this. Youth and health might prevail against the savage spear wound, which seemed to have tapped the springs of life. There was no poison in the black's weapon, which was so far good. Indeed, that diabolical practice obtains only where mixed races show; as at Torres Straits, where hybrid tribes of Papuans use a fearful animal poison. The hot weather was coming on, and that circumstance added to poor Shewell's discomfort, and increased the difficulty of recovery. The doctor shortly left. He could do no more than give his best advice and directions for treating the patient, and the most we could do

was to get the hut made more commodious, cool, and airy, and secure the assistance of some women, who came with the teams. They most willingly did all they could to make him comfortable. Durham sent up, among other things, some medical stores, small luxuries, and a box of books, which came in well. Kennedy, his chum, almost never left him, and every soul on the place did something for him daily. We felt that he was in a bad way, and grudged leaving, for in these few months his sterling qualities and kindly nature had deepened our regard for him, but we knew that he would be well cared for, and we could not postpone our appointment.

The Belgian, Henry, had quite got over his hurt, and was at work as cheerful as ever. As for old Gorbals, he had never been molested. The enemy had never appeared near him. He had a weird uncanny look about him which no doubt made an impression on the savage mind. His eccentricity would at times display a hardihood verging on ferocity; and as he was thoroughly reckless of danger, they no doubt thought him worth leaving alone. "The blacks! what can the blacks do? They can only kill me," he would say, with a sneer. To a man who had lived the life of the chain-gangs and the stockades for a score of years, a little knocking on the head did not seem to matter.

As Edwards had taken all Durham's interests over, we had nothing to detain us further, and so we were off, after being three days at home, with our trusty and indispensable attendants, Binnebbera and Toby.

Harvey and Cameron were men of their word. The nine hundred heifers were all mustered. They were very much quietened, and had a good sprinkling of young calves at foot; so we gave the vendors a cheque with very considerable satisfaction, and this we could well do, as Durham, when he found that his tenders were fairly under way for ratification paid £1200 into our bank account, like a trump.

We were then entertained by our hosts with joyous hospitality, for there are plenty of warm hearts in bushland, and rumours had reached them of the troubles we had gone through, so we had to tell them all about our perils and adventures. They were much concerned about Shewell, and asked us to send him along to visit them as soon as he could ride. They had a garden, and their grapes and oranges would do him good. Moreover, like good fellows as they were, they saw us sixty miles on our way, and sent a stockman and black boy another couple of days with us, so that we were into the desert tract before we had to depend on our own hired men, and then we expected fresh help. Kennedy with Hardy's help was to get a yard put up of round stuff, to receive the cattle, and when this was done one or both were to come to meet us. So we had not got far into the country of jungle and sandstone when Hardy appeared attended by Bandicoot, whom he had promoted to serve on horseback. "Mr. Shewell," he told us "was very low. Mr. Kennedy hardly

ever left him. He was losing strength daily," Hardy thought, "but did not suffer pain." It was natural that Kennedy should wish to stay with his friend. How gladly we would have helped him ourselves, but nothing more could be done that we knew of.

Hardy had got a line marked on ahead for seventy miles, which would take us to all the good water-holes on the route, but there was one stage of twenty miles without water that we would have to get the cattle over the best way we could. This was a ticklish matter. If the waterless part of the track was over open plains, we could travel the cattle all night in the cool hours, and make the stage without trouble or loss, — but in this region, a labyrinth of scrub and rock — the heifers would need to be watched closely all night, girdled round with fires; and twenty miles without water on a hot summer day was a long stage to drive young cows and weak calves. However, there was no help for it, and Hardy's observation of the ground enabled him to suggest the best way to get over the difficulty. At the last water before the dry stage, we rested till we had just time to get on five miles before dark. Then we camped the herd at a spot that had been chosen before hand, and watched them strictly till dawn. The first few miles in the morning they travelled well, but when the sun rose, the heat, dust, and want of water began to tell on the suffering kine, and it was weary work keeping them in hand and making them travel. The vigorous young animals, without calves, would string away ahead in a long line in search of water, and a couple of horsemen had to be at their head to keep them in check, while at the tail end, a ruck of convalescent mothers and tottering infants needed to be kept on the move by unremitting persuasion. Horses and stockwhips were thrown away upon them. You might flog them or ride over them, and they would simply lie down in a heart-broken way. Having no stomach for such heartless cruelty, we let our horses go, and followed on foot, driving the poor things with green branches. Our horses, like sensible animals, as stockhorses nearly always are, with their bits out of their mouths, and the reins fastened back on the croup of the saddle, walked along picking the grass wherever it was fresh. Other two horsemen, meantime, had to keep the flanks as there were plenty of cunning, sluggish beasts, that if not watched, would creep away from the column, and hide among the bushes.

We were getting weary of this fagging work, and were nearly as tired as the poor cattle, while still two miles by Hardy's reckoning from our long-wished for oasis of rest, the rocky water-hole on the marked line; when the heifers ahead, for long silent, broke into an abrupt bellow, which vibrated with a murmuring "croon" along the whole line, and seemed to electrify even the tottering stupefied cows and calves in the rear.

"That is the water bellow," said Short. "I know it. We had better get on

our horses.”

The “rowting” ahead increased, and by the time we were mounted the whole column was in a trot, raising enormous volumes of dust. Even the youngest calf, and the mother but lately recovered from the pangs of maternity, cocked their heads and tried to waddle after, while low, bellow, and bleat, question, answer, and the voice of joy, all telling of water! water! rang in varied notes along the column, now a mile long. We galloped on in no little anxiety, for we knew the danger of a large mass of excited animals rushing into a water-hole, but we soon found we were too late. The men ahead had tried to steady the rush, but it was useless after the leading animals scented the element they panted for, and as we got up, the long snake-like torrent of horns and hoofs was, in a continuous stream rushing over a bank twelve feet high into a broad pool that lay under a low, rocky hill. The acre of water was in a foam as the horned multitude poured in and swam round and round.

I feared greatly that we should have a disaster, but by the time the cows and calves got up, the leading cattle had drawn steadily out, and with all the splutter and alarm, there was not a beast drowned or hurt. Both before and since, I have seen serious accidents happen from less cause. It was a strange sight to see how the herd became galvanised into activity when the “water bellow” arose — the half dead animals, roused by the sympathy of hope to activity, and the unmistakable intelligence conveyed by these oral sounds through the bucolic multitude, suggested a strong impression that what we call “instinct” has a strong relation in kind to, if more limited in degree than, the property which among mankind is called reason.

Two days after, the long stream of cattle with horsemen guiding them, poured down on the Takilbaran flat, where the herding yard was now put up. Clouds of dust rose, and the bellowing, and volleying report of stockwhips re-echoed among the ages-old rocks and gum-trees, while a pale face, propped among pillows at the hut-door, watched with hectic enjoyment and interest the fruition of our enterprise. We hurried to poor Shewell. He put out his thin worn hands, and tried to tell us how pleased he was to see the cattle. “You're — all — right — now — you — know.”

Our saddest auguries were soon realised. The seal was on his forehead, and in two days more the silver cord was broken. With the sweet evening breeze of the forest on his brow, he babbled of green fields; he thought he saw again the woods and streams of his home and the grey cathedral towers of Worcester, and he spoke as to his loved sister of the far Malvern hills. When the sun sank, these home visions flickered and vanished, but his eye brightened for a second, while a kindly gleam lightened his features — then his head drooped and he had gone to the Hereafter!

When we had laid him in his quiet rest under the shadow of Takilbaran,

there was not a dry eye in the little group, for his simple honour, his kindness and truth, had bound him to our hearts.

Many years have passed since then. The seedlings of the weeping myall, planted on the grave, now cover the rude fence by their pendulous branches — but little children often spend an hour on the spot, and they all know about their father's friend, who lies below, who died far from his home; and, indeed, we often speak of him yet, for he is not easily forgotten.

Kennedy was greatly cut up by the death of his companion, and old Gorbals showed most unexpected sympathy. He had promised Shewell a collie pup from his slut Midge, and he brought the little bright-eyed black-and-white thing to Kennedy. "He was your freen, like, and its richt ye should have the whalp. He was a wise-like lad, a hantle better than a when o' them — and if ye tak' care o' the dowg, it will do ye credit." Kennedy in acknowledgement, gave him a meerschaum of Shewell's, with which the old character was much pleased.

From this time, our doings at Strathclyde were without sensational interest. Steady, contented work, enlivened by the free, invigorating forest life, and cheered by occasional meetings with kindred souls among our scattered neighbours, made the seasons roll on, not without pleasure, and bringing much solid advantage.

The want of hands was strictly and truly the origin and cause of our good fortune. We could not get men, and could not leave our station for a day. But we got on somehow, as people always do get on when they are driven to depend on their own brains and muscles, and cannot help themselves otherwise. We managed chiefly by the aid of black-boys, and with such work as we could get out of an occasional loafer, or a delirium-stricken drunkard. If we had done what we wanted to do, and what we were generally advised to do — but which, fortunately, we could not do — we would have gone down to Sydney to hire men, order supplies, and borrow money to buy more stock. All this kind of accommodation would have been freely offered, almost thrust upon us, by the commercial touts and kite-fliers; but our acceptance of such advances would certainly have ended in our being ruined in three years. We knew this well now; we did not know it then. But, while grumbling away, eating our own beef cooked by ourselves, and getting our other supplies by a cart-load at a time from the distant township, we were really, though we did not know it and were working sorely against the grain, rapidly gathering real wealth.

Briefly, when I was able to leave the station for the first time in the year 1862, we were comparatively rich men; no thanks to our foresight or calculation; thanks, certainly, to our deprivation of those financial advantages that seem so highly prized at the present day.

It was our great luck that we escaped the octopus of squatting finance,

that crushed about two-thirds of our contemporaries, in the very way that we would have been crushed had we got within its tentacles. Advances were freely made to buy stock by the financial authorities of the day, and I have known the advance called up before the cattle or sheep so bought have been a year on the ground.

Kennedy remained with us for a year, and always after made our station his home in his intervals of leisure. He prospered in time by working at droving, exploring, and managing for others. He put his savings into town allotments, and guided his interests with such discretion, that when the Alienation Act of 1868 passed, he secured a nice Downs Freehold of ten thousand acres, which he named after one of the strongholds of the Kennedys — Bargauy. He is now a man of substance. His Hereford bulls are well known all over the North-Western Districts, and he is Chairman of the Yandiraway Tin Mining Company. Moreover, he has another tie to our district. The Crawfords and Kennedys had been at deadly feud for many centuries, and their onslaughts and burnings had kept the banks and braes of Doon in turmoil since the days of the Bruce. Among other of their overt acts of *stoullrief*, *hame-sucken*, and *spulzie*, as detailed in “Pitcairn's Criminal Trials,” were the roasting on a gridiron of the Abbot of Crossraguel, and the sacking of the fortalice of Kerse by the Kennedys, while the Crawfords bragged that they had, by their strong right hands, got full amends, and more, for these neighbourly acts of attention. The appropriate end to this feud came in a manner proper to this Nineteenth Century, when I married Dick's sister some years after.

I cannot deny that occasionally a gleam passes over the features of this young woman, indicating that the genius of “deadly feud” is not yet extinct; but I am glad to say, that these flashes of spirit are directed chiefly against shams and hypocrisies, and not against her lawful lord. I don't think that, even when provoked, she would roast an Abbot, like her ancestor, but she roasted a single-collared Anglican the other day who came round begging for money to build a cathedral, instead of teaching the “larrikins” of his parish to be decent and honest — as she told him.

## Chapter XXIV. Of Jack's Struggles, and Mary's Marriage.

During all these years of bush-life, our correspondence with our friends in Sydney had never slackened. Willy had been able to provide a little for their support, Rawson and he having thriven in the arrangement they had entered into with Mr. Gully Trotter. That speculator had accumulated an enormous mass of station property in the North, mainly through their instrumentality. Strange to say, though we heard constantly of them, we did not meet for a long time. Though we were settled at no great distance from each other, still, from using a different port and different road, our avocations never brought us together, but their doings were noised abroad — far and wide, being on a much greater scale than ours. Occasionally, we heard surmises expressed as to Trotter's proceedings that caused us to wonder, but then the gossip of stations was very unreliable. One thing, however, came to our knowledge, that we often remarked upon afterwards, namely — neither Rawson's nor Willy's names appeared in any of the Government returns published, as owners of runs or stock.

Rawson and Mary would have been married some years ago, but she could not leave her invalid mother and crippled brother. Mrs. Smith had remained in a feeble state of health, subject to occasional nervous attacks. Though full of affection and ever-cheerful interest for those spared to her, yet her heart was much with those of her loved ones who had passed away. Jack had been restored to as much strength as he could attain with the serious spinal injury he had received — still uncured, and apparently incurable. A part of his time — two or three days every now and then — was spent in bed, and it was only by slow degrees that he managed to creep about. Unable, from the wreck of his frame, to undertake any work, he had, perforce, to fall back on his thoughts for occupation. His mind at length acquired a habit of study and reflection, and he had taken greatly to reading, and, latterly, to writing. I never could understand how he lived at all. The want of exercise and active occupation must have sapped his life quickly and surely, if he had not become wholly engrossed in mental labour. But the effort and power of will that could so turn his energies into this new channel, astonished me, and I could not sufficiently express my admiration for the courageous, high-minded spirit with which he rose to his fate. It was plain, as he grew

older, that he had inherited his father's character and temperament, and on these were grafted faculties, if as yet untried, of no mean order, and a mental growth, the product of his individual reflections and experiences.

When he took to reading in the early months of his invalid state, he first, naturally enough, ran over a course of novels, magazines, and travels. These led him to dip into history, politics, and economic and social studies; then, finding his weak points, he harked back to his school books, and took a turn at languages and elementary science, and, by degrees, he varied his course of study by jotting down, as impulse suggested, his various experiences and observations. At length, he licked some of these into shape, after much hesitation, and read the result, in a series of articles, to his mother and Mary. Of course, they were delighted with the sense, wisdom, and wit of Jack's marvellous compositions, but *he*, very prudently and rightly, distrusted their partial judgement, and delayed offering his writings to the Press till he had submitted them to reliable criticism.

One day, Debrett Hawkins, being down the country on leave of absence, happened to call. How was it that Hawkins, beginning his career as clerk of petty sessions in a bush district, and developing into Police Magistrate and Commissioner, knew about everybody and more or less about everything? He was naturally and intuitively a man of the world, moving easily among men of all sorts, and with tact and *savour-faire* never at fault; moreover, possessing a keen power of observation and logical ability that did not appear on the surface during his somewhat dandified appearances in Sydney.

Jack considered a moment, and then taking a bundle of manuscript out of a drawer, tossed it to their visitor while he was carrying on a lively skirmish of small-talk with Mary. Hawkins barely glanced at it, but he put it in his pocket, and brought it back in a week. He drew his chair to the table beside Jack, screwed his eye-glass tight into his eye, and, going over page after page, commented tersely on the matter, and pointed out defects and imperfections.

“Condense, Jack, condense. Have your subject clear in your head before you put pen to paper, and then use as few words as possible. Employ figures of speech sparingly. Metaphor, if broken, reads like a string of Irish bulls. But, when you adopt illustration, let it throw a vivid streak of light on the one point to be brought out. Keep your pen in order — make it stick close to the text. Some of your *à propos* incidental allusions are almost worthy of ‘Mrs. Brown's ‘Olliday Outings.’ Cut them out. Go at it again, and, if you prune away these excrescences, and give your views pith and point, the stuff is good, and you will undoubtedly have readers — for one reason alone, if for no other — unquestionably you understand what you are writing about. I don't mean to say that you will make a fortune as a writer, but, for my part, I

would rather write a dozen good articles of the character you aim at, than write the best sensational novel.”

So Jack worked away patiently, and at last sent some papers to the *Morning Dawn*. The good old proprietor, in the course of a month, wrote him a letter with his own hand that put the little household in a flutter of delight; and for years Jack sent in every now and then his parcel of “copy,” and received in due course his cheque for £10 or £20. This was a source of great happiness to his mother and sister, as well as to himself, and I verily believe saved him from dying of mental inanition and weariness; but, if any of my readers think that it was easily earned money, let them try their hands on the Sydney editors and publishers, and then they will be able to judge for themselves.

Our last letter from Sydney told that certain arrangements with Trotter having been completed, Willy and Rawson were now more able to command leisure and means of their own, and that it had been decided that the marriage was to take place immediately, as Rawson would be able to spend a good deal of his time for the future in Sydney; and the letter ended with a line from Mary, asking us — either one, or both, if possible — to the ceremony.

How often had we talked over the little family in Surrey Hills, till their surroundings stood out before our minds' eyes and seemed familiar to us. We could fancy their little meagre lodging; the dear old lady — not aged, but prematurely worn — full of sad, sweet thoughts of the past, reflected around her like the fading rays of a summer sunset; still busy with her loved old household thrift; we could see Mary, with two or three little music pupils round her, teaching them by the magic of her loving nature and ever fresh sympathy, better music even than that of Meyerbeer, or Bellini — the music of the heart; and then Jack in his corner, with his books and papers, installed in studious occupation of that marvellous lever-chair and writing-table that had come to him anonymously from New York (Short, and I, and Morse's Express knew how). At times I felt as if I cared more for the Smiths than for those nearer akin to me, but this was mainly a feeling that had naturally arisen from the afflictions and crosses that they had endured, for I already began to experience a strong under-tow, none the less real that there was no immediate call or occasion for it, that made me crave for another look at my blood relations and the misty moorlands where they dwelt. While the invitation to the marriage was yet unanswered, and before, indeed, we had spoken of it at all, Short stepped into my room one night after I had got into my first snooze, and, sitting down on the edge of the bed, gave me the result of his midnight meditations.

“Now, Reggy, old man, I've settled it all. You go down to the marriage, and take your two years' holiday. Feast your eyes again on Drumdhu, and Auchangee, and Knock-shinnoch (Heaven help me with these gutturals!

‘Rax me the stoup of water,’ as Jeems Lapraik used to say, ‘or I’ll choke’); and when you’ve shot the black-cock on Darn-connar, and beat the heathery braes on the skirts of Cairn-table, and fished Loch Ken, and seen the fair damsels in Auld Reekie, then come back your ways to the old station, and I’ll have my spell home among the tors and combes of Devon, and take my shy at the ox-fences of Leicestershire. Now, then, a man can’t say fairer, can he?”

Thus spake Short, and, sitting up erect on my couch, I listened, and slapped him on the back and called him a trump. We had talked so much to each other about our native hills and dales, that the Celtic nomenclature of Strath-clyde was as familiar to him as his beef and damper, though he made an awful hash of the pronunciation.

So, in due time I reached Sydney in the famous pioneer boat commanded by jolly Captain Knight. I had not seen the city since I entered the Heads eleven years before, and there was a new lighthouse put up in memory of the terrible tragedy of the *Dunbar*, and the pretty island of Pinchgut was transformed into a gingerbread fortification, and Kirribilli had become a two-penny fort, and the tank-stream was covered over, and the streets were filled with crowds of people, and cabs, and omnibusses — very unlike what I remembered; for, when I landed, you might see a solitary bullock-team standing near the Royal, and perhaps you might meet three horsemen and half-a-dozen foot passengers in George-Street.

I was soon at Surrey Hills. Strange it was that I passed them all seated in their verandah, and they never guessed who the bronzed and bearded Northerner was who stalked along peering into every cottage he passed, and yet we all knew each other, and every tone and look seemed so familiar as soon as we began to talk.

The dear old lady received me as a son, and Mary as a brother. The sad years had frosted Mrs. Smith’s widowed head, and the girl of eighteen, as I had seen her last, was now a woman of twenty-six, but she was still the bright gentle Mary of old, though with a shade of thought and gravity on her brow. Naturally our first talk was saddened by the inevitable associations that crowded on us, the remembrance of their cherished ones passed away, and the happy days of the old homestead. But this gentle tribute being paid to affection, there was no morbid brooding over the irrevocable. It seemed to me that, though by no means demonstrative in their emotions and beliefs, still they cherished some well-founded conviction on a subject that I am sure was seldom absent from their thoughts. As I looked at the ladies’ faces and reflected, the impression came into my mind, that my good old friend the Major, and our jolly, hearty, Fred, would be much better pleased if we were enjoying ourselves cheerfully, than by our cultivating a habit of sustained melancholy, or paying lachrymose tribute to their memory.

If the dwellers in the realm beyond are ever present with us, and conscious of our acts, it can hardly please them to hear themselves spoken of as the victims of a fearful doom. Some good people never allude to the departed but with bated breath and awe. It is surely not a reasonable or right tone to adopt in reference to the inevitable and necessary law of beneficent nature, and it can only be accounted for by their belief in those horrible nightmare dogmas concocted by the early monks, which still linger in our books of devotion as fossils of savage thought.

Well, though I believe the remembrance of the Major and Fred never left us, we very soon recovered the cheerful tone of the old days; and I had not landed twenty-four hours before I made the household understand that I had not come to town for nothing, after being eleven years in the bush. I got lodgings near them, and set up a trap and two greys, which I fairly drove off their legs taking Jack and Mary, and sometimes Mrs. Smith, everywhere; and the railway was a novelty then, so we explored every bit of the line, and I carried on at such a rate, that Mary declared I was mad. And I sent in my subscription to the Bachelors' Ball Committee, and enticed Mrs. Smith and Mary to take a peep at that high festival; and, as soon as we went in, the two most distinguished-looking men in the room came over to us, and who should they be but Debrett Hawkins, now Commissioner of Crown Lands, and little Jack Johnstone, who once lived a year at Windabyne, grown a tremendous swell. And then there was a rush of girls across the ball-room, and they all thought that Mrs. Smith and Mary should know them. What a difference eight years does make in girls! I would never have recognised the little monkeys that I used to play with in these stately damsels. Indeed, Mary did not know them for a second, and then she lifted up the eyes of amazement. "Why, mamma, if it is not Emmy, and Flo, and Dolly Campbell!" For the Misses Campbell, when they were small, used to spend their holidays at Girrah, and were constantly at Windabyne.

But before we had half finished our spree, Rawson and Willy arrived, and then wedding preparations commenced, and the marriage was celebrated with all becoming festivity, in a modest way. There was only one disappointment. Mr. Gully Trotter had been expected, but he did not turn up — no doubt pre-occupied with some of his numerous engagements; and so the young folks being got rid of, and away to the Kurrajong, or wherever their stars led them, and peace and quietness being restored, I began to consider the propriety of taking my passage for my trip home.

I was sitting in the Union Club, turning over my letters and papers — ways and means being under consideration — and I opened my bank book. "The Devil!" "Ghindi!" "Bismillah!" "Holy mother of Moses!" I don't know which of these polyglot ejaculations I used, but a prim-

looking official standing before the fire gave a jump, and let his jaw drop. What a sight of cheque-butts! A good many hundreds knocked down already. I had laid out more money in that month in Sydney — that is, on my private expenses — than I had spent in the eleven years before; but, what a mercy to think that no friendly mortgagee or agent had a word to say in the matter — not even to the tune of a bank overdraft for £5 — and that Short could, from tallow and hides alone, even if he were driven to boil, provide the double of what I had been spending, even if I carried on the game for a whole year. Why, we had branded 1,500 calves that spring, and the herd numbered about 7,000; and this was mainly from the start we made in 1855, with 900 heifers. We had since bought some other small lots, but they were all paid for in cash, and there was not a penny of debt on stock or station; and, as I totted up my score, and calculated future outlay to be provided for — it was the day after the wedding — Hawkins came and sat down at the table opposite to me, with his hat on, and his eye-glass glaring intently on me.

“Queer start, that, Crawford.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, Gully Trotter's off by the mail steamer, and his affairs are in a devil of a mess. The Waratah Bank and the Occidental are, they say, fighting like cat and dog over his securities. By-the-bye, I hope Rawson and Smith are clear of him?”

I was alarmed, and started at once to make enquiry. There was no mistake about it. All that Trotter had was being attached by creditors, and the whole business looked fishy. Finance seemed to have exhausted its convolutions. Everything appeared to have been pawned twice over. “Surely,” I thought, “Rawson and Willy must have secured something apart.” I found Willy on the point of returning by the Rockhampton steamer. He had heard that an agent had gone up from the Waratah by Brisbane, and he hoped to be on the spot first, and to hold possession. “He had a letter from Trotter detailing the conditions of the partnership, and he would insist on the same.”

“Well, but does that letter preclude Trotter from making over the whole property?”

“Certainly; he bound himself not to mortgage our share.”

“But, Willy, is that condition specifically expressed? Again, why do all the blocks appear in his name?”

“He insisted that it was better they should remain so, and he said, “You will not regret leaving it in my hands. I'll trust you, and you'll trust me.”

“Well, let's see the Queensland list of runs.”

We speedily got it, and there were all the Ullswater and Cannobie blocks on the Western Darr and Buchanan, only three weeks before transferred to the Waratah Bank. On examining the Register of Stock Mortgages in the Queensland *Gazette*, there appeared, “all the live stock,

the property of W. Gully Trotter, in the Mitchell and Gregory Districts,” assigned to the Occidental. The compact of mutual trust, so confidently put forth by their principal, did not seem to have worked well for Rawson and Willy. I have seen the like since, When a florid and generous capitalist puts a transaction with his working partner or manager on the footing of “trust me and I’ll trust you,” ten to one, that when the day of reckoning comes, the operative squatter will find that all his earnings and prospects are torn from him, and in the grip of a power as hard-biting and tenacious as a “Tasmanian Devil.”\*

I may as well tell now what came of all this, though it was long after I left before the business was settled — cleared up it never was. Willy got to the station in time, and he and Rawson tried to negotiate with the creditors, but the only consideration they received was while they were being made use of to secure the various properties. When I sailed by the mail steamer, they were in hopes of making good terms, but after all the runs and stock had been secured, they found themselves cast adrift with a few hundred pounds each.

Trotter was living in a snug country seat in Essex, almost immediately afterwards, and some years later he appeared again on the scene of his old operations, as a capitalist of the first water, with a million of money to invest in stock and country.

During my stay at Surrey Hills, we used often to talk of the old station. Jack said that Windabyne was now well known in Melbourne, and had been sold at a high price, but he did not know who had bought from Sharp. There were new names all down the Yarombil and Wolgan, some being southern men, and others who had in our time been in quite a different way of living. Mr. Hawthorne was selling; he was determined to clear out before Free Selection reached him. All the country was being fenced now, and some who had ridiculed our fences claimed to have been the first to adopt the method.

For a long time after, I heard nothing of the old place, and it was owing to a circumstance that occurred to me during my trip home that I came to visit the spot again, not long ago.

But in a month from the time that I saw Willy off to Rockhampton, I was on board the *Cyphrenes*, straining my eyes in the night watch for a first look of the “Great Bear,” as the mail boat forged her way north over the long swell of the Indian Ocean.

\* A ferocious Marsupial cat, peculiar to Tasmania.

## Chapter XXV. Of a Trip Home, and What Came of It.

On a spring morning some six months thereafter, that is in the month of May, 1863, I found myself again at one of the haunts of my youth, the little town of Dalbracken, on the shores of Loch Dhaine, an upland lake on the edge of a stretch of black moor-land country.

The landlord of the Cross Keys Inn,\* Deacon M'Clure, after having been certified of my identity, gave me a warm welcome.

“Ye'll be for the Loch?”

To be sure I was for the Loch.

“Here, Jock, get the boat,” and his son Jock appeared, a tall, fair-haired lad of nineteen, with peculiar light grey eyes.

“You'll be for your denner?”

“Aye, aye, Deacon; to be sure I'm for my denner. We'll say at five. That will give me daylight to get back.”

“Daylight, say ye, lad? We have daylight here till sieven or acht at night. Whar on God's yirth have ye been to, that your day's ower at five in the afternoon?”

We had a great day on the Loch. Jock, a native Walton, produced from the recesses of an old book, red hackles and midges, the very counterparts of the winged mites darting about on the water, and they proved the most killing of tackle, for our baskets were heavy with yellow-finned and and scarlet-spotted trout long before the day was over, My companion had plenty to say; he told me all the news of the country, but his forte in conversation was the “interrogative.” Any allusion to the big world beyond Strathclyde immediately subjected me to a deliberate course of cross-examination; still, there was nothing of the vulgarly offensive in his queries; they had no reference to my individual concerns whatever. The youth had simply that craving for action and adventure, and that keen appetite for the fruit of the tree of knowledge, so common in these moorlands, and he bolted such junks of information as he managed to extract, very like my dog Bran — to be digested at his leisure. And I found, long after, that what he thus learned was not thrown away. But among all the topics that turned up, he was most interested in what I told him of the strange Southern land where I had sojourned, and when I spoke of the iron-bark forests, thunder-riven peaks, and rolling downs of Queensland, of the grassy table-land of Monaro with its snow-fed streams, and of the grey wastes of Salsolacea, mirage-haunted and

sun-scorched, his interest and enthusiasm were greatly stirred; his eyes fairly glittered; he slapped his hands together, and he shouted "that's the country for me."

And so that day's fishing left a mark in my memory.

In due time, I made my way back to these parts, accompanied by a young lady who has taken charge of me ever since, and with many busy years the tide of our lives moved on, with its alternate ebb and flow, bringing new actors on the stage, and leaving gaps where used to be familiar faces.

At the point where I now pick up my chronicle — for I can hardly call it either fiction or parable — dear Mrs. Smith had faded away, leaving but a loved memory behind her. Mary was a widow with a boy, whose features were his father's over again. Rawson, in his youth an athletic, hardy, muscular fellow, had given way all at once. One would have thought that he had strength enough to stand anything, but protracted exposure during an overland trip had touched his lungs, and he wasted away in a couple of years.

Willy was somewhere among the back blocks; he did not come to town. He was down on his luck, had made an indifferent marriage, and was but poorly off; so his sister had to depend entirely on her self for support, Rawson having left almost nothing. A change that took place in the tenancy of their lodgings made it suitable for her to take the house herself, some gentlemen living there having expressed a wish to stay on, "if it suited Mrs. Rawson to take charge." So, in the most natural and inevitable way, Mary, being under the necessity of making her living, had taken to keeping a boarding-house.

Jack remained with her, still a confirmed invalid, his time occupied with his writing, occasional actuary work that he had got into, and teaching. He had begun with his little nephew, and from that got on to take a few private pupils.

I need hardly say that I, with my better half, never lost a chance of seeing them, and of making much of their friendship. To witness such honourable, high-minded independence on the very margin of poverty, did us good, and served to check any tendency to snobbishness that each true Briton naturally develops when he gets into possession of a few thousand pounds.

But, indeed, the Pleuro\* and other dispensations, more especially a re-measurement of the run that handed over one-third of our country to a high official in a neighbouring colony, who had never seen it; and other Providential visitations — though they did not bring us to ruin — still tended to keep down in me and the wife the pride of life and the love of the world. She, dear creature, insists that she has no wish for wealth and social eminence; all she wants is peace and quiet; but she "does hate to see *some people* in carriages, and wearing such bonnets — it's odious."

Just so.

Well, only the other day, I went on business, bachelor fashion, to the great Southern city. By this time, my trip home might have become like a dream, but that the incontestible proof of its reality was ever before me in the shape of my married blessings, and the record of the same contained in my bank book; and as to the day on Loch Dhaine, it recurred to me but seldom, and then the association seemed more like an episode that I had heard or read of, imbedded in my inner memory, but a thing detached and apart from my own life; till one day, in coming out of the Bunyip Club, I saw, at the door of the great financial firm which we shall name Ginger and Co., a man whom I could not keep my eyes off. Some half-forgotten impression fascinated me. He was evidently of the squatter species, tall and straight, with light hair and yellow beard. Nothing so very uncommon, certainly — you can see that sort any day by the dozen in George-street or Flinder-street. Exactly; but still I could not help staring at him. Presently he crossed the street, and when near, I caught a look of a pair of light-grey eyes. The mystery burst upon me like a shell. It was Jock M'Clure! I walked up straight and addressed him; he turned and faced me — knew me at once; of course I was less changed than he, and he nearly wrung my hand off.

I got him into the Bunyip, and heard his story, and it was — a staggerer.

He told me that he had Windabyne Station.

It appeared that our talk in the boat about Australia had “stuck in his gizzard,” as he said, and led him to write to his uncle, his mother's brother, one David Brown, who had come here as an immigrant in the early days. Brown, in reply, remitted him £50 to pay his passage, but on arrival, Jock found that his relative had met with some reverse, had shifted his quarters, and made a new start. His letter to his nephew, received on landing, said that he would be welcome at his farm on the Wimmera, but that he had not now in his power the means of forwarding Jock's interests that he had a year ago, and therefore he strongly advised him to get employment on a station. This Jock had done, and had worked on from ration carrier, boundary rider, drover, overseer, and super, till he became a full blown squatter.

“Good work for twelve years, Jock,” I said, “How did you manage to buy Windabyne?”

“Ginger managed it.”

“How did you know Ginger?”

“Know Ginger!” he said. “What wuld ail me to ken Ginger? Do you tell me that you're not acquaint wi Ginger yuresel? Surely you must mind his father, auld Robin Gander, the Gowandale dominie?”

Jock had warmed into his native vernacular.

I fairly shouted with astonishment, “Do you mean to tell me that

Ginger, the great financier, is Robin Gander's son? Then why the change of name?"

"Oh, as to that, many a name gets a twist here. The colonials sometimes alter a syllable, whether you will or no."

This was true enough, and Ginger might merely have adopted what the common pronunciation suggested. The mist began to clear from my eyes.

It came across me that I had heard of the old dominie having a son in Australia, and I had thought it strange that I had never seen or heard of him. But, having the clue now, I recollected a young business man whom I had seen several times in Melbourne a dozen years ago, who seemed to recognise me, though I could not guess why. A flash of intuition brought before my mind the youth with the carpet-bag landing from the *Heracles* in the days of Canvasstown, and putting that and that together, other reminiscences occurred to me which completed the chain of proof. I wondered at my own stupidity.

There could be no doubt about it, and, in fact, the only time that I ever met Ginger personally, not very long before, he seemed to claim me as an old friend; why, I felt puzzled, but it was all plain now. So the son of old Robin had developed into Ginger, the sovereign of squatting finance, the terror of free selectors, the holder — under mortgage or fee — of territories larger than German principalities, within which no man might buy or sell, or, indeed, eat or drink, but by his leave.

The matter for wonder was, after all, not so great. Ginger's sire, whom I have designated by the name of Robin Gander, was still a prominent figure in my youthful recollection. He gave me a terrier pup, and made me my first fishing-rod. I can understand now that he may have wished to conciliate my father, who was one of the heritors of the parish, and a somewhat irascible magistrate, but then, of course, Robin's gifts made him appear to me the best of men.

The old man tried to earn a living, which, at the best, was about half a navvy's wages, by teaching some twenty ragged children in the clachan of Gowandale, eked out by a little farriery among the dairy farmers, a small practice in herbs and simples, and a petty road-side shop. The sign-board I have so vividly in my mind, that I will transcribe it. It was laboriously printed in black letters on a white deal board, and the legend ran as follows:

R. GANDER, LICENSED TO SELL TEA AND TOBACCO,  
DEALER IN YERBS AND OTHER PHEESIC FOR ALL TROUBLES  
OF MAN AND BEAST.

And so, under this inscription, one of the chief of our merchant princes first studied the science and practice of commerce.

"Mak siller, Peter — honestly if ye can — but mak siller," was Robin's farewell benediction; and so Peter did, literally, as his parent enjoined, and nobody accused him of hampering himself needlessly with the

condition appended. But, to say sooth, the dominie was never forgotten by his son. Every mail took him home the news of Peter's grandeur, which he read to his admiring neighbours of Gowandale, and every now and then a letter, enclosing a slip of bank paper went the same road. The dominie never felt want henceforth. The financial soul of Ginger has one soft spot. It is for the hearth of his parents.

So, it was through the aid of this well-known capitalist that Jock had got into Windabyne.

The name itself was golden. He was as right as the bank.

"Upon my word, Jock," I remarked, after hearing so much, "you have taken away my breath, but I am heartily glad to see you thriving so well. I know the station is good, for I lived on it many years ago."

"It's first-rate," he said, "and would do famously if the selectors could be kept off, but they are an infernal nuisance."

"Have you many of them?"

"Not yet, but we have to buy so much land, and to keep constantly on the watch."

"Who may *we* be?"

"Oh, that's a long tale, but you must do me the favour to come to Windabyne for a week, and I'll tell you all about it."

That plan suited me very well, as I intended to go back overland, and moreover, I felt a saddened craving to look upon the old spot again; so the upshot was that I accompanied Jock on his return homewards.

There are constant changes passing over the face of the world, and the greatest of these are often so gradual as to be unnoticed. Our life goes on from day to day, leaving to our eye hardly a ripple on the surface, and yet thus come and go youth, manhood, and old age; and nature keeps on her silent course, her mightiest forces working like a dream, and so rocks and forests, seas and rivers take form, last for ages and pass away like a great panorama. For we know that the laboratory of the Universe never stands still, though the revolutions so carried out take cycles of uncounted years to complete. But there are subordinate features of these great mutations at times more readily recognized during their progress, and one of these had been at work on the country we travelled over. When we got into the scenes formerly well known to me. I hardly knew them again, for the stocking of the Australian bush with sheep and cattle will transfigure a country-side in the knowledge of a generation. Tracts that I remembered as beautiful park-like open forest had now become scrubby bush, and much of this was being ring-barked and fenced in. Many of the prairie-like open plains that I had galloped over were now encroached upon by the extension of the myall and other acacia scrubs, — all from the same cause, the cessation of the annual bush fires. The grass being cropped close, there was nothing for the fire to seize on, and consequently most of the seedlings and suckers that in primitive times would have burned,

now became trees and shrubs. Moreover, much of the country had been devastated by the great marsupial plague, the increase of the kangaroos.

Twenty years ago, the blacks and dingos had but lately disappeared, and these gigantic rodents were still kept within limits. Now, with the removal of their natural enemies, and their increase unchecked for so long, the balance of nature is disturbed, and, in many districts, marsupials in flocks are destroying the grasses.

The last stage that these pastoral tracts had reached was the most melancholy and depressing of all. They were so heavily stocked with sheep that a blade of grass was hardly to be seen, and groups of Chinamen were cutting down the shrubs of myall and oak to feed the starving flocks.

Along with these symptoms, were to be seen the evidences of the agrarian policy generally adopted in all the colonies since I had last been in the southern districts. The year 1851 found the Australian continent untouched by European colonisation, with the exception of a fringe of settlement on the South-Eastern corner. Much land, few men, and a limited production, formed the state of things before the gold discovery. Living was easily enough got by the few people then here, but wealth was not to be readily extracted from the weird, half-grassed forests and thirsty plains, that stretched away as far as the white man had been North and West; and indeed, then, any man who had the hardihood to take sheep or cattle out to these half-desert regions, so far from being hooted at as a monopolist, and condemned as a plunderer of the people, actually at times got some credit as a pioneer adventurer — such was the simplicity of a portion of the public before the popular mind was illuminated by Free Selection. But, with the gold, and a large tide of population, there came new men and new ideas. The towns and the diggings became full of new-comers, and their minds in time awakened to the fact that the persons from whom they bought their beef and mutton had been turning the country to use for many years before they, “the people,” as they called themselves, had ever heard of Australia; and moreover, that these same graziers or squatters were even yet, occupying large tracts of land. One would think that the intelligent politicians of the day might have admitted that this circumstance was on the whole a matter for congratulation; that a wilderness which, not long ago, very few people would even look at, had been made productive by some of their fellow countrymen, but so far from admitting that any public advantage arose from such enterprises, our law makers saw only in the fact ground for exasperation and a sense of injury. The democratic creed of a generation before, would probably have conceded without question, that if two men ride on a horse, one of the two must ride in front, but the great doctrines of M. Proudhon, that “property is theft,” and that “individual enterprise is an outrage on the welfare of the people,” had of

late been added as corollaries to the “Rights of Man,” and the dogmas of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity;” and it was now generally held by advanced thinkers of the sansculotte school, that rather than the first rider should have any preference, justice and humanity demanded that the horse should be knocked on the head, so that all travellers should limp on foot, and no man should dare to go a-head of his neighbours. Therefore, to the reforming politicians of those times, it appeared a self-evident proposition that the squatting occupation of the country was an injury to the recently-imported inhabitants, and that the only possible way to put things right, was to knock squatting on the head.

This feeling of exasperation was real, though it was quite illogical and unjustifiable.

I knew a squatting family, who, at their own risk and cost, opened up a splendid district. In course of time a population gathered, and a township was formed within ten miles of their station. For years they kept open house, and welcomed towns-people and bush-people alike when travelling, but the township had hardly solidified and got beyond the “camp” stage, when a strong feeling arose that this pioneer family had no business to be there at all, and that their existence and their industry were evils to be abated by all possible means. There was one very respectable, honest, business man, who made himself very prominent in the squabbles that ensued; and he even succeeded in forcing these people to buy at auction the very land that their house, woolshed, and paddocks stood on, at £10 per acre; and their only crime was that they had ventured to live in and utilise this country before he ever heard of it. I could never fathom this man's mind, or follow his train of thought. He really acted from some perverted sense of public duty. There was no ground for his action on the score of the land being monopolised, for there was plenty to be bought in the open market at the upset price, £1 per acre. “Nevertheless,” as it was said of old, “all this availed *him* nothing, as long as Mordecai the Jew sat at the King's gate.” He was, in fact, suffering from an agrarian craze that infected the people like an epidemic; and to this spirit we owe the Act of 1861 in New South Wales. It was the destructive element in that law that gave it point, flavour and political significance. No doubt, there was a want of large-mindedness in the party that opposed the measure, and the question was argued almost entirely between those who wanted everything, and those who would give up nothing, between rabid spoliation and stolid, soul-less greed; and this is acknowledged now, when it is too late. A well-known advocate of popular rights has admitted the errors of the times, and has said “that the measure was passed without knowledge or consideration, and in a storm of passion.” But if the brains and conscience of the country had really been consulted, it is certain that some method would have been adopted equally favourable to the permanent settlement of the country, and to the

advancement of grazing — then, as now, the staple, and almost the only rural industry.

I often think of my good old friend, Major Smith, when the subject turns up. He had been familiar with the various forms of tenure and village settlement in use in India, and these experiences led him to reflect on the adjustment of the land question here — long foreseen by him to be looming in the distance. I remember that, during one of our many long rides over the run, he told me that he had once been a member of a Commission appointed to settle the tenure of a piece of territory — a “jagheer,” I think he called it, in which the rights of several villages, a Mohammedan prince, and other claimants were concerned, and in which, moreover, much land had lapsed into the condition of jungle affording cover for tigers, and other noxious animals, owing to the unsatisfactory terms of the tenancy. The Commission, taking evidence on the spot, and examining the locality, arrived at a decision that settled all questions in dispute, gave the villagers more scope and greater security, doubled the income of the Prince, and recovered country from waste that soon was covered with several new villages, and indigo factories; and my old friend pointed out that this satisfactory solution was attained not by shifting arrangements violently out of old grooves, but by finding what the real rights and interests of the different parties were, by doing the best for all they could, by commuting conflicting claims, and by placing all under such an accurate survey and clear regulations as guarded against future collisions. Applying these experiences to the changes that might be expected to follow the influx of population here, he used always to remark that any legislation to be successful and beneficial must be framed in agreement with the capabilities of the country and the habits of the people. No honest settlement could result except from a law based on these fundamental facts, and the very essence of intelligent administration in such questions was to make honest enterprise more profitable than trickery, jobbery, or mere speculation.

Apropos of these reflections, he pointed out that the ordinary argument of the Colonial Press that, after a certain term, “grazing must give way to agriculture,” was absolute nonsense. The meaning of the term, “agriculture,” was quite unknown in the colonies. The Hawksbury farmers grew wheat on the same land till it perished with rust and the soil was scourged into sterility. They also let their cows find a living for themselves in the bush, and when the dry seasons came, they let them die. The Hunter River people would have done the very same, but that the ooze of the flooded river gave them endless crops of lucerne without trouble. The small settlers up on the Table-land sometimes grew an acre or two of grain, and starved their cows on everybody's grass. Was this agriculture? And was this ridiculous sloth and waste the thing that squatting was to be suppressed to make room for? Squatting was, no

doubt, an imperfect system, but still it was an industry conducted with method and energy, on which real work was expended, and so far of national importance, that the support of a large portion of the people came directly from it, while the savings of the whole community were, through the banks, invested in it. *Real farming* was, everywhere, an elaborate art, of slow growth, resulting from the prolonged observation of climate and innumerable experiments, and each country, formation, and latitude had a system peculiarly its own, as, for instance, the rotation of crops in use in the Lothians, the method of the deeply-drained clay lands of Lincoln, the high farming among the reclaimed meadows of Holland, the system of irrigation on the slopes of Lombardy. When Australia had received the benefits of such study and such experiments, as, no doubt, would be the case in time, then farming would become a fact. For the present, it was a sham, even less carried on than in the first days of the colony. Meantime, it was evident that the tendencies of our rural population ran in one uniform direction. Away from the coast rivers, or except in the neighbourhood of towns, the earth was hardly scratched, but all small free-holders tried simply to become small squatters, many of them without even making a pretence of carrying out what the newspapers mis-named "agriculture." This could be seen at that time all over the settled districts, from the head of the Hunter to the head of the Shoalhaven, and Major Smith pointed out that the uniform recurrence of this fact indicated the form which settlement would naturally take in Australia, and that sound policy, in the interests of the country, both industrial and social, should legalise and popularise the use of the grass; should, in truth, deal with facts, and not with shams. This, in his opinion, could be best done by laying out freehold grazing farms and villages, with permanent commonages.

I, naturally enough, not seeing deeply into the question, objected, "that the country was already leased for grazing."

In reply, he reminded me of the success which had followed the settlement made by the Indian Commission; how, by defining rights accurately, and protecting all interests, they had at least quadrupled the capabilities of the country. "You say, 'the country is already leased for grazing,' but what kind of lease is it? You know how worthless a great part of Windabyne would be without our dams and fences, and you know how few of these improvements we dare make. Now, suppose that we had a tenure under which we could carry out such works to four times their present extent; supposing, moreover, that we were safe in adopting any other improvements that experience might suggest to us, if it was only on one portion of the run — on the Six-Mile Creek, for instance; don't you think that these advantages might be worth a deal more to us than the nominal tenancy of great tracts of waste dry land that we pay rent for, and that we get little use of at all — none in a dry year? If you

had seen how that jungle country bloomed under the arrangements of the Commission, and how Rajah and villagers were both better off than they were before, you would understand as I do, how the squatting industry might be made to merge into, and remain flourishing along with the permanent settlement of the country. You do not improve your vineyard by chopping down all the oldest vines, but you prune away straggling shoots; you train your branches close; you deepen and enrich the soil, so that the tap roots may strike down; and thus you make room for more vines to grow beneath the leafy shade of the parent tree, and to draw their life from the earth that is broken up, sweetened, and opened to the sunshine by the roots of the older plant. Land settlement ought to be carried out like the planting of a vineyard, by a judicious encouragement of natural growth. To displace the earlier tenure, as is often suggested, to make way for a new one, would be wanton destruction, and it would only end, after much grief and evil, in nature re-asserting herself." And, truly, if the Major were a prophet, he could not have said better, for we are rushing helter-skelter through land-sharking and financial muddle, into a huge land monopoly, which, as compared with the original squatting *regime*, is as the weight of the millstone to the burden of the grasshopper.

I remember how Jack, during these discourses, used to lean silent on the neck of his horse, his brown eyes gazing on vacancy; and long after I recognised the text of his father's teachings in the columns of the *Dawn*, and understood whence came the inspiration to his pen.

But I must return from this digression to pursue my journey with my friend, Jock McClure.

As we went on, we could see that on the richest runs, the evidences of the celebrated Agricultural Act of 1861 were most apparent. There was one stretch, of about twenty miles, along the south bank of the Wolgan that Jock told me he believed had been every inch selected, and, at short intervals, there appeared the evidences of occupation, consisting of ricketty pole fences, and shanties of hurdles, bark, and slabs, exactly like what we used to put up at temporary lambing yards. These were the *residences* of the registered "inhabitants," and the improvements prescribed by the law; but in all the day's drive, I saw only three of such inhabited. Two selectors out of these were doing nothing. One said that he was waiting for a surveyor before he could set to work. Another was involved in a dispute, and his operations were stopped by a Volunteer Land Order, which had been used to block him off from access to a dam. The dam, it appeared, had been built by the lessee of the run. The third was planting some trees, and had a flock of sheep within sight, but the sheep were being watched by a mounted patrol of the enemy, and I was told, that the first chance they gave, by crossing an unmarked boundary line, they would be seized, driven off, and impounded.

I saw a more singular phenomenon shortly. I had heard of, but never seen before, the portable iron huts, like exaggerated camp ovens, manufactured expressly, and imported wholesale, to secure land for the “lessees of runs,” under the Improvement Clause. After acquiring one portion of the soil with these huts, under solemn declaration of substantial improvement and continuous residence, they were wheeled off to repeat the same dodge as often as was wanted. Most of the selected land had already passed into the hands of the station-holders, or rather, of the mortgagees, for it became quite apparent, from what I had heard, that the whole country was deeply burdened with debt, incurred chiefly in making resistance against the destructive action of selection. Some of the former owners had sunk under this financial pressure; some had sold out, in fear of the evil to come; and the consequence was, that there was a great change, not only in the personality of the proprietors, but the residential character of the class was wholly altered. All the noted stations seemed to belong to absentees, to financial firms, and city men. This one belonged to a politician — formerly, before he went into the “House,” an insolvent storekeeper; that one belonged to a man who had been a broker under the “Verandah”; and there was hardly any of that pleasant family life which I remembered in the old days.

The society of the Yarombil consisted of Ginger's manager, St. John's super, and the gentleman representing the Financial and Territorial Company. The men were well enough, individually, but they had no real tie to the country they lived in, and, as residents, they offered a poor substitute for such families as that of my old friends at Windabyne, who, if they had not been forcibly dispossessed, would, from their tastes and habits, have bound themselves to the soil by ties ever growing closer and closer.

Now, let me ask, does this modern land-scramble, the debt, the speculation, the waste, the wrangling, make up for the absence of such family residence?

It is worth noting that the frequent changes in the ownership of squatting stations are never hinted at, either in the Press or by the Legislature; but the “squatters” are continually spoken of as if they had remained individually and identically the same. Occasionally a senator reads out in the Assembly a column of figures proving the continued increase and prosperity of the “pastoral interest.” The figures are, no doubt, right, so far as they go, but what do they show of the fate of the men, women, and children concerned? Do they tell into whose pockets the money goes?

While the grass grows, and the stock breed, production will go on, and, assuredly, would go on as fast as ever, if all the grazing country and stock belonged to the Waratah Bank and the Finance Company, and if every real squatter in New South Wales were rubbed out.

As to the selectors, I was told that they consisted largely of people from the same country as the squatters, south of the Murray, and that many of them had formerly been selectors on the other side. Some came over, undoubtedly, with the honest intention to get farms and settle, but the difficulties placed in their way by the administration of the law, and the resistance of the squatters, generally made them willing to sell out when they could get a fair price, and it was observed, that many who began selecting as *bona fide* intending settlers, ended in becoming professional land-sharks. It was, in fact, easier to make *money* by the abuse of the law, than to make a *living* by honest work, hampered and harrassed as they found themselves. It was clear that *honest* selection was placed at a great disadvantage by the law that gave it birth, while rascality was suggested, prompted, and encouraged, in every possible way by the same celebrated piece of legislation.

Among the local names recognised by me, appearing prominent in this land-scramble, was that of my old acquaintances, the Donohus. There were few stations on the two rivers that they had not gutted, spoiled, and made money of, and they had prospered accordingly. The patriarch of the tribe had died worth a great deal of money, but his sympathies kept him a "poor man" in heart always; and in harmony with the character, he cherished a fervent sympathy with crime to the very last. One of his sons had risen some rungs on the social ladder. He had moulted the plumage and ideas of duffing and selection, and was now a J.P. and squatter of pronounced Conservative opinions; his daughters were among the *crème-de-la-crème*, and had the *entrée* of Government House. The rest of them were all prospering more or less, and were to be found in our most valued institutions, from the Australian Club to Goulburn Gaol.

Hearing and seeing all these things made our journey pass quickly; and moreover, I had to admit that modern travelling by Railway and Cobb\* presented an undeniable sign of progress that could not be gainsaid. We had left the day before, and we reached Windabyne by dark. What a long journey it used to be to Melbourne in the old days! I had to be contented then to do my thirty miles a day, and now we had travelled over three hundred in a little more than twenty-four hours! When we stopped, I did not know the place in the least. The clearing of the trees, the altered buildings and fencing, and above all a new straight-cut Government road, with the telegraph wire carried aloft, that we travelled for the last few miles, quite puzzled me. It was only when I walked down to the river-bank, and saw the windings of the long reach of water, and the well-remembered Red Cliff Range, that I knew where I was.

"Have you been taking a look round?" said my entertainer, hospitably putting down the whisky. "I daresay the place is not like what it was. St. John and Morgan Donohu, two of my neighbours, tell strange yarns of the people that were here first, an old officer and his sons. They say that

they were frightened to go out on the run for fear of losing themselves, and that they kept the cattle in little bits of paddocks till they starved, and they nearly blew up the station with gunpowder during a fire, and they got that frightened then that they sold the station for half-nothing to the Honourable Ebenezer Sharp — threw it away in fact. Most of the old hands we hear of, seem to have been of the same sort. Won't you help yourself? Now, these young chaps, they say, did nothing but sit in the drawing-room and water the flowers, and they never went out of sight of the house without a black fellow or two, to bring them back again. It's no wonder if they came to grief. It stands to reason that it needs practical people with capital to work stations. Now, Ginger's the sort of man — ”

I listened with interest and amusement to this. It's the very way that you and I, reader, will be talked about too, when we get wiped out. Our real characters and lives make little impression on the multitude. Figments without a shadow of foundation are readily built up on circumstances that the retailers of gossip either do not understand or twist about to suit their own prejudices.

“Why, Jock, you are speaking of my oldest friends, and your informants have given you a most perverted account of them. I think I can guess who Mr. Morgan Donohu is, and I am not surprised that he should make mis-statements about Major Smith and his family, but I don't know who the other man may be — ” and I gave Jock a true account of the old days at Windabyne, including the goings-on of that rising family, the Donohus, at Rover's Flat, the drought, the fire, the troubles of the gold discovery, and Mr. Sharp's proceedings with the Station. “Now, Jock,” I concluded, “You talk of ‘practical men’ and ‘capital,’ and I wish to say a word or to as to these misused terms. Major Smith, I happen to know, was reared in his native country of Westmoreland, and spent his youth, before he joined the army, in a quarter where the breeding and tending of stock form the occupation of all the dalesmen round, and it would be difficult to find as good managers of stock, except, perhaps, a little farther North. He was, moreover, a thorough sportsman, and a student of nature, habitually and passionately. I never saw anyone who had noticed so much of what is to be learned of animals, plants, and the seasons. Moreover, as one result of his observations, he was among the first to keep sheep in paddocks, and to work cattle in the improved way of modern times. Other friends of mine, a Highland family in Gippsland, adopted these innovations about the same time, but both were far ahead of the knowledge of the day, and were much criticised and laughed at by ‘practical men.’ As to the young Smiths, I have no hesitation in saying that they could manage cattle and sheep, ride, and work against any men now on this river, and they knew the country thoroughly well; indeed, there is hardly a gully within thirty miles of this that I have not hunted with them. So much for ‘practical

men.’ Now as to ‘capital.’ Major Smith, I can state positively, put £4,000, hard cash, into this station. Well, you cite Ginger as the right kind of man to hold station property, but I’ll be bound Ginger would not know this station from any other station he has had to do with, if he saw it. Do you call that a practical man? Further, you know well that Ginger never brought a sixpence into the Colony, and I’m quite sure that he never made a sixpence by doing such work as my friends, the Smiths. No doubt he got on by *working the oracle* with bills and mortgages, if you call that work; and, indeed, I don’t believe that he, any more than Sharp, and half-a-dozen more of these financiers, was ever worth £100, till he got it by financing. There, now — so much for your ‘practical men’ and ‘capitalists.’ ”

“Is that really the case,” said Jock, as a bell rang. “Indeed, you astonish me. We always thought that the first squatters were regular crawlers, and that it needed Victorian capital and energy — but here is supper or dinner, I don’t know which to call it. Come your ways ben the house.

\* My friend the Deacon did not hold any ecclesiastical rank. He had simply been Deacon of the Craft of Hammermen, or Blacksmiths, in a Royal Burgh, and he retained his municipal title of honour when he retired to private life, and took to keeping a public house.

\* Pleuro-pneumonia. — A frequent scourge of the Australian herds.

\* Cobb and Co., the great Colonial Coaching Firm.

## Chapter XXVI. The Old Homestead, after Twenty-Five Years.

When I sought my couch once more under the roof of the old homestead, I lay long awake, as the memory of the gliding years passed before me. Of all that loving, joyous household that I joined in my youth, only three members were alive, the widowed daughter, the sad-browed, anxious Mary — once the bright young girl, who had been the joy of the home; the crippled brother, himself almost helpless, yet his sister's aid and solace; and poor Willy, his career broken; and he himself fallen into the rude by-ways of life.

What was I that I had prospered, while worth, and honour, and the qualities that spread joy and blessing, like a halo, were thus trodden under foot of swine? And what had Major Smith and his family done that their names should now be a by-word and a laughing-stock among men, whose fathers would one day rob him, and on the next would fawn upon him, hat in hand, to beg his favour as an officer and a magistrate?

And yet I recognised, in the genial character of my host, proof that the new state of things must have some good in it. Even the wildest social chaos is tempered by the humanising influences of to-day, and, no doubt, these upheavals have a bright side for many; but for me — I could only reflect on the black disaster that had fallen, undeservedly, on my much-loved friends. I sought, in vain, for some solution to the riddle in the laws of Providence, or divine progress, and when I slept, it was to dream only of human straws, tossed and whirled on the cruel tide of Fate, and of the bubbling and seething of a witch's cauldron, casting up flakes of dirt and scum to the surface.

The morning found me looking with keen interest over the old place, spying out old familiar haunts and searching for reminiscences of the days gone by. My host could not do enough to make me welcome, and, by degrees, I got the whole story of his connection with the Station. If I was staggered at first at finding Jock in the character of a territorial magnate, I was dumbfounded with the revelations which now followed.

It seems that Ginger's business is something of the character of a private banker, the securities he deals in being stations. When a likely thing comes into the market, he looks round among his customers, and makes up a private company to carry out the purchase — he arranging

payments, receiving all proceeds of sales, and holding the securities.

At our other capital, the need of the banks to get investment for their deposits in squatting securities, has resulted in the development of the great speculator or station-monger — the man with dozens of stations everywhere, tens of thousands of cattle, and hundreds of thousands of sheep, who tramples out selectors like the ox among the frogs, keeping an army of supers, agents, and drovers, whom he directs from a back office not far from the bank.

This type is not unknown in the Southern City, but the superior character of its people — “the capital, intelligence, and energy,” which they tell us so often about, have produced a peculiar growth, and of this, Ginger was the topmost blossom.

A head unusually clear, and the watchful study of his fellow-men habitual to him, had made him an adept at this trade, and there were few of his neighbours up and down Flinders-street who could not bear testimony to his business capacities.

According to Thackeray, the well-to-do British tradesman cherishes a heartfelt desire to become a country gentleman. He sometimes carries samples of oats in his pockets, and if the wind is southerly on a winter day, he remarks that “the scent will lie.”

His congener in the Golden City is said to nourish the same meritorious hankering to be a squatter. This tendency Ginger works on most ably and successfully.

Saucepans, the great ironmonger up the street, had, since he went through the Court last, got up a good head of business, and he could, for the time, draw cheques like shelling peas; and Ginger spotted him. Our financial friend knew perfectly well that Saucepan's books were never balanced, and, that for all he knew, he might not be worth a farthing; but still he had the handling of money, and, if so, Ginger could make him plough in his furrow.

Saucepans for some time had felt sat upon. Dipps, the wholesale grocer, had a Sheep Station in the Saltbush — (at least a share of one, got through Ginger), and a Cattle Station on the Paroo; and it gnawed the ironmonger's entrails to see Dipps lug out the wool list. “Look here, RP over diamond, 130 bales fleece, 2s. 2d., 80, 2s. 31/2d.; greasy ditto, 28 at 111/4d. What do you think of that, Saucepans? And see our bullocks from the Paroo, reported by P. R. & Co. : — 40 head, £15; 59 head, £13 10s.; 72 head, £12 — not so dusty, eh?”

This used to happen in the evening train to Iona, and Ginger sat by watchful and silent, eyeing the pear ripening to his hand.

At length, Windabyne appeared in the market, and then Ginger leaned across the carriage, and whispered to Saucepans — “Could I see you any time to-morrow?” and an appointment was made.

At the interview, the matter was opened in this form : — “I am glad

that you have favoured me with a call. There are things that can hardly be made a matter of correspondence, and, indeed, this will need to be between ourselves. The fact is — I have something good in view — ; and I wish to keep it for a few gentlemen — a few of ourselves — and I thought, knowing your position, and having half an idea you might look our way, that I would like to make you the first offer. I believe that you have not done much as yet in squatting, but, you may depend upon it, there is no investment so sound, if carried on with adequate means, and nothing gives a man such a position in the Colony, as being the owner of station property. Knowing your thorough business character and large capital, I feel almost as if I were guilty of presumption in offering you an opinion on matters which must be perfectly familiar to you — except, perhaps, in some technical minutiae which pertain to my special branch of business — so that I will only say that a man stands better and safer when he is identified with the great standard interests of the country, and with your Conservative views in politics and large resources, I put it to you, if it is not fair that you should be expected to join us — if for nothing more than to aid in resisting the torrents of democracy now turning the country upside down. The lower classes, sir, have been pampered out of all reverence for the most sacred of interests — for property itself, sir,” (Robin Gander! oh, Robin! could you but have heard your son!) “and this Free Selection must be resisted at all hazards.”

“Right, sir, put 'em down, sir — I call 'em paupers, sir, and I say, put 'em down. Selectors! — a lot of paupers!” ejaculated the delighted Saucepans.

Ginger continued — “Should you feel inclined, then, to go in, all I can say further is, that if you find it inconvenient to shift your funds immediately, we shall be happy to arrange money matters for you.”

Jock went through this scene with considerable humour, Ginger standing up holding the back of his chair, his legs straddling on each side, and his hair stuck on end, while Saucepans sat blushing and simpering like a school-girl at a ball, taking in, with evident gratification, the barefaced flattery which called him to his face a “capitalist and a Conservative.”

The result was, that Saucepans and three or four more gave short-dated bills for part of the purchase-money of Windabyne, and the deal was completed by Ginger, who has first a station account with the concern, and then a separate individual account with each of the partners. All the wool and fat stock are sold through him, and as there is a very healthy quarterly augmentation of charges on these various accounts, the station will need to be worth nothing at all, and each of the partners hopelessly insolvent, before it will cease to pay their agent — or mortgagee — or nurse — whatever he may be — very handsomely indeed.

Jock MacClure was taken on as manager, with a salary and a working

share.

Ginger had watched him. He knew that he had honesty, energy, and intelligence; and he knew also well the value of such qualities — in subordinates — for, there is no doubt, the monied man is wonderfully clever.

So this is a sketch of the whole affair: First, the financial head and projector who “runs” the business, as the Yankees say; next, the city proprietors; and last, the manager, the best man of the lot.

When I had grasped all these facts, Jock detailed his arrangements for meeting the inroad of selectors, which he apprehended daily.

The map of Windabyne, extended on the table before me, where it was placed to illustrate my host's plan of defence, shewed, at first glance, something like the sketch of the Battle of Salamanca, as contained in the atlas attached to “Alison's History of Europe.” The deep French battalions that crown the ridges and stretch away to the left, bear a great resemblance to the auction lots put up and bought in by our friend Jock, running up the Six-mile Creek from its junction with the Yarombil; and there can be no doubt of the strength of the position thus secured, for whoever holds this chain of blocks, comprising some seven thousand acres, commands twenty thousand acres of plain, and all the timber near, and the only soil fit to hold water on that side the run.

To the right, the British Force is represented by numberless forty-acre Improvement Purchases and fifty-acre Volunteer Land Order Lots, extending in ragged order along frontages, and holding every point of vantage, leaving only half-mile intervals here and there, daring the selector to thrust his head into.

The centre consists of the Head-Station, in the midst of an irregular cluster of auction and other purchases, commanding, with their pre-leases, the heart of the run, and the main frontage to the river; and this position is rendered doubly secure by areas withdrawn from selection on each flank, these reserves covering, in the aggregate, about twenty thousand acres more.

There still remain some portions of dry, plain, reed-bed, and flooded land on the River, unprotected, and these comparatively valueless spots represent what is left still intact and available for settlement, of that portion of the “People's Estate,” called Windabyne, generously offered to the public by the Act of 1861.

The study of this chart throws a good deal of light on the working of that Act, and it explains, also, how our large and flourishing revenue has been raised.\*

Ginger cannot have spent less than £20,000, or £25,000 already, in land purchases, and if he has not secured the run altogether, he has, at least, spoilt it pretty well for selectors.

Any private landlord who dealt with his estate in the way that the

Department has allowed this station and scores more to be spoiled and gutted, would be well qualified for Turban Creek; and any tenant of town property who used his ingenuity to make the neighbourhood uninhabitable, in the same way as Jock M'Clure, would run great risk of being suppressed as a nuisance.

But, it may be said, these abuses have not arisen from the law of selection, but from the measures taken by the squatters for their protection against its operation.

Well, then, did any sane man ever expect that the squatters would meekly yield their backs to the shearers? Had they not paid rent, year after year, for a lease, and entered into expensive arrangements under that tenure; and, moreover, had not many of them paid heavy prices for the titles of their runs, under a system as fully sanctioned by law and custom as the sale of buildings, under the Real Property Act? And were they not entitled to due consideration when resumption was exercised — to a law framed in a spirit of foresight and equity, and administered by care and method as was due to an industry which had been deliberately nursed into life by public policy for the last thirty years? Or, are there no such fixed principles as fair-dealing and honesty? Can the majority of the House decide all matters as they think fit, without reference to such considerations? Does black become white, or dirty water become clean, simply because forty men out of seventy vote that it is so?

Well, then, looking at the question from first to last, and admitting the awful mess of waste and confusion caused by such spoiling of runs, still, placed as they were, is the resistance of the squatters to the Law of Selection to be wondered at or condemned?

I am not aware whether Mr. MacClure went through the equities of selection in this way, but he adopted the plan of defence above detailed; and, indeed, the selectors, up to this time, had given him a wide berth, finding him, like the porcupine — always ready. Even for those patches of the run which were considered not worth protecting by purchase, he was prepared to fight, if necessary. He was constantly in the saddle, shepherding every waggon and horseman that approached the other side of the river, and he kept a stock of volunteer land orders, mining permits, and other explosives, ready for immediate use.

The horse-track to the Land Office was pounded bare by his daily travel, and he had pencilled the office chart, pointing out what was reserved — what was going to be reserved — and what should be reserved — to that extent that the land agent had to choke him off; and so the defence of the run was, by his own showing, conducted with vigour and vigilance.

My host shortly was called away by some matter requiring his attention, and I went out to stroll about, to brood over what I had heard,

and moralise on its bearing. Here, indeed, was the evidence of a new world — a state of things entirely changed since I had seen Windabyne. Was the change for the better?

The look of things was decidedly and intensely for the worse. Hard, dry, and short-sighted utilitarianism, reckless of all considerations except immediate money result, seemed to be the spirit of these modern operations. The ground was nearly as bare as a sheep-yard used to be in old times. One hundred and thirty thousand sheep starved on Windabyne, through the dry season. One-half of these were cheap store stock, bought on the chance of the rain coming in autumn. If they died, it would be comparatively a small loss; if they lived, a handsome fortune would be pocketed from the one year's profits. So it was considered that the risk was legitimate, and neither the cruelty of slow starvation to the dying stock, nor the ignorant recklessness of destroying the pasture by overstocking, appeared in the ledger.

Drafting-yards for sheep covered the top of the bank where I had many a time helped Mary to water her flowers, and a man was wrenching with pick and lever at a stump that remained near a gateway. At length he tore it out with many curses, when I observed that some soft green buds sprouted from the root. I pulled some of the tender shoots. Yes, it was as I thought; I remembered planting some lemon trees on the spot, and this stump was the last of them.

The ghost of my youth seemed to rise and pass before me. I remembered the sweet young girl, with her joyous laughter and sunny locks gliding among her flowers, and the boyish nonsense and rhodomontade with which I had amused her.

From the little garden that once was here, we used to get but a glimpse of the Big Waterhole; it was then so shrouded in foliage. Like many such spots in Australia, this homely name was given to a reach of rare beauty, a winding sheet of lily-fringed azure, embosomed in woodland verdure, and many a time, in the summer nights, when the moon rose over the tree-tops, we had run down the bank with laugh and shout, and paddled our skiff under the shadow of the sighing oaks, through the reeds, and past the points of plain, where the roan and white cattle lay thick in the yellow pasture. But now I saw the Waterhole from one end to the other, and it was as ugly and uninteresting as a coal-wharf, for the trees were all cut down, and a steam-engine with piles of piping and a new shed marked the iron economics of the *regime*.

It may be childish to regret the gashes and furrows which improvement and industry mark in the fair face of nature; it may be silly to mourn over the lost beauty and grieve at the eye-sores left; but, in such an instance as that before me, the “*cui bono?*” naturally cropped up, and I I felt that one might fairly demand of the utilitarian “who got any good from his wholesale clearing, his overstocking, flaying, and tomahawking?”

In the case of Windabyne, after seeing behind the scenes, I felt that it would not be easy to tell who benefited; and what a satire the whole result before me read on the financial, pastoral, agricultural and humanitarian platitudes that filled our parliamentary reports and newspaper columns.

First in order, there had been that fraudulent farce in the old days, carried out to the ruin of my earliest friends, professedly under the solemn responsibilities of "capital," and here, before me now, were the results springing from "agricultural" legislation.

From first to last it appeared as if neither our economic methods nor our theories of life had any real relation to the facts to be seen around us daily.

I soon got tired of looking about. I wished to take to my friends in Sydney some pleasant reminiscence of the old homestead, but I came across little, except innovations of the kind I have mentioned. I could enjoy Jock MacClure's conversation, but I could not admire the work of his hands, and yet there was no question that he was filling his position admirably as an energetic and conscientious manager.

It was the system that was objectionable, not the man. He would have done equally well, or indeed better for himself under circumstances where there were fewer difficulties and anomalies to be reconciled.

On going in from my stroll, I found that he had taken himself off to the Court House on some urgent matter, but he had left orders for my behoof.

Lunch was waiting me, and a steady horse was saddled, in case I wished to take a turn over the run in the afternoon. This thoughtful kindness pleased me much, and I ambled along once more towards the South Bend Camp, now a camp no longer, but the centre of a close-cropped sheep paddock; and then I went to the well-remembered Six-mile Creek. Afterwards, crossing the river, I went up the Girrah side, and there I unexpectedly fell in with something that interested me, and this I must relate in the order in which it happened.

Well, it turned out that on that same morning, a traveller had come on the banks of the Yarombil, somewhere below the Bend. The view which there opened on him pulled him up, and he looked long and steadily across the river. He had left the Wimmera many a long and weary day's journey behind, in search of the Land of Promise so much talked of in the Western District, and his household and belongings were now camped a few miles back on the road.

He was a man of some substance, with a growing family, and, attracted by the agrarian paradise offered to the whole world by the selection law of New South Wales, his children promised, as he gratefully reflected, to become to him veritable "blessings." For he had perused carefully the liberal Act of 1875, and he was now on the Yarombil in answer to the

invitation therein given to the human race; an invitation which on behalf of himself and his three sons he decided heartily and in all good faith to accept, for that measure offered each male citizen over sixteen years of age a freehold of 640 acres of land, together with a leasehold property of three times that area — so that, with his young ones, he could secure a handsome estate of something over ten thousand acres, and, not without reason, he blessed the legislation that put in his way such a provision for his family.

The view from the river bank, where he sat on horseback, disclosed to his sight none of the strategic preparations provided for the reception of selectors, such as himself, by Mr. MacClure, but he saw before him a smiling landscape of alternate plain and ridge, with distant oases of timber shimmering in the morning light. If the grass was scant he had seen it as bad elsewhere, and he opined that no doubt it would grow yet, for he was stout-hearted. So he smiled to himself as the pleasant breeze swept up the river, swaying the trees in its gravelly bed, for the haven of his hopes was reached at last, and a voice seemed to whisper, that here Mother Nature had ready, specially prepared, the home and welcome which she could hardly refuse to an honest man like himself.

Thus, in joyous mood, he spurred down the bank to cross the river and take possession of his inheritance, and he was scrambling exultingly up the other side, when his horse was brought up short by a stout wire fence that caught him in the chest.

He had heard a good deal on the road of the fiendish rapacity of the squatters and their supers in these parts; nevertheless, he was not easy of belief, and such yarns went in one ear and out at the other; but now, for the first time, the fact was brought practically home to his apprehension, that the beneficent powers who had offered ten thousand acres of land as a patrimony for his family, had previously let the same land and a good deal more to another tenant, who did not seem likely to move off without debate. Here was a new idea altogether. However, he would not be balked in acquiring his just rights — he would make his way through the fence, and then he would consider how to deal with this lessee or tenant who had ventured to fence the lawful owner out of his property.

For a weary mile he followed the fence until he found a gate, but he had barely opened it when he was hailed by a smart young boundary-rider. “Hi! There's no road this way. Its all private land here. The road's three miles down at the Falls.”

“Aye — say ye so? May-be ye can tell me whether it's all private land at the Falls.”

“Oh, oh! You'll be one of the selectors. Just you go to the Land Office and find out. Shut the gate after you, and keep the road.”

The traveller, it is hardly necessary to say, learned nothing more by going to the Falls, and so betook himself to study the chart, and ask

questions at an establishment where the records of alienation were generally nine months in arrear; and no wonder, for the local functionary was liable to immediate dismissal if ever he tried to think or act without orders from head-quarters.

And now, my reader must understand that I got the foregoing from the traveller's own mouth, for I dropped on his camp during my afternoon's ride. He delivered his testimony with an air of injured innocence, the "even a worm will turn if trod on" style, a humility of tone strikingly belied by his keen grey eye and hard northern physiognomy. "Old man," I thought, "you're a nice lamb to lead to the slaughter;" and I could not help laughing in his face at his cool impudence in wanting to take ten thousand acres off another man's run, and at the high approval of Windabyne which he repeatedly expressed, alluding to it as a property of which he was illegally dispossessed. I tried to point out to him that the squatting right was as much founded on law as the right of selection, and that the powers that be had practically confirmed and fortified that right by allowing the lessees to buy in their own defence; but he ignored every consideration except the "letter of the bond," the text of the Alienation Law; and, indeed, he could not be expected to understand, without more experience of such doings, that the working of that law was a farce, that it offered concessions with one hand, which it daily nullified with the other.

And so it came to pass that our talk was prolonged, and became interesting, for, besides the absorbing character of the topic, the old fellow's voice had a ring in it which brought back to me the moorlands and glens of my youth; and, at length, I found myself dismounted, seated by his fire, and listening with appreciation to his keen, sententious, and somewhat pragmatistical discourse. He told me that he had just been to the Land Office, where he had become aware of a circumstance that troubled him. A relative of his own was in possession of the station on which he had determined to select. He had only come to know the fact that day, and he hardly could decide what course to take. In fact, my new acquaintance turned out to be no other than the David Brown of whom Jock MacClure had told me, the relative who had paid his passage to the Colony, and to whose sound advice he owed the position which he held; and now they had met, if not as foes, at least on opposite sides of a battle-field, for there is no use blinking the fact that this is the mutual position in which our mountebank legislation has placed the chief workers in colonisation. The success of the one side involves the destruction of the other.

The vice of such a system as ours comes home to us, individually, only when some element of personal friendship or kindred blood becomes involved in the feud. While squatters and selectors are known to each other only as members of antagonistic classes, and enemies

— necessarily made so by the wisdom of our statesmen — they hardly look upon each other as belonging to the same order in creation — in fact, they cherish reciprocally, in a degree, the same feeling that pioneer settlers entertain for hostile blacks and native dogs; but when relationship or previous acquaintance intervenes, then the true character of the feud appears in its naked deformity, and things begin to show in a new light when seen apart from prejudice and class enmity.

Thus, David Brown felt on consideration, that his nephew, in the part he acted, was merely doing his duty, zealously and creditably, for the interests he represented, and, in fact, in so doing, was justifying his own recommendation, when he advised him to seek employment on a station. All the common cant that he had read and heard of the lawless greed and treachery of the squatters, fell to the ground before the facts of this case. He saw that the opposition he had to contend with, was that of a corporate organization founded on lawful industry, and did not arise merely from the avarice or caprice of individuals; and he felt that, if his nephew was to fill the position to which his own counsel had led him, he could not properly act otherwise than as he was doing.

It appeared that the kinsmen had lost sight of each other for some years, not by reason of any unkindness, but, as often happens with relatives in this part of the world, distance and dissimilar interests had kept them apart. But Jock had told me, the evening before, that, as soon as he had a month to spare, he intended to look up his friends, and I was glad to be able to say as much to the old fellow.

From what Brown said, and from what I observed in his camp, there could not be a shadow of doubt, that with his family, he would be an invaluable acquisition to any colony. The young ones were of an excellent stamp, educated, intelligent, and healthy; and I could not but admire the docile, modest, child-like deference which these graceful rosy girls, and lithe, muscular lads, showed to the kindly, comely mother who formed the centre-point of the home group. He had — it came out — about £4,000 capital, in addition to his travelling equipment, which consisted of a waggon and team, saddle-horses, and a small lot of picked milkers.

Here was another evidence of the agrarian chaos in which we live. Brown was the very type of the best of our original settlers — the men who colonised the sterile uplands of the Old Settled Districts, and who have left their successors in comfortable independence, the very heart and kernel of our population, and almost the only people among us who have no need to scramble for either government money or bank accommodation — and, for this colonist of the true stamp, there was not a corner to be found among the wide pastures of rich Riverina, unless he made up his mind to go through a course of jobbery and back-stairs intrigue enough to sicken any honest man.

I was, by the way, quite aware — though I did not mention it to Brown — that anyone who liked to spend £500 in the right quarter, could get a reserve cancelled, and selections covering the same passed through in a day — all standing rules and official obstructions notwithstanding.

At length I took my leave, deeply impressed with the unnatural position in which these two kinsmen were placed in regard to each other. Brown gave me a message to his nephew — “Bid the lad come and see me, Mr. Crawford. Whatever comes of this business, there shall be no feud between me and my sister's son. If I had only himself to deal with, we might make a bargain, — but I doubt Ginger and me would hardly hit it. It is an ill-governed country where such things can be.”

When I told Jock all this, he became moody and dolorous. A good-hearted fellow like himself could not but feel deeply the false position he was placed in. Here was the man who had treated him like a son, come to his door, and an adamant wall of circumstance divided them, so that he could neither welcome him as he wished, nor lend the helping hand that he would naturally give so freely.

I reflected long. To what did all this discord and disorder tend? There was ample reason to believe that what was taking place on the banks of the Yarombil was also going on over the hundred valleys of New South Wales, and what would come of the forces thus set in motion?

As I considered this problem, with its side issues, following the winding track of pettifogging and strategy that traversed it throughout, there met me at every turn, apparently as the be-all and end-all for which men were unwittingly working their hearts out — like the deified monkey in the secret-place of the Hindu temple — the smug, self-assured countenance of Ginger, for the mills of destiny seemed to grind merely to fill this money-lender's pockets and to inflate his financial potency.

So far as I could judge by Windabyne, the war of squatter and selector would end neither in establishing a resident class of pastoral proprietors, nor in settling a race of yeoman farmers on the soil; but, like other wars, it would chiefly enrich the stockjobbers and crimps; and, it was here fast turning into a millionaire and shepherd-king, a long-headed little man, who knew how to play the game of beggar-my-neighbour — a capitalist whose money was gathered through working the oracle with pen and ink — a sham squatter, who had done all his squatting on paper, and had never looked a sheep in the face.

Withal, there was a startling incongruity in the relative positions held by the parties in this contest, that struck me as most ludicrous. It was delicious to my saturnine humour to reflect on “Aristocracy and Vested Interests,” as represented by Ginger, Saucepans, and Mr. Morgan Donohu, and “Democracy and Rapine,” as incarnated in the douce responsible person of David Brown.

Melancholy Jacques remarked, when he saw Touchstone appear with

his honest Audrey, "There is sure another Flood toward, and here come a pair of strange beasts to the Ark."

A like phenomenon of a social character must be in full tide with us, when a tricky money-lender, an insolvent iron-monger, and a white-washed cattle-stealer sit among the magnates of the land, and when a man like David Brown is called by these same swells a "pauper, and one of the lower orders."

Next day I had purposed to go on my road. My interest was sated, and I felt little pleasure in brooding longer over the ashes of the past; but my host pressed me to stay, as he had received a telegram, announcing that Mr. Ginger would be at Windabyne that afternoon to get fresh horses, on his way to the Southern City. It appeared that he had just returned from Europe, and had his two daughters with him. I always felt great pleasure in observing the ways of the financial *noblesse*, so I readily consented to stay another night with my friend, Jock.

By three o'clock a mail-phaeton dashed up, and Ginger, whom I recognised readily, alighted, looking bluff, florid, and affable, and assisted two ladies to descend.

On observing me, he greeted me cordially, and patronised Jock in a free and easy way. I had the honour of being presented to the Misses Ginger, and received a chilly recognition, which caused me to indulge in an internal grin, when I thought of their grandsire, old Robin Gander, at Gowandale. Mr. MacClure was not presented at all. "Terrible season for stock, Mr. Crawford," said Ginger. "One good thing — it will clear out plenty of these vagabonds of selectors. A man wants capital to stand these times, sir."

I assented to the fact of the ungenial season, but thought that a good deal of the loss at present was due to the overstocking of the country, and the bad land law.

"Quite so — quite so — but, mark me, there can be no security for property till this Selection is put down. Have you seen the programme of our Pastoral Association? We are going at them. We have the best legal advice — private access to the banks, and — but that's a secret — ten thousand pounds of secret service money, to be spent by the Committee, and no questions asked. See the names — all the Sydney and Melbourne men of mark! I've seen men in London, sir, who tell me that we may do what we like with the money market as soon as we get these lands entirely into our own hands."

I looked at the document he handed me, and I never saw Philistinism so pronounced. The idea it suggested was of a lot of monied hogs standing in their troughs and grunting to keep others out. The names were well-known ones — Sharp, Bogus, Chalker, and all the other financiers, who had become "squatters" by slaying and taking possession.

Meantime, while we had been conversing in the verandah, the two young ladies had retired to the room within. Ginger left me while he went to the stable, and I entered to speak to his daughters, and do the civil, but they maintained a staid reserve, hardly answered me, and talked to each other in French before my face. It was a limp kind of Clapham boarding-school French, with half the consonants left out, and I was wondering if I might venture to say that I had heard better, if it was only to give them a hint not to criticise my grizzly “barbe,” and my aquiline “nez” in my presence, when I was startled by hearing sounds, much more like the genuine language, not far off. Going out to look whence this came, there was, at the carriage, a pretty black-eyed French maid, whom I had not noticed before, struggling to take down one of those ponderous wicker hampers for holding dresses, and commenting aloud, volubly. I was on the point of going to lift it for her, when help came from an unexpected quarter.

There was a “ne'er-do-well,” one Tom Evans, cutting green hide for hurdle-ties in the store verandah. Now, this Tom Evans had lived in the sunny land of Burgundy, and had drunk its ruby wine, but he was not known as Tom Evans then, for he was a young swell who was sowing his wild oats, and he had seen and done as much as any young man of spirit could, while the oats lasted, and that was just about a year, for he had kept it up on both sides of the Channel, and he had put his money in the Grand Prix, and had visited friends at the great camp at Châlons, and spent many pleasant days at the old town of Dijon, and the sinner never repented of these doings of prodigality, but thought that they had been first-rate times, and, in fact, was thinking so while he was cutting the green hide. So, when he heard the loved accents, that he once knew so well, from the lips of a pretty girl struggling with, and *swearing* at, a big portmanteau, he rushed to her aid, with “permettez moi, made-moiselle.” Then did not poor Louise's black eyes flash, and her tongue went off, firing volleys of the language of Europe, which sounded, as contrasted with the Misses Ginger's slip-slop French, like the fire of the Sydney Rifles against two-pence worth of Chinese crackers.

Well, if Tom Evans had contented himself with simply carrying the portmanteau for Mademoiselle Louise, there would have been no great harm done, but he must needs proceed to flirt with her in the most outrageous manner, to which she was too happy to respond, being enchanted with this so noble — so distinguished — monsieur. It was characteristic of the Frenchwoman's shrewdness that, though Tom was dressed in bush working clothes, she saw at once what manner of man he was. Unfortunately, they were within ear-shot of the Misses Ginger, and well-regulated female minds do not appreciate or approve of such goings on, so a voice like that of a discontented pea-fowl interrupted their conversation, and summoned the femme-de-chambre. Louise rolled her

eyes, and made an expressive “moue.” “Oh, ceil! comme elles parlent.” “Ye-es, mees, I come,” for she scorned to speak *to them* in French.

This was hard on Tom, so he went back to cut his green hide.

The luncheon was slow work.

Ginger's talk continued to be a “blow” about capital and property, and the sisters whispered to each other, or if they spoke to their father, it was chiefly to refer to titled people whom they had seen, or heard the names of in England. On the whole, I felt that I would much rather associate with David Brown and his family; and yet there were thousands of people in the two colonies,\* willing to break their necks to get into the position these Gingers held; to attain this Olympus of purse-pride and Philistine vulgarity. I was glad when I heard the fresh horses announced for the mail-phaeton, and more pleased yet when their wheels sounded in the distance. But there was much running, fetching, and carrying before they were ready, and poor Louise might have suffered, but for the aid she got from the willing gallantry of Tom Evans. He helped the little maid to her seat, and then stood at the open gate, with his hat off, bowing like a Paladin, while the Misses Ginger looked straight before them, as if they would acidulate milk. No wonder Louise murmured, with a roll of her wonderful eyes, “Mille remerciements, Monsieur.”

The ladies of fashion had no patience with people of the lower orders giving themselves airs — and wouldn't Louise catch it before night?

As the mail-phaeton rolled away, Tom Evans fastened the gate, and turned back to go to his work, when Mr. MacClure accosted him, with a humorous twinkle in his eye:

“Vera interesting young person that, Evans.”

“Very much so, sir.”

“Do ye think ye could take a drop of whiskey after that, Evans?”

“I don't mind if I do, sir,” said Tom.

MacClure's sly, knowing look, as if he had penetrated Evan's mystery, and Tom's assumed unconsciousness, were infinitely mirth-provoking. But any jest was pleasant after the Ginger riddance. The flavour of them stuck to one's mouth like ground ashes, and all the whiskey on the place could hardly wash it away.

And this was modern “Society” in Australia; and this was the social fruit of all the industrial and political strivings of two generations — the cramming of a pedlar with bank-notes, and the inflation with vanity of two silly girls, who might otherwise have been of some use in the world.

The morning after I took my leave of the banks of the Yarombil, likely for the last time. The Windabyne of the past was dead and gone, and its shadow lingered only among the strewn and withered leaves of memory. From my host, Jock MacClure, I parted with much good will, and with many hearty wishes that he may yet put things straight with his kinsman. Perhaps the social anarchy, of which their mutual position is an example,

may some day work itself sweet to a more wholesome and happier state of things, for the fermentation of class feuds and discordant relations now infecting the inland districts of the colony can hardly last.

I have already told in an earlier chapter of my trip down from Wagga, and how I came to see Mr. St. John, whom I had heard so often quoted, and how I identified him as an early associate of the Donohus, in the days of the grogshanty and scroll-brand — a veritable Phoenix risen from the ashes of the old times — a flake of the unwholesome scum cast up by the simmering of the witch's cauldron.

When, at night I reached our temporary home in a Transpontine suburb, overlooking the blue waters of Port Jackson, the house showed signs of packing up. A flitting was plainly in prospect. The young ones were all at roost apparently, and the genius of the house was, no doubt, "on household cares intent" On a table lay an ornamental card, upon which was written in pencil a list of boys' boots and clothes. Turning the other side, there read in tasteful lettering:

MRS. CHALKER,

AT HOME,

TUESDAY, 25TH JUNE. NINE O'CLOCK.

Mrs. Chalker is very high life, and I was charmed to think that my wife had attained the distinction of such an entrée. The door opened, and the lady herself bounced in, carrying an armful of childrens' apparel, which she dropped on the floor, and gave the scream appropriate to the return of a husband, after a long absence.

"Well," I enquired, when I had leisure. "What's up? Where are you going?"

"Going, Reginald. I think you're *doited*. Is it not the children's holidays, and are we not going up to Strathclyde?"

"To be sure, I forgot."

"And Mrs. Rawson and Willy are going with us."

"To be sure, and I meant to try to get old Jack to come with us too. I think I am *doited* to forget that. I must see him to-morrow. But are you not going to Mrs. Chalker's? I see she has a 'drum' for Tuesday."

"Stuff," she remarked, and stuck the card with a sniff into an old rack. This young woman does not care much for "society," you see, but she is a dab at poultry and at darning socks.

The next morning I met Chalker going over in the steamer. He is now a very big, heavy man, and enormously rich. We have always kept up a sort of acquaintance, and indeed, since the day, now so long past, that he showed such sympathy and kindness for poor Jack in his terrible accident, I have thought him not a bad fellow. His plutocratic tone though, is blatant. That morning he bellowed the whole way, about the oppressive burdens entailed by possessing property, and the fearful losses he had sustained through the dry season. I suppose the impression

he meant to give me, was that he had brought millions of money into the country which he was managing solely for the general good, and at the cost of severe sacrifices. I could not sympathise with him on account of his pecuniary misfortunes, as I knew that he had arrived in Sydney thirty-five years ago as the son of a Government immigrant, and he was not worth much when he came to Windabyne as bailiff. I told him though, that if his station properties were such white elephants, he might hand a few of them over to the Children's Hospital, an institution in which my wife took much interest. He did not understand that though, and he gave me a side glare of his yellow eye, as if he thought I was taking "a rise out of him."

I found the little household at Surrey Hills in great glee. The boarding house was disposed of. Mary had saved a little, and she was glad to get the chance to give her boy a long holiday up the country, and Jack was coming with us too.

I was delighted. I had tried to get them away often, but people like them of straitened means, and with their living to earn, can make few visits. Willy Rawson had passed with credit the "Junior Exam," and he needed change to gain strength and health.

Though of the stout old Border race, and the son of a squatting pioneer, he had lived among smoky bricks all his life, and had hardly ever been on horseback, or had even seen the forest-land of his birth. However, he had the instinctive cravings of blood and breed, and he hankered after the plains and mountain ranges that he had heard so much of. This boy had lived the town life, like thousands more in Australia, because there was no other open to him.

Our mountebank legislation, and slip-slop unwisdom, are already filling young colonial towns with needy and helpless crowds. One half of the youth of New South Wales, from causes beyond their ken, drift to the slummy life of Sydney streets. The flow of population is no longer turned towards the inland wastes. These are, in effect, as much stock-jobbed as if they were shipped across the seas, and the human current, barred from the rightful outlet, has set direct for the Central Treasury, where the boldest beg for public money and pimp for billets, and the weak and timid sink down and disappear.

So I was glad to take Jack Rawson's son to healthy, breezy bush-land, and moreover, my heart was blithe within me, for I had got a letter from Short that morning, telling that all the cull cows were sold at £3 per head, to a Victorian going out to the Herbert — and so I whipped out an oblong grey book, and seizing a pen from Jack's patent writing desk, drew out a cheque, and put it into Willy's hands. "There, Willy, my son, — that's your tip. You go to MacCall's, in Hunter-street, and buy yourself a saddle and bridle, and say I sent you and he'll give you something decent; — and — mark me — young man, I don't doubt you'll

thrive. If you are respectful to your superiors and always agree with what they say, you might possibly get into the Civil Service; or you might get an opening in a general grog-doctoring business — or you might learn the financing trade — how to make money out of wind, and lies, and paper.” “If the young thief does any of these I'll cut his throat — so help me Magog,” roared Jack, and he brought down his blackthorn *smack* among us. “Oh, mercy, Jack! spare my old table,” cried Mary. “Uncle Reggy, Uncle Reggy! why did you set him off with talking such cold-blooded irony to Willy? Willy, my dear, come and kiss mother; you'll not be a cheat, or sell grog, will you?”

I turned upon Jack next, but he had already drawn himself up to his desk, and was letting off the steam, writing like one possessed. I sat for a few minutes, and watched the demoniac scriviner, as slip after slip of flimsy fluttered from his pen, and dropped to the floor, and I knew he was driving it home hard about sham statesmen, universal muddle, and starched hypocrisies, but I did sincerely hope that he was not telling too much truth, for, if so, he would certainly lose his two guineas for that afternoon's work.

And so we started for our Northern home, the whole party, in three days more. But, the day before we left, I was writing a note in the Union Club, when John brought me a card, “A gentleman to see you, Mr. Crawford — Mr. Powys Meredith.”

“Never heard of him — ask him to come in, John;” and Mr. Meredith appeared — a tall, handsome young fellow, whom I surely knew.

“Why, you're — — ” “Yes, Mr. Crawford, I'm Tom Evans, Mr. MacClure's boundary-rider that was.”

“Save us!”

“Yes — I've just heard from home, and am on my way there. There's an old debt of kindness my people owe you, and I was warned when I left five years ago not to leave Australia without seeing you; but, indeed, I had not the chance till the other day, and I only heard your name, and learned who you were, after you had left Windabyne. My mother's name was Shewell, and her only brother — — ” I clasped his hand. Here was a link with the bye-gone days; a son of the sister whom Shewell so often spoke of seeking me out in memory of old friendship.

“I am going by the *Orient*, and meant only to intrude on you for a moment.”

“No, no!” I said, “you must not leave me like this. Shewell's sister's son must eat and drink with us, and there is much to tell that your mother would like to hear.” And so till midnight, in a wide stone balcony that looks over the star-lit waters of the Southern Venice, I spoke to my guest long of the pioneering days, and of our warm remembrance of him who sleeps beneath the shadow of Takilbaran.

And, in the morning, I saw him on board the *Orient*, when he told me

he had succeeded, by the death of a distant relative, to his estate of Castle Gelert in North Wales.

“Why,” I said, “you'll be in Melbourne for a couple of days. You may depend upon it, if you get an introduction to the Misses Ginger, they will make their father invite you to stay with them. Powys Meredith of Castle Gelert is a very different person from Tom Evans — though Louise did seem to appreciate the boundary-rider.”

“Yes — a vera interesting and discriminating young person, as Mr. MacClure remarked,” said Meredith.

“By-the-bye — how came you to be a boundary-rider?”

“Well, it's a common enough case. My two thousand pounds went into a huge squatting concern, and was mopped up in a bad year. I had neither friends, money, profession, nor trade, and I wasn't going home with my finger in my mouth. My choice to make a living seemed to lie between boundary-riding and the mounted police, and I preferred the first. Mrs. Grundy said at home that I was a black sheep, but it was a lie, Doing ordinary work is quite enough to blacken a man's name with some folks.”

A threatening scream of the steam whistle, and the jingle of a bell warned me to be off. “Good-bye — God bless you — good-bye,” and I was down the side into a skiff, where my Gibby and Jim were lying on their skulls.

One day, not long after, Mary, with tears in her eyes, looked over the rolling downs and the dark scrub to be seen from our verandah, for the view recalled memories of a like landscape, and as the voices that once made such a scene reecho came back to her, my wife and I stood by, in silent sympathy, for we knew what she was thinking of.

But now young voices are ringing in our ears, in earnest, for there comes round the corner with laugh and glee, a merry group. An old man is in his saddle, after having been a cripple for twenty-five years. Jack is once again in the beloved bush-land of his youth; and the girls press round him, and a stout little grey man, and an equally grizzled aboriginal, walk ahead to open the gate.

A chubby little rascal, with a huge, flapping hat, and mounted on a pony like a bear, sings out, “Aren't you coming too, Bob?”

“For shame, Reggy! Say, ‘Mr. Short,’ ” says tall sister Florry, as she gives him a shake, and ties his hatstrings.

“I calls him ‘Bob,’ ” says the rebel. “I say, Binebbera, cut me a stick to welt Donald.”

“Baal you want it stick — Donald run away,” says the last of the Yarombil tribe, for Walbaligo has fallen long ago before the Myall spear.

And thus the same scenes appear again and again upon the stage. The type continues, although the units change, like the leaves that fall, shaken from the boughs, year by year.

But there still remain with us, undimmed and undiminished, the

memory of our youthful days, and the warm friendship that bound us together, in our old home at Windabyne.

\* In the years 1876–7–8, several millions of acres were bought by lessees of runs, at 20s. to 25s. per acre, solely in order to resist the encroachments of selection.

\* Victoria and New South Wales.

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