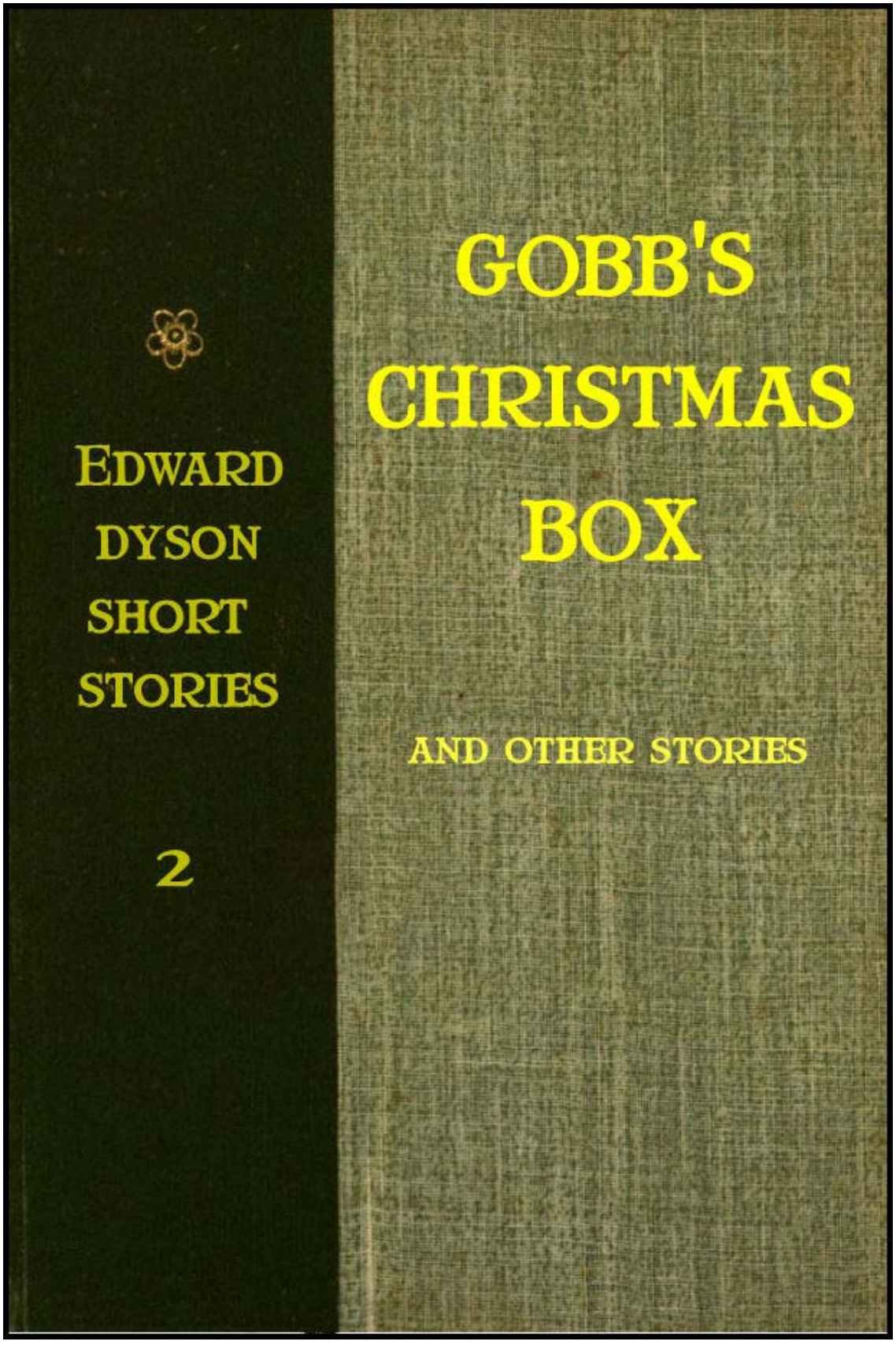
EDWARD
DYSON
SHORT
STORIES
2
GOBB'S
CHRISTMAS
BOX
AND OTHER STORIES

GOBB'S CHRISTMAS BOX

and other stories

EDWARD DYSON

This original collection edited and produced by Terry Walker, 5 April 2025

Edward Dyson
1865-1931
Australian journalist, poet, playwright, novelist, and short story writer

Edward Dyson was the son of a Mining Engineer, and he grew up on goldfields in Victoria and Tasmania. In 1883 the family settled in Melbourne and he worked as a factory hand, and took to writing. This proved so successful that he son became a full-time freelance writer under an ever-growing list of pseudonyms: Dy Edwardson; Ed Ward; Silas Snell; E.D.; Ward Edson; Eddyson; and many more.

While his contemporaries such as Henry Lawson wrote of the life in the bush and the suburbs, Dyson's unique upbringing led to many stories set in major mines, on factory floors, and shops. *Austlit*'s entry lists some 2,400 items— stories, poems and articles— by him.

———————

Contents

An Unexpected Pleasure

(as by Eddyson)
The Bulletin, 18 Mar 1920

THE front door is at the side, and there is a brick porch with two stone steps. He was seated on the top step, embracing his knees, a vague object in the gathering gloom, but I saw that he had a casual sort of a face, the features of which were just thrown together, like disconnected fragments on a plate, and he had one large round eye and moist whiskers. The other eye was negligible.

"This," I said, "is an unexpected pleasure." It was not exactly what I meant to say, but my office as carpet salesman at Gumin and Tumbledon's has afflicted me with a politeness that might be classed as automatic.

"'Sh, 'sh no goo'," he answered dolefully, "she won' le' me in."

He rocked himself, and made a low, moaning sound. "Fer twenny year I bin a good 'usban' to tha' woman, an' now in me sickness, me old age an' desolashun she won' le' me in."

Now I knew why his whiskers were wet— he had been crying into them for some time past.

"You had better get up and go home," I suggested. I have heard it is best to be gentle and propitiatory with commercial travellers in this state.

" 'Sh no goo'," he replied, with the air of a man for whom the w'orld held no greater calamity. "She won' le' me in." He took out his pocket handkerchief, spread it on the floor of the porch, and curled up on it.

"Goo' ni'." he said with a tremor in his voice. "Go' blesher!" He raised his head again. His large round eye was revolving vaguely in the dim light, seeking the person addressed, if any. "Sir or madam," he said, "as the case may be— Go' blesher!" His voice broke; he wept. "I was at peash wish all mankin', wouldn' 'urt a lit' pickled onion, 'n' she said: 'Getter hellenblazh outer thish, you dirty loafer, you filthy, drunken sot!' And she hit me onner head with sma' meat-axe— sma', black meat-axe. She chop a man's 'ead about terrible. Shee for 'shelf."

He held his ignominious head up for my inspection, and embraced my arm, and shivered, and said: "Don' leave me. Don' leave feller creasher to his doom. She's waitin'. She's gorrer sma' black meat-axe."

I knew he was quite mistaken. I had been married to the lady inside these seven years, and I was prepared to swear in the most solemn manner possible that she was incapable of using the language ascribed to her, and constitutionally unfitted for the use of a meat-axe upon a fellow creature.

"You had better get up out of this and go home," I repeated, growing firmer. I wished to convey that he was dealing with one who, though disposed to be kind, was not to be trifled with.

He resisted, punching vaguely at the atmosphere. " 'Ome, 'ome," he said, "there'sh no 'ome now for poor' lil' Johnnie Collinsh. 'Go, hang yourshelf,' she said. Hit me nine timesh on 'ead wish bo'l'. Nine timesh, nine bo'l's. Now I'm outcasht 'n' forlorn." He piped two lines of a sad song. "Alone, forshaken, weary of breath, In rags and in pain I'm awaitin' my death!" Then he cried again.

"Come along," I said, stern with him at last. "I can't have you loitering here."

He embraced my arm, his large eye sought me out. "One lash' 'quest," he said. "Bury me wish me mother. Bury poo' lil' Johnnie wish hish ole murrer." Then he hit me hard on the nose. "Ta' that," he said— "robbin' man of the 'feckshuns of hish lawful wedded."

I rolled him off the porch. I could hear my wife indoors agitatedly calling up the police on the telephone we did not possess. I endeavored to raise him to his feet, with the idea of walking him off the premises, but failed, so, taking him by the feet, and occupying his legs as a horse occupies the shafts of a vehicle, I towed him along the sanded path to the gate. He did not mind this treatment but conversed with me all the way.

"Bin a goo' and true 'usban' to that woman for 'leven years," he said. "She hash man on 'ead wish warrer jug— perfectly goo' warrer jug. 'Go back to your swipers, you dirry tripe-'ound.' she says. Unnerstan', my wife's a lady, but she has lapses. Broke lil' Johnnie's poo' 'ead clean in wirrer coal-shuttle."

We had arrived on the street asphalt. I deposited him in the grass-grown gutter and left him there, complaining that, though he had been tender and true, his wife had so far forgotten the faith of a good woman and the promptings of. humanity as to knock him nineteen times on the head with a blacksmith's hammer.

I closed and locked the gate after me, and went indoors. I found my wife on the verge of hysterics.

The unexpected pleasure had happened along half an hour earlier.

"I heard him maundering at the keyhole and would not open to him," Mrs. Titmuch explained between sobs, "and then he fell with his head against the door, and lay down in the porch, moaning and saying I was hitting him with the house. I pretended to call up the police, but he did not mind. He called me Agnes, and said I had blighted his life. Then he kissed me through the keyhole, and said he forgave me everything, because he was going to die under the pepper-tree or the lilac bush— I could please myself which."

I reassured Mrs. Titmuch, and she was presently more composed. She has great faith in me in situations calling for coolness, strength and daring, dear little woman! We had the evening meal, or, at least, portion of it. When the

sweet was served there came a sharp ring at the back-door bell, and presently the maid appeared with a white face.

"It's 'im again, Mrs. Titmuch," she faltered.

I went to the door, intending to be very severe. He was clinging to the door-post with one hand, and swaying about in the night.

" 'Scuse me," said he— "my wife! I don' wan' any arg'ment wi' you. Shust give man liish wife, 'n' call it square."

I told him his wife was not here, that I knew nothing of his wife, and urged him to be gone before I sent for the police— one policeman in particular, noted for his severity in dealing with such cases.

"She's a lil* wom'n gold-filled hair, ansherin' to the name of Agoness. I give you fi' min'ts to produce her, after which I break your flamin' jaw. Time'sh up!" He aimed a blow at me and hit the woodwork. With a low, long wail of anguish he lay down, nursing his hand. He said I had bitten him.

I took him by the legs again, and dragged him into the right-of-way. He was affable about it, and at the end of the journey said: "All ri', chauffeur, how mush ish that I owe you?"

I went indoors. Within an hour he was back knocking at the kitchen door. When I appeared, he said : " 'Sh all ri', lan'lor'. 'sh only me. You know me. I wanner drink. I wan' two drinks. One for me, one for my frien' 'ere." lie laid hold of my arm. and introduced me to myself. "Lan'lor', my frien' Hobson."

I tried to run him off the property, but he preferred being dragged. He lay down again, and said he had been hit repeatedly over the head with a bread crock. If there was a law in the land against hitting a man over the head, his own head, with his own bread crock, he would put that law in motion the instant he was released by the ruffians into whose hands he had fallen.

The back gate was still locked, still intact. I put him into the right-of-way. and returned wondering. He must have fallen over the front fence. Anyway, he reappeared in an hour. This time he whanged the front door-bell. The girl answered. She came to me, pale and trembling.

"It's 'im all right." she faltered. "He's out there wantin' to fight you. He says lie ain't in no 'urry, any time will do: jist suit yer convenience, lie says, 'cause when he starts on you he's goin' to kill you."

Sure enough little Johnnie was on the porch again.

"Goo' ev'nin'," he said. "Thish ish to a finish. You're dirry scoundrel, you rob a man of 'feckshuns of hish wife. You're bla'guard and ruffian, come 'n' have drink 'long o' me. Go'blesher, ole f'l'r! Go'blesher!" He then kissed my hand, and asked would I mind his dying on the porch. He promised to be very quiet about it.

"Wife's druv me forth, he said. " 'Appy 'ome's all broke up; villain's susurped the love of goo' a wifesh ash man ever had, sooled her on to break poo' head all to pieces wislia a bo'l'. Don' wanner live."

He then started fighting me, and went whirling all about the place, striking out blindly and wildly, swinging, jabbing, upper-cutting, hooking and ripping with great energy. I remained on the porch watching the battle, and when he fell, and was biting his opponent on the ground, I seized his legs and the cortege moved once more.

We had been in bed perhaps two hours when the maid came calling faintly at our door. "Oh, please, sir, he's there again," she said. "I can hear him in the wash-house. He's snorin', and sayin' his prayers somethin' dreadful."

I went forth. It was perfectly true. He had dragged out the contents of the linen basket, and made a bed for himself on the brick floor, where he lay, bemoaning his hapless lot. He was still troubled about the battering his head had received, and the temporary loss of his wife, whose hair, he complained, had changed color again. As I was towing him out he explained that he was a roofless outcast. He sang as I bumped him across the yard: " 'Omeless, forsaken, frien'less, through this worl' I roam."

I could not understand how he had been making his way back to my property, and this time I determined to watch. Standing in my gateway I saw him stagger up the narrow lane, cannoning from one fence to the other, and crying the faithlessness and cruelty of his wife (the lady with the variable hair) to the sleeping night. He disappeared into Free-street. I went to the front, and saw him come rocking round into Birchway-avenue. He stood off in the middle of the road, and with a finger raised in the pale moonlight counted off the houses from the corner. Then holding the finger straight in front of him as a guide, he dived for the front gate of the house next door on my right. This house was now inhabited by people I had never met. The new tenant had only shifted in within a week.

I waited and watched. A quarter of an hour slipped by. I moved along the dividing fence, awaiting developments, and presently heard low voices in the yard next door. At the same moment two broad palings of the dividing fence were swung aside at the bottom, and little Johnnie appeared, or at least some portion of little Johnnie. Obviously he was not coming through of his own volition. He was being pushed through; and was showing some resistance.

I sprang upon the fence. A tall, iron-boned female, in a roaring carpet-patterned kimono, with hair the gilt of which glimmered in the moonlight, had John down on his back, and was deliberately shoving him through the fence on to my property.

"Madam," I said severely, "may I ask what is the meaning of this?"

She looked up at me. "I can't have him here." she said. "You can see that for yourself."

"But I've got nothing to do with him. He's no connection of mine. Why should I be plagued with him?" I cried.

"And what of me?" said she— "what of me? I suppose you'll admit I'm entitled to a little peace and quiet— a little sleep. As for his being no connection of yours, you need not tell me that. I know perfectly well who his connections are. He is my husband!"

And then she pushed him through.

I am not living in Birchway-avenue now.

The Interfering Boss

(As by Eddyson)

The Bulletin, 16 Jul 1914

WE are enjoined to do at least one good deed daily, and the idea is excellent in principle, but not always so satisfactory in practice.

Take Bannerman's good deed. Bannerman looked into an old hut at Scotchman's, seeking a lost cow, and discovered Billy Bull hanging by his neck to a rafter. Bannerman promptly cut the rope, and Billy Bull fell to the floor, breaking a small bone in his leg. It now became Bannerman's duty to procure a trap and cart Bull to cover. Bull, having no home of his own, was taken to Bannerman's. Meanwhile the cow, which had bogged in Wee Creek, was suffocated. Bannerman got a doctor to Billy Bull, and had the broken leg timbered at his own expense, the doctor declining to act on a written guarantee from the patient, mainly because Bull was a notoriously incompetent and inactive person. The Bannermans nursed and fed Billy Bull, impressed to some extent by Billy's argument.

" 'Coz why?" said Billy, "if the boss didn't go an' spile me bangin' I wouldn't ha' bin up agin it no more. I wouldn't 'av' 'ad t' work, an' I wouldn't ha' wanted fer nothink, includin' beer. Moreover, the boss he broke me leg, an' spoilt me rope."

When Bull could limp about, Bannerman gave him half a sovereign, and bade him a touching farewell. But Bull went no farther than the pub at Scotchman's; after which he returned as full as a blown balloon, and sat in Bannerman's kitchen, and wept and wailed, bemoaning his unhappy lot in being still in a weary world, a world of wickedness and deceit, that exacted so much from a wretched man endowed with no gifts for work.

"I was orl right," Billy snivelled, "I was fair 'arf-way out iv it when a thoughtless feller lays 'old an' drags me back into a sphere iv sin an' sorrer an' sufferin', sufferin' an' sin an' sorrer. Lord forgive 'im!"

Eventually Bannerman had to throw Bull off his property, advising him at the same time that if he reappeared he would be liable to attack. Billy was back next day, arguing over the fence, while Bannerman thinned his turnips.

"You brought it on yerself," he said. "Here was me willin' an' eager t' die, an' more 'n 'arf done fer, an' you goes an' spiles it all. Bringin' me inter the world agin makes you more or less me father in a manner iv speakin'. That bein' so, it's on'y right fer you t' give me a shillin' now an' agin, also bed an' board, seein' I ain't got the courage t' hang meself no more, likewise me rope spoilt."

Bannerman told him to "get."

"Oh, very well," Mr. Bull replied ; "under them circumstances it's me dooty t' tell the people hereabouts what you done. I ain't what's known ez pop'lar in this district, an' if the people knowed, they'd maybe make it pretty warm for yeh."

"What the devil have I done?" thundered Bannerman.

"You stopped me from hangin' meself, Mr. Bannerman, you know you did, an' what you ain't been game t' tell I'll have ter if you're goin' t' allow a man t' thirst an' hunger in a world what yeh litterly dragged him back inter regardless iv his personal feelin's."

Bannerman saw the force of the argument. For three years Scotchman's had been very anxious to be rid of Billy Bull, who was reckoned in with rabbits, pleuro and codlin moth, and if Scotchman's knew that the continuance of the infliction was due to a rash act on Bannerman's part, Bannerman would certainly come in for public dislike. Bannerman capitulated; he kept Billy Bull loafing round the farm for another month, at the end of which time Billy's complaints had become unbearable.

"It's sad, boss," Billy would say through his tears and beers, "but I kin never forgive yeh, never. Here I might ha' bin bedded down fer good, an' et peace with me Maker, but fer your insolent interference. All that I suffer an' endoor I owe t' you. Yorter be ashamed iv yerself— ashamed t' look ver victim in the face."

It was after a bitter complaint of this sort lasting over two hours that Bannerman again kicked Bull into the night, telling him to do his damnedest. Billy did. He told all Scotchman's that when he was on the point of being well and truly hanged, Bannerman had cut him down. He appealed to Scotchman's to say whether in such circumstances he had not a moral, lawful and holy claim upon Bannerman. Scotchman's was wild with indignation; it held that Bannerman would be served right if visited with the whole upkeep of Bull. Bannerman found himself something of a pariah. When Bull went to sleep in Cruden's fowlhouse, Cruden called and insisted on Bannerman removing his deadbeat. Bannerman denied possession ; Cruden used coarse words, and there was a fight.

The thing became utterly unbearable, and one day, when Billy put in an appearance at the garden fence with his dolorous complainings, Bannerman turned on him with great bitterness.

"Blast yer eyes, I ain't stopping you from hanging' yourself now, am I?"

"No," replied Bull, "but you cut me rope."

Bannerman went straight to the stable. He returned immediately, with a neat coil of half-inch Manila cord. He threw it at Billy.

"Good day," he said. Billy took up the rope, and examined it carefully. "It ain't ez good ez me own," he said, "but I s'pose it'll do."

Then he went away. Bannerman watched him go into the old hut. Then he sat on the fence for two hours to warn off any casual resident who might have entered the hut and interfered with Billy's execution.

Bannerman did not find the body. He had washed his hands of Billy. But at the township pub that night he announced that all was well— Billy Bull had hanged himself again. However, there were differences of opinion— Pope had seen Billy going towards Hill End, leading a bay mare on a Manila rope. The bay mare was Bannerman's. It never returned.

_____

A *Bulletin* Story

(as by Silas Snell)
The Bulletin, 18 Aug 1900

THIS IS A TRUE *Bulletin* story, and as the moral is somewhat derogatory, I have hope of its seeing print. The moral comes first, for a change, and it strenuously advises you not to keep your back-numbers about the house.

The stranger struck Abe's selection when the sun was straddling Bald Head. He dropped his bundle by the front-door, sank down in the shade, gasping, and lay still whilst the hens prospected inquisitively amongst his rags, and Tige, the cattle-dog, sniffed him over resentfully, and the red calf chewed his boot.

Abe found him in this condition, and helped him into the kitchen. He had tea with the family that evening, and ate a great deal, and drank four pints. The feed made a new man of the wanderer, and developed in him a vein of cheery optimism. He talked right along till midnight. He knew Abe's family in Lancashire, and had heard of Mrs. Abe's people in London. He had been everywhere and everything, from university professor to cook's understudy on a guano-boat, and he knew of all things on the earth, in the waters below, and the heavens above. He smoked Abe's tobacco with beatific disregard of cost, and beguiled Mrs. Abe, mysteriously, and much to her own after-amazement, into bringing forth the precious brandy from the medicine-chest— a kerosene-box behind the bedroom door. He said his name had been Andy Johns for this last month or so, and before the brandy was finished he distinctly remembered meeting Mrs. Abe's brother Tom at Kimberley, and believed he had been mates with a cousin of Abe's in the West.

Abe made up a bed for the guest in the spare room. When he returned to the kitchen after bidding Mr. Johns good-night, he looked sheepishly over at Mrs. Abe. Mrs. Abe made a heroic effort to look as if she had no such thing as a suspicion about her, and the two retired in an unusually thoughtful mood.

Andy Johns was up bright and early in the morning, and ate a big breakfast, and when Abe was shuffling about preparatory to moving off to his job at Oldham's Johns said:

"So long, old man. Don't you mind me; I'll be all right. I see you've got a big pile of old *Bulletins* in my room. I'll just go over them, if you don't mind."

Abe gasped and walked away dubiously, pausing once or twice before reaching the track as if to turn back and move Mr. Johns out; but Abe was a soft and rather diffident man, and nothing was done that day to incommode the stranger within their gate.

Mr. Johns spent the day amongst The Bulletins, and in the evening was full of gay prattle about The Bulletin and Bulletin writers, one of the most conspicuous and gifted amongst whom, it was hinted, was the speaker himself,

who wrote over an alias. The stranger declared that he had earned a great deal as an author at one time, and was certain he could do as much again under the stimulating influence of three meals a day, and in the calm of those peaceful surroundings. Complete quiet and generous feeling, he said, he had always found absolutely essential to sustained intellectual effort. He would begin contributing again presently, and the first cheque that came along— well, he was not an ungrateful man. Did it occur to either of them that he was the kind of man that would be likely to forget a kindness? No, no; those who had shared their little with him would be his chosen companions in prosperity. Meanwhile it was necessary for him to familiarise himself again with *The Bulletin* style, and he intended continuing his study of those back-numbers next day.

Mr. Johns spent the second day and the third day over the back-numbers, and Abe, who had made up his mind a dozen times to clear him out, and had failed miserably in the face of the sunny smile and bland manner of his guest, was developing a morbid condition of self-contempt, and would sit out between the chimneys brooding, whilst Johns lolled comfortably indoors, poring over those old *Bulletins*. On the fourth night Abe conceived a plan. He stole into the spare room, seized about a hundred papers from the bottom of the pile, dropped them out of the window, climbed out after them, and then carried them away and hid them in a hollow tree, returning to the kitchen with the air of a convicted thief. Before Sunday came, Abe made two more shameful, surreptitious visits to the spare room, and got away with nearly the whole of *The Bulletins*, leaving only those Mr. Johns had read. The visitor made no comment on the disappearance of the papers, but devoted Sunday to the composition of a poem, for which, he said, he would receive ten pounds by return of post, and Abe wasted his day of rest mooning about fretfully, trying to make up his mind to eject the poet, and failing pitifully.

That evening Mr. Johns gave Abe an envelope addressed to the editor of *The Bulletin*. The envelope was supposed to contain the ten-pound poem, and Abe was expected to post it m the township next morning.

"We'll have the cheque along in less'n a week," said Mr. Johns.

When the unwelcome stranger had retired for the night, Abe took up the envelope, and glanced dubiously over at Mrs. Abe. Mrs. Abe nodded her head, and a large, hard thumb went through the wrapper. There was no poem— nothing, in fact, but a few sheets of old print.

That was the last straw. Abe rose to the occasion, morally and physically. Quietly, but with a steely glare in his eye and an ominous rigidity of the jaw, he stole to the tool-box, armed himself with hammer and nails, and, going to the door of the spare-room, began to nail it up. He drove in about a pound of nails

before he was satisfied, and then paused for the remonstrance; but Mr. Johns spoke never a word.

"You can leave by the window, mate— or stay where you are, and be damned to you!" said Abe through the keyhole; after which he went to bed. Next morning, the poet appeared at the kitchen door, carrying his swag.

"I'm thinkin' about going," he said. "No, Mrs. Abe, I will not stop to breakfast. No, no— thanks very much, all the same."

He moved away, but returned presently, and addressed them through the open window.

"About our little account. You can take what I owe you out of that Bulletin *cheque, when it comes, and send the rest on to me. Address Menzies, Melbourne."*

That was the last they saw of him.

———————

An Awful Night

(As by Silas Snell)

Christmas Number, *The Bulletin*, 8 Dec 1900

MR. JOSHUA LILLY had been detained in the city by what he called a fortuitous concourse of events, and long after midnight he started on foot for his home in a distant suburb, hoping to be overtaken on the way by a belated cab. No cab came in the course of the first mile, and Mr. Joshua Lilly was tempted by considerations of Mrs. Joshua— a large woman who always sought explanations and never accepted them— to take a short cut across Jamtin Flat, a level sweep of land reclaimed out of a swamp. The rain came, and hapless Mr. Lilly, scurrying like a wet hen, was washed across the railway line into Quob's Corner.

Quob's Corner is a tangled section of a poor suburb, hopelessly cut off from respectability, and given over to impoverished drunkards and mean, ambitionless criminals. Joshua Lilly, the very acme of respectability when dry and with his linen in good order, knew nothing of the reputation of Quob's Corner, but its dark, desolate streets chilled him, and something like terror chased him though the pelting rain.

He was one of those thin, sleek, twittering little men who contrive to support a dignity in fair weather and under favorable circumstances, but his claim upon popular respect was due almost entirely to starch. Starch was his moral backbone, and with a limp shirt and a sodden collar he was a pulpy, characterless mute, washing about in the darkness of Quob's Corner, and most devoutly he wished himself at home.

Suddenly, hastening along, head down, boring his way through the rain, Joshua collided smartly with some tremendous mass which seemed to open and envelop him. For a few moments he swayed about helplessly, moved by the mighty bulk, and then he got his head free, and discovered to his great joy that he was in the hands of the police.

"It's all right, officer!" he gasped; "I'm just on my way home."

He was clasped tighter, tucked under the abundant arm of the law, and the officer swayed above him like a willow wand stirred by a gale.

Presently, the myrmidon began to drift to leeward; then he brought up with a jerk, and went over to windward, righted again, and stood oscillating from his base with the movements of a nautch-dancer, and Lilly drifted or danced with him, feeling strangely like a ladybird tackling a mastodon.

"Really, constable— most respectable man," protested Mr. Lilly; "name of Joshua Lilly. Kept late— fortuitous events, you know."

But his custodian was off again, driving wildly up the street this time, with a dangerous list to port and the strange aimlessness of a strip of paper careering

in the wind. He ran aground against a brick building, on which he leaned to recover his breath, still clinging desperately to Joshua, who had lost his hat in the flight and had been towed in the mud for half the distance.

"Come, I say, Mr. Policeman," protested Lilly, with pitiful indignation, " this is too bad, sir— too bad altogether!"

The officer of the law was quite oblivious; he clung to Joshua automatically, as he might have clung to any trifling article he had picked up in passing, and gazed far off into the night with dim, unseeing eyes, and began to sing, beating time vaguely with his free hand:

"She's the mosh dishtreshful counthry
that ever yit was seen;
They are hangin' min an' winimin
for the wearin' av the green."

The policeman propped himself at a more comfortable angle with his back to the building, and the rain sluiced down, and ran in miniature falls off his waterproof. A convenient street-lamp illumined his gigantic proportions with a sickly glimmer, but up and down the street ranged the black, silent houses, and not another living soul could Lilly see anywhere. A town clock struck two. Joshua was wet, dirty, and filled with misery; he recognised the awful truth, and his heart sank within him like a thing of lead. The law was drunk— fatuously, fantastically drunk. He thought of Mrs. Lilly again, and revolted weakly.

"Let me go, policeman. This is an outrage. If you don't let me go I shall most certainly report you."

"O, the French are on the say,
Siz the shan van vocht
The French are on the say,
Siz the shan van vocht*; "*

sang the oblivious policeman. But this time he endeavored to beat time with his left hand, and Joshua was in that hand. The resistance irritated the officer; he made another effort and brought his captive into view, and held him suspended for a moment, blinking at him in stupid curiosity. For the first time he was conscious that he possessed Joshua.

"I insist that you release me at once," gasped Joshua— "at once, sir, do you hear?"

The constable did not hear. He was thinking, thinking, thinking, gazing amazedly at his prize the while.

"Fwhere the divil did I get id?" he murmured in troubled accents.

"I ran into your arms," protested Joshua. "An accident— quite an accident!"

The policeman continued his wondering self-catechisation.

"Fwhin did I arrist id, an' whoi ? "

"I am not arrested," cried Lilly. " Eh— eh, constable, would— eh— half -a-crown—" He held up the shining coin.

The policeman's eyes centred on the half-crown for a moment, then he took it mechanically, and, as a matter of habit, dropped it into his pocket.

"Look here, me mahn," he said; "how long have ye bin undther arrist, an' who the divil are ye, anyhow?"

Lilly opened up in explanation, but his captor had suddenly forgotten him, and had drifted into boozy song again.

"There's a dear little plant that growsh in our Oile,
'Twas Sint Pathrick himself sure that sit id

See here (hic), it'sh no kind av use ye prevaricathin'. I'll get ye six munths fer dthis, phwativer it ish," said he, becoming unexpectedly conscious of Lilly again, and shaking an impressive forefinger at that worried citizen.

Lilly denied everything, and struggled with the inveterate hand that held him. It was as if a mosquito wrestled with a smoke-stack.

"I misrewmember fwhat 'twash ye did an' whin ye did id, but I'm sartin ye're the guilty man, so come aisy an' decent, or I'll bate ye sick an' sore."

Lilly fought with the energy of despair, but they were off again, lurching through the floods of rain, battling through the slush, and Hooley led his prisoner as a thoughtless small boy leads a toy terrier, unconscious of his weight and careless of his bones. Once or twice Joshua cried for help, but his breath was gone from him, and nothing short of the murder of a policeman would draw Quob's Corner bodily from its bed. Up and down shabby streets, and in and out of dirty lanes, the tremendous man hauled his new find, at first with a dim idea of finding the watchhouse, but later with no purpose in the world. He ran into a tree-guard at last, and, seeing no way through, stayed there, and sang a wild Fenian song at the top of his voice. In the middle of the third verse he discovered Joshua once more, and with almost as much surprise as on the former occasion.

"Here ye are again," he said in troubled accents.

"Help! Help! Help!" cried the wretched captive at the top of his small, thin voice.

"Ye've bin a great throuble t'me, ye have," continued Hooley, reproachfully.

Joshua repeated his shrill appeal, and Hooley drew his baton and struck out in an indefinite, dispassionate sort of way, raising a sudden bump on the little man's head and driving him into terrified silence.

"I do be rigrittin' me kindness to ye," said Hooley. " It's ivident ye're a bad mahn— l must take precahtions."

He produced his handcuffs, snapped one ring on his left wrist, and the other on Lilly's right.

"Now, we'll sarch fer the body," he said, brightly. "Ye'll take me straight t' the murthered mahn. It's great honor I'll have out av thish noight's wor-r-k— honor an' gloory an' prifarmint."

He took flight with the wind, and Lilly went with him. In spite of his fat, Hooley had marvellous endurance, and after doing three laps round the square he was so little distressed by his frantic spin and the burden of Lilly that he fetched-up in the middle of the road with his back to the storm, and sang a song in a roaring baritone.

Somebody in the second storey of a squalid residence hard by threw up a window and hurled curses and crockery, also some knobs off an iron bedstead. Lilly seized his opportunity.

"Help! Help! Oh, help!" he moaned.

"Get home, ye silly old cow!" cried a voice out of the darkness, and the window rattled down.

And still the warm rain marched over the belated couple in succeeding battalions, rank after rank, and Hooley sang and Lilly moaned feebly, and, in accents that might have touched a heart of beaten brass, pleaded with the insensate monster to whom he was riveted. The little man had never been so utterly wretched in all his life. He was soaked through and through; his legs were limp, and the very heart seemed washed out of him. Half-a-dozen times he had been rolled in the mud, and half-a-dozen times the rain had sluiced him clean again. He was a mere atom on the end of Hooley's tether, and was whisked hither and thither with as much thought as a mastiff gives to the wagging of his tail.

Square in the middle of the road, leaning upon the wind, with the storm-waters sweeping from the great sides of him, the constable sang the woes of Ireland, and his turbulent song chorded well with the roar of the elements ; but a momentary cessation of the gale left Hooley at the mercy of the law of gravitation, and he plunged bodily into the mud, throwing Joshua far and wide.

There was a lull while Joshua lay on his back with outspread limbs, winded and quite beaten, and the policeman rested, blinking up through the rain, deliberately collecting his faculties and weighing the evidence.

When Lilly cared to recollect and to think of precautions, he found Hooley crawling on his knees, and clawing in the mud, and moaning in his desolation.

“I’ve bin sthruck— sthruck bitter. Och! Saints give him into me hand fwad done it. Are ye there, ye dir-rty scut, ye! Oh! oh! Ned Hooley, ye’re by the way av’ bein’ killed. An’ me poor mother— me poor owld mother! Me head! Me head— oh, me bad head! Where are ye that hit me? Let me get the hand on ye, an’ I’ll tear ye bone an’ body.”

He continued prospecting vaguely in the mud, repeating the words “bone an’ body” as if the phrase pleased him, and Lilly realised that it would not be good to fall into the clutch of his enemy whilst that mood was upon him, and crept by his side very warily, careful not to bear upon the bond that bound them. All in vain. After they had been crawling for a minute or two Hooley chanced a hand in the middle of Joshua’s back, bearing the little man flat into the mud, and then began an insane scramble on the roadside, in which the captive was fumbled violently, but without sustaining much hurt. Then Hooley lost him in the dirt and confusion, and went creeping straight ahead in quest of his enemy, muttering softly of saints and manslaughter, and towing Joshua behind him through the puddles.

The constable ran his head against a wall after a five minutes’ search, gave the matter due consideration, and then rolled over and sat in a pool, and babbled of lovely woman. The clock struck three.

Lilly curled under the lee of the Law and rested, and gave thanks while Hooley’s scandalous soliloquy ran on, but an eloquent gesture drew the captive over the knees of the captor, and the officer apprehended an insult.

"Sorr, ye’re inthrusive,” he said loftily. He frew Joshua close to him, and peered at his face in the darkness. “Was we intherjuced?” he asked.

At this point he discovered the connecting link, and recollected deliberately and with great effort.

“Yis, yis, yis,” he said, “av coorse, I mind ye. ’Twas murther, an’ we was foindin’ the body.” He changed his tone to one of fretful remonstrance.

“Ye’ve been a sore throuble t’me this blissid noight— a wearin’ throuble. ’Twasn’t dacent av ye t’ bate me, an’ me wid a fam’ly, an’— an’ a big sorra!”

Joshua ventured a word or two, pleading and consolatory, but felt the baton chopping at him and desisted.

“Ye’ve give me the ondacent long chase for ye— an ondacent long chase for a man o’ my time an’ wid a big sorra.”

Joshua knew that the Law was weeping, but wisely refrained from comment.

"I take it onkind of ye. An' ye assaulted me in the execution av me juty. I mind ye dishthroyed me uniform beyant in the mud. 'Twas onchristyin. I'm a weary man an' a man wid a great sorra, an' ye've chased me troo the mud, an' ye've murth'rously assaulted me, an' ye've done murther this night. Me wid the bitter grief on me! I was thrue to her, I tell ye. I'm disaved an' malthrated." Hooley wept maudlin tears and talked of many varied tribulations, sitting up in his pool the while, and Joshua never ventured an answer.

"She's discar-rded me for that hay then Portygee from Belgium—me that was thrue an' lovin' to her— thrue to her for sivin weeks, barrin' the woife, who don't count. Och! och! me hear-rt's breakin'— breakin' it is! Oh, the cruel wor-rld! Disarted me, a dacent married Christian, for a Portygee haythen from Belgium! "

Mr. Hooley's grief quite overcame him, and his vast bulk was shaken with sobs. It was long ere he regained control of his emotion, and then he continued to maunder, speaking softly; pitiful was the moan of the strong man in his agony. Lilly had crept to the lee again, and there, sheltered by the vigilant officer, he lay close and silent. Any cry or movement from him brought the baton snapping automatically at his head, and the little man had long since given up all hope of a rescue. He was deeply grateful for this rest for his aching and weary bones, and presently found himself drifting into sleep. The clock struck 4, and the rain still fell. The unhappy prisoner was awakened by a violent wrench at his handcuff. Hooley was saying in a low, passionless voice—

"Hows'm'ever ye've done murther this noight, an' murther's a misdimanor an' a offince undther the Act. We'll sarch fer the body, an' 'tis a sarjint I'll be in the mornin'."

The constable climbed to his feet with some difficulty, and jerked Lilly up after him; then he balanced himself and reflected.

"Ye bate me!" he said, trembling again on the verge of tears, "an' ye've wore the sowl out av me wid the owdacious tratemint, but in the name av hivin get me a dhrink, an' I'll forgive ye iverythin'— iverythin', moind."

Hooley indulged in another erratic flight around the block, crying aloud for strong drinks, and then he dragged Joshua into a black, evil-smelling lane, and presently found a snug retreat for himself amongst a wheelwright's lumber, where there were dry shavings in a long, narrow case that had once contained corrugated iron. The policeman made his bed in the box and lay there indulging in occasional bursts of song, but for the most of the time bewailing his misfortunes and the faithlessness of woman, leaving his prisoner out in the mud and the rain.

Joshua was careless now if he lived or died, and half convinced that he *was* dead and had gone to hell, condemned to be dragged through an endless night of rain and dirt by this gibbering fiend that knew not manners nor ruth. After a while Hooley's chummerings had a soporific effect on Joshua, who would have slept again, but Hooley tugged him back into a full consciousness of his misery.

"Are ye there, ye wicked mahn?" moaned the policemen. "There'sh blood on yeer hands, an' ye have a bad hear-rt; but I'm alone an' tore wid me sorra. Sing to me, Charley."

The request was made in the voice of a tired child, but, as there was no response, a jerk of the chain brought Lilly smartly to attention.

"Sing to me!" demanded the Law.

"I do not sing, policeman; I have no voice. I beg your pardon, but— but—"

Hooley struck out from his box with the baton "Soothe me wid song," he said.

Lilly began to sing in a husky treble. For the life of him he could think of nothing but "Hey diddle-diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon," and he sang that three or four times over.

"'Tis a dthrunken low song, Charley, an' ye have no larnin' in music, but ye may sing. Ye can't rifuse it to a dyin' mahn, Charley, dear— dyin' in nade av a dhrop av dhrink. Sing to me."

Kneeling in the outer darkness and dampness, Joshua crooned his ridiculous song over the mountain of gross flesh spread out upon the shavings, and all the time Hooley hiccuped weakly of woman and drink and his besetting sorrow. Coming day softened the darkness into greyness, and Lilly sang on. The babbling of Hooley grew fitful and drowsy; sleep was pressing hard upon him, and Joshua, bowed above him, dreamed of escaping before the coming of the sun. He recollected another song, and changed his tune to "Hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree-top," and no mother lisping over her restless babe ever threw such depths of precious feeling, such soothing fervor, into the simple old cradle ditty.

The policeman slept, and Lilly sang on till Hooley's snore had deepened and broadened into an emphatic assurance of sound slumber, and then he allowed his song to die gradually, and commenced a cautious, but eager, hunt in the policeman's clothes for the key of the handcuffs. In those few moments Joshua developed all the insidious faculties of a gifted pickpocket; he was as insinuating as a serpent, as soft as a dove. He discovered the key at length. In his haste and anxiety he unlocked the cuff from Hooley's wrist, and in a few seconds the sorely-tried and long-suffering citizen was speeding towards his home in the dim light of the new-born day.

On reaching the street in which he lived, Lilly noticed, for the first time, that the handcuffs dangled from his wrist. He had left the key with Hooley.

Hatless and ghastly pale; tattered, breathless, muddy, handcuffed, and sopping wet, Mr. Joshua tottered into the shelter of his own home and the arms of his waiting spouse. What happened thereafter is another story.

_____

The Bag o' Spuds

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 15 Dec 1906

"WON'T YOU do it for my sake, Con? Make it a Christmas promise, dear."

"I'd die for you, Tish."

The impetuous young man gathered the girl in a hug that would not have discredited a big, brown bear of an amiable, disposition, and burrowed his face lovingly into her thick hair.

"Oh, that's all very well," said Letitia, shaking herself free, and adopting a decided tone, "but it isn't business-like. I know you'd die for me, or do any kind of foolishness, but will you settle down and work for me? Will you clear the land, and put in a crop, and build a decent house, and get some cows about you? Will you give up mooching all over the country like a vagabond sundowner, scraping the earth for silly specks of gold? Will you do something sensible for me? What would I want with you dying for me?"

Con broke a splinter from the rail against which he was leaning, and chewed reflectively.

"But, you know, I'm morally bound, to find that reef one of these days, old girl. It's simply a cert. I can't miss it," he argued.

"You've missed it pretty successfully for seven years, mister— ever since you came to Dogwood."

Con nodded. "Yes, but it's there. Where else does the gold in the creek come from? There's a reef there, safe as eggs, and one day I'll cut it, you see if I don't."

Con resorted to the conciliatory hug again. "Pretty man you are to take up land! Pretty farmer you'll ever make! Pretty fellow you are to go and make a girl fuf-fond of you!"

Tish broke away once more, and faced her sweetheart, flushed and petulant. "Dad is quite right about you; you'll never get a home of your own, never in this world. He's quite right not to let me be engaged to you, or to have anything whatever to do with you. You— you make me that wild!"

Con drew her back to his side. "Say, you ain't going to cry, are you, Tish?" he asked anxiously.

"I don't believe you care one scrap about me — not one scrap."

"Oh, come, that isn't true. You know I'd die— you know I'm just mad about you."

Tish sighed comfortably in his strong arms.

"I'm not good enough for you that's true; not a quarter good enough," he went on; "but there ain't any doubt about my loving you. 'Pon my soul, I've tried to settle down to the land, but I ain't cut out for it. My old man was a

miner and a fossicker and prospector pretty well all his life, and ever since I was a nipper that high I've been nosing about after specimens, and following up indications, and pottering round all over the shop after lodes or leads. It's a sort of gipsy fever; it gets in your blood. Once a man's got the gold- seeking craze he's a crank about it for the rest of his days; it won't let him be still."

"Look out!" cried the girl, in sudden alarm, tearing herself from his arms. "Run for your life; here's dad."

Con did not stay to argue. He started from scratch in a fine sprint. A stone missed his ear, and cracked against a tree; a short stick took him fair and hard in the middle of the back, but he ran on, and a fierce voice yelled after him with intense bitterness:

"Ah-h, yeh loafer! I'll break yer back for yeh, I will."

Con ceased running when well out of range, and ruefully rubbed his damaged bans. Then a slow grin moved across his tanned face.

"The old man's getting to be a darned good shot," he said; "bust him!"

"A blackguard like you t' come courtin' a man's daughter! A waster like you! By the Lord. I'll lame yeh."

Steve Martin was not more than 5ft. 4in. in height, and Con Ogilvie was quite six inches higher, but the fiery little man did not doubt his ability to smash up his enemy, and Con never failed to encourage him in that belief by resorting to ignominious flight when the old man opened an attacks .

"Be off, you!" cried Martin, turning on his daughter. "Back to the house, I baggage!" He wheeled round, and shook his two fists at Con again. "I'll beat the life out of yeh, I will that, yeh common loafer!" he yelled.

Martin was flushed with righteous wrath. He hobbled after his daughter, tripping over bark and sticks, and muttering furious complaints and bitter abuse of Ogilvie.

"Lot a good a man talkin' to you, me fine lady," he gasped; "but I'll show yeh. I'll pack you out of this. Off to yer Aunt Jinny yeh go. It's somethin' if a man's t' be kept from his business day an night, huntin' the likes of yeh. I'll teach yeh, madam. The crawlin', creepin', idle ruffian!"

Martin turned once more, and whirled his fists at the bush where young Ogilvie had disappeared. Letitia was walking homeward at a leisurely gait and with a cool indifference that her affectionate parent found extremely aggravating. He hopped and skipped by her side, uttering be familiar threats, and Mrs Martin, watching from the kitchen door at the farmhouse, prepared the usual homily for Miss Letitia, a long and eloquent address, bearing on the awful fate of disobedient daughters.

The scene just enacted was no new thing to the actors. Scores of times Mr. Martin had hunted young Ogilvie off his land. Dozens of times he had come on

him unawares, and assaulted him grievously, and Con had invariably sought safety in ignominious flight, for Steve was Tish's father, and a privileged person. In no circumstances must he be assailed, and Con recognised his own deficiencies, and the righteousness of the parental cause, but he loved Tish too dearly to think of giving her up, and yet the drift of the gold-seeker was in his bones, and not to be denied.

In ten years Steve Martin had developed from a mere settler into a prosperous farmer, fruit-grower, poultry-breeder, and beekeeper, and after seven years Con was little more than a settler still. He had observed the covenants, he had fenced his 300 acres, he had cleared a few patches, he had made something of an orchard and something like a vegetable garden, but for him there was neither satisfaction nor profit in all this. He loved to prowl the adjacent hills, trenching and loaming for the rich reef, the existence of which was a tradition of Dogwood, the belief in it a relic of the old, disreputable days when Dogwood was a roaring mining centre.

During those seven years Con had been off after five rushes in distant places, and of late he had only lingered in Dogwood because of the amazing development in little Tish Martin, who from being a disregarded hobbledehoy of a girl had been suddenly transformed into a brown-cheeked, bright-eyed beauty, a something inexplicable, unexplainable, adorable— an everlasting wonder.

After coming back from Frying-pan, Con had gazed at this strange, new creature for five solid, silent minutes, and then had abandoned all reserve, all restraint, and simply collapsed into a state of reverent devotion. He was in a new world, or he saw the old world in a new way, and Letitia Martin was his sun, moon and stars. There was no light without her.

Tish could do anything with Con but destroy his faith in the reef, or make a good, sensible, stay-at-home farmer of him. When her father called the young man a loafer he merely resorted to a convenient term of abuse; Con could work like a steam plough for other men, and did when he needed money, but the vagrant fancy of the prospector always dragged him away again.

Love laughs at homilies, and Tish contrived to meet her lover in the orchard that night, and there she renewed her efforts to win him over to practical husbandry. Letitia was very fond of Con, indeed; but although a disobedient daughter, she was an affectionate one, and did not dream of carrying her revolt to the extent of marrying Ogilvie without the paternal consent. Besides, she was not yet nineteen.

"Won't you try and be friends with dad," she pleaded— "won't you, Con, for my sake?"

Con gave a gesture of despair.

"What's a fellow to do?" he said. "I let him pelt me with stones, and knock my head half off with a waddy; he can sool his dog on me, and call me all the blanky scamps from Geelong to breakfast, and I don't murmur. Be friends with him! I like that."

"There," cried the girl. "That shows all you care. You pretend I am all the world to you, and you won't hear of anything to help us. You're fooling me."

Con pulled her to him, despite her struggles.

"Yes, you are! You are! You are— just fooling. You don't want to marry me."

Angry tears were on her cheeks.

"Don't I want to marry you? Well, come with me to town to-morrow, if you're game. Don't want to marry you! See here, dearie, what's a fellow to do? Suppose I settled down, and put in a couple of years' hard slogging on the land, what proof have I that your father wouldn't hate me as much as ever? How do I know I won't be turned down after all?"

"It's only because you don't attempt to get something like a farm about you," protested Letitia. "I'm sure dad would be pleased with you if you were shaping well on the land."

"Hanged if I am," said Con. "The old man can't sight me! Let me be certain I'd get you, and I'd simply tear the trees off the blessed place. Don't want you, don't I?"

He kissed her with convincing emphasis.

"Would you, dear — would you, if you were certain?" murmured Tish. "Well, speak to dad, tell him that— ask him to give you a chance."

Con laughed. "Oh, I say," he said, how's that going to be managed, unless he's tied down? If he sees me within a hundred yards of the house he's off for his gun. Remember, I've got a shot or two of his bedded in me at the present moment."

Letitia sighed, and passed a caressing hand over her lover's face.

"He is impetuous!" she said.

"Impetuous! He's a demon."

"Perhaps I'll be able to manage it. But you do love me. Con?"

Then the conversation grew fervid and confidential, and no longer helpful to 'this narrative.

LETITIA did manage it. On the afternoon of the third day, two days before Christmas, she came to Con's hut door, flushed and breathless.

"Come along. Quick, quick!" she cried, "I've got dad."

"Got him how?"

"Don't waste time. I've got him so that you can talk to him In safety. He's down the well, cleaning it out. I've sent Dan away. Dan was helping him. The rope is off the windlass. It's quite safe." They were already on the way, Tish tugging at Con's arm, gasping out her story, and the young man presently found Steve Martin in the predicament his dutiful daughter had described. Steve had pulled the rope upon his own head, and was bellowing up the well for Dan when they arrived, threatening his absent assistant with death and torments after.

Con assumed a comfortable attitude at the well mouth, and looked down.

"Good afternoon to you, Mr. Martin," he said respectfully.

"Ogilvie!" cried Steve. "What in thunder 're you doin' on my land? Get about yer business, yeh loafer!"

"I want to have a little talk with you, sir," said Con. "A little talk about Tish."

"I've got nothing t' say t' the likes of yeh. How dare yeh trespass on my property?" Steve was dancing wild.

"If I come up t' yeh, yeh'll wish yeh was never born!" He made an offer to climb the side of the deep well, fell back, and shook his fist at Con's head silhouetted against the blue sky.

"I love Tish," said Con, disregarding Martin's fury. "I love her with all my heart, and I'd do anything to win her."

"That yeh'll never do, yeh prowlin' bla' guard. Dan! Dan! Where's that Dan? Want my daughter, do yeh— the daughter of Steven Martin, Esquire. Blast yer impudence fer a penniless waster. Want me daughter!"

Steve snatched up a stone and hurled it at Con's head, but it rebounded, and fell on his own, and Tish's dear father danced in impotent rage in the slush at the bottom of the well, and howled for Dan.

"If you'll only listen," pleaded Con. " 'Pon my life I'll do anything you care to ask Just to have a chance of pleasing you."

"Yeh will?" screamed Steve. "Then go hang yerself."

"She's fond of me; you know that. And you know I can work like a demon when I set my mind to it."

"Yer a prowler and a vagabond, 'n I'd see me daughter buried first."

"The timber on my land's worth a few hundreds," continued Con persuasively. "That 'd help with the clearing. I'd have the place a little paradise in no time if there was a chance for me."

"Bah!" cried Martin. "Yer a wild-goose chaser, no better. When yiv cleared another twenty acres by the creek, cropped it, and put up a decent four-roomed house, bring me a sample bag of yer first crop of spuds fer a Christmas box, 'n I'll talk t' yeh about me daughter."

"It's a bargain," cried Con.

"It's a bargain," said Steve, with derision, " 'n a safe one for me, because I'll never see the spud yeh'll grow, nor the like of yeh. But t' encourage yeh, yeh might remember spuds was eighteen pound the ton this season."

"Thank you, sir," said Con, very gravely.

"Meanwhile," yelled Martin, "yeh leave me daughter be, and keep yerself to yerself."

"Will you shake hands on the promise if I haul you up?" asked Ogilvie.

"I'll break yer head with the pick if yeh come nigh me," replied Martin graciously.

Tish beckoned Con away.

"Don't aggravate him any more," she whispered.

Con took her hands.

"You'll come and mark the spot where you want the house to stand?"

"Yes," she nodded gaily; "and now you'll work hard, dear? You won't wander off again?"

"I'll show the chaps about here what a man can do for the sweetest girl In the world."

Letitia drove a stick into the soil on the slope above the creek, to mark the spot where the house was to stand, and at the top of it she tied the blue ribbon from her hair.

"That will be the corner block," said Con.

Before nightfall it was known at Dogwood that Con had ordered sawn timber for a cottage, and was negotiating for the sale of milling rights over his land. Con set deliberately to work, and cut the blocks.

Precisely at noon on the day following his interview with Martin, he drove his pick into the soil where Letitia had set up her mark, and began to dig the first hole for the corner post of his foundation of blocks.

Tish, coming along the creek, saw him at it, and shouted encouragingly. Suddenly he seemed to go mad. He ceased digging, and started to jump and caper like a maniac. He whirled his shovel in the air, he yelled exultingly. Dashing his hat down, he jumped on it, then capered in shameless, boyish exuberance, and finally made a ludicrous attempt to stand on his head, and rolled into the hole he had dug.

When Letitia came up to him he was swiftly shovelling the loose earth back into the excavation.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" cried the girl.

"Whoop! Hooroo!" answered Con, and he beat the earth flat with the back of the shovel, and resumed his frantic capering.

"You surely don't mean to say you've— you've given up the idea, Con?"

"I do! I do!"

"And you won't farm the land?"

"Never a foot of it! Any man that likes can grow spuds, there's not any in mine. I'm off it, old girl. Glory hallelujah, I'm off it!"

Tish had grown very pale. She stood very erect; she was most dignified.

"Then," he said, "you may as well know what it means. It means you and I are off, too. Yes, yes, it does. If I am not worth this, I am not worth thinking of."

Con gazed at her in surprise for a moment, and then his slow grin stole over his face.

"That's all stuff and nonsense, Tish," he said, confidently.

"Is it?" answered the girl. "I wish you good day."

She turned on her heel and walked away. She never once looked back; he made no offer to follow her, but the smile lingered in his eyes.

It was a sad Christmas dinner the Martin's sat down to— Steve, Mrs, Dan, Letitia, and Tim (her married brother), and Jim's wife.

Tish had told her father and mother.

"Dad, I think you were right about Con. I have given him up. I shan't disobey you about him again," she said. Then she had gone to her room, and her father and mother stood staring at each other in silence, neither as well pleased with the development as might reasonably have been expected, for the look in Tish's face was not a pleasant one for affectionate parents to think of.

"But she's amazing fond of the scamp for all that," said Mrs Martin sadly, nodding her head at the bedroom door.

"She is, she is," said Steve moodily. "I wonder what—" Then his feelings overcame him. "The bla'gard, the villain, the dirty crawlin—"

"Hush!" Mr. Martin put a hand over her husband's mouth. "I wouldn't have her hear you now. 'Tisn't decent."

Letitia went about her duties very quietly on the following day, and her father watched her anxiously all the while, and now, when Christmas exuberance should have prevailed, his eyes wandered In a furtive, troubled way to his daughter's face. Steve stood, carving the great goose, and the incense, odorous of stuffing, filled the room, and floated out of the window into the golden Christmas sunshine.

The crunch of feet upon the gravel walk turned all eyes inquiringly to the open door. A man stood smiling in upon them, a brown-faced, clean-shaven, good-looking man of about 28, and on his shoulder he carried a weighty burden in a sugar bag.

"A merry Christmas!" he said gaily.

"Con Ogilvie!" gasped Martin. "Of all the infernal—" His wrath choked him there. For a moment he glared and gasped in indecisive anger, and then, for

lack of a better weapon, he grabbed up the boiled chicken, and hurled it at the head of the visitor.

"You hound," he cried, "what d'yeh mean be comin' crawlin' into my house?"

He made a rush at the young man, but Dan and Jim hung on him and held him back, and Con came forward into the middle of the room and dumped his burden on the floor.

"Mr. Martin," he said, "you promised that when I could being you a bag of spuds of my own digging as a Christmas box, you would talk with me about Tish. Well, here are the spuds."

He took the sugar bag by its bottom corners and emptied it on the floor.

"Stones!" cried Martin, "nothing but stones, you dirty scamp!"

He struggled in Dan's hands, and Jim took up a stone and examined it eagerly.

"Gold!" said Jim.

"Gold!" cried Steve. His struggles ceased. He snatched the specimens, and glared at them. One side of each was fairly clothed with clear, yellow gold.

"Gold!" he repeated, "gold!"

"Yes," said Con. "I have cut the reef. Cut it right on the spot where Tish set up the mark for the first post hole of the new house, and it's simply matted up with gold. I've pegged her out; the lease is applied for. I wouldn't take fifty thousand quid for her this minute."

Steve Martin glared at his visitor. He gasped, he spluttered, his limbs trembled under him.

"Con Ogilvie," he said, "will yeh have a bit of dinner?"

CON'S MINE was called "The Bag o' Spuds," up to the time when it was bought by a big syndicate. Now-a-days Con wears frock coats and smokes expensive cigars, and I often see Tish described in the society papers as "that charming hostess."

_____

Swinnerton's Wonderful Dog

(As by Silas Snell)
Critic (Adelaide) 15 Dec 1900

IF SWINNERTON'S DOG was any good for anything on earth but as a fattening paddock for fleas his appearance belied him; he was a low-browed, boss-eyed, squalid cur, with a dirty yellow complexion and the morals of a warthog. He was of an atrabilious temperament, and had an evil disposition, and was wont to waken suddenly out of a fit of reverie, and start nervously kicking insects off his neck with his hind claw. When Venus started hitting himself behind the ear in that hysterical, energetic way with his left hind leg, it was time to give him air and stand from under, because, instantly, and without further warning it began to rain large, famished fleas in his vicinity, and if you happened to be in the line of fire you would not be fit for publication in decent society for a week at least.

Swinnerton affected a great pride in his dog, and tremendous admiration for his intellect and moral abilities, but I believe now that he did this with sinister and ulterior motives. Swinny would stand around in front of the pub, when any of the boys were about, and gaze at that old sore flea-emporium of his, with a look of mute admiration in his eyes that was quite touching, and Venus would do nothing to deserve this evident great respect, but chase himself up and down the fence, rubbing all the nap off his ribs on the pickets, or sit kicking fleas at the visitors; and I must admit that he could kick a flea further and straighter than any other tortured dog it has been my misfortune to meet.

At last Swinnerton broke out about his dog. He had a large audience under the pub. verandah, and the day was warm, and he was nearly up to his chin in beer. He had been gloating over the brute in silence for about ten minutes, and he broke out like a man who could retain his feelings no longer.

"See that dog, lads?" he said, "that's the most wonderful dog on earth below."

"Dorg!" growled Blue Peter. "Call 'im a dorg! He's a blanky pea-shooter fer fleas; he's a reg'lar flea squirt. He ain't no dorg!"

"That dog," continued Swinnerton, with emphasis, is the most wonderfully gifted dog on this here earthly footstool."

"What breed o' dog?" asked Piper, with the air of an expert.

"Half sheep, half cattle," said the proud owner, "but he's an artist after either. No better sheepdog ever smelt wool, an' he could take a mob o' cattle up the side of a house. Accomplishments! That dog's got more accomplishments than Melbourne University, an' as much intelligence as a science congress. Look here, talkin' about drovin', that dog could yard a swarm

o' wild bees into a barrel through the blanky bunghole, an' never lose a single bleedin' bee.

"I call him Venus 'cause he's a good water dog. See here, he's a livin' for the man who owns him; an' easy livin', that's what he is. He's bloomin' well kept me for five years. An' how? Winnin' bets, that's how. It's like this; coves what think they're smart, they see Venus there, loungin' round, leanin' up against things, lookin' too tired to die, and they jump to the conclusion that he hasn't got sense enough to wag his own tail or spirit enough to steal giblets from a consumptive cat. 'Bout this time I chances round, an' makes a airy remark bearin' on Venus's intellectual attainments an' his trickiness generally. They ridicule the idea of his knowin' any more than a tin pan, an' I makes a pretty temptin' bet. They snaps me up, an' I win, 'cause that dog'll do anythin' I tell him.

"Now, s'pose any o' you fellers want a superior sheepdog— a sheepdog what'd round a hard old immoral, moonstruck, buttin' ram into a pill box if you gave him the order— there's yer animal. What's the hardest things in the world to drive?"

"Pigs," said Piper, sententiously. "Wrong again. Pigs are bad, but they are the spirit o' righteousness an' the pinnacle o' reason compared to goats. The pig when you want him to go one way insists on goin' the other, an' argues the matter like 'ell in a high falsetta voice. Now, a smart dog soon discovers this. Venus there discovered it in half an hour, an' now when he's asked to drive pigs in one direction he tries his darnedest to drive 'em the opposite way, knowin' that the pigs will go right from blanky contrariness.

"But what about goats? Set a dog to drive a mob o' goats, an' what happens? The bally goats don't go any way, but just rounds on that dog, and tries to butt him into hash an' tatters. I was once very nearly bein' had over Venus through a mob of goats, an' I'll tell you how 'twas. I'd struck some smart flats at a little Gippsland township, an' won five quid from 'em over a bet that Venus could take five hundred sheep through a two foot openin' in a fence without leaving a single strand of wool on the palin's. When he'd done it a long feller that'd been lookin' on ups and says:

" 'I'll tell you what, mate, I'll bet you twenty quid I'll bring a mob of twenty that that dog o' yours won't put through that openin' in an hour.'

" 'Done,' I said.

"We fixed the time, an' next mornin' along came the tall cove with his mob, an' as soon as I clapped eyes on 'em I reckoned I was done brown on both sides. The mob was not sheep at all, but goats, an' most of 'em big buttin' billies that would have fought with the bloomin' pyramids. O' course, I bucked,

but what was the use? They were all agen me, an' so I reckoned I'd haw a bustle for my money.

"Well, I called Venus up, an' gave him his Order, and he sailed in in his old, cheery, obligin', confident way, but he hadn't had no experience of goats; he hadn't been dealin' in 'em, an' no sooner did he start roundin' 'em up than a large male, with a deep bass voice an' a beard like Dan O'Connor, of Sydney, whipped round an' butted him from here to the valley of the shadder of death.

"You never saw a dog so surprised in all your born natural, but Venus is not a dog that's easy discouraged. You can see by the way he deals with his fleas that he's a sticker. He pulled himself together, an' had another shot at it. This time four old goats all came at him together, and they bounced off his ribs, an' left him feelin' as if he'd been bumped by a locomotive. When he took 'em on for a third time, a pert little nanny countered, and got in on his brisket, bowling him over endways; another chipped in an' caught him as he revolved, helpin' him on his way; a third took him on the hop, an' passed him on, still revolvin' on his own axis; a fourth rapped him as he bounced, and so they strung him out for nearly a hundred yards, while the crowd laughed. Hair of Higgins! how that crowd laughed. They hung on to each other and roared, they had giddy fits on the grass and yelled, they bounded around like spring idiots an' shrieked, an' the long man began to tell about the things he was goin' to buy fer his old mother with my fifteen quid.

"Poor Venus, he was awfully hurt. He was more depressed when them goats had done bouncing him along than a young an' tender slug what's been rolled over by a fifty-ton road-roller. He looked at me with awful reproach in his eye, as much as to say, 'Well, this is dirty, low, Chinese joke to put upon a dog, isn't it?' But when I gave the word he took it on again.

"Venus is a dog that's quick to learn. Already he had learned the guidin' principle that you want to be able to dodge quick and lively when you go drovin' goats. This time he dodged, and the goats kept him pretty busy. Now and again while he was dodging one billy a second would plunge head-first into his ribs, and land him in the valley of the shadder again, and the crowd would laugh some more, and the long fellow would say that he never knew how sweet it was to be paid fifteen clean, cool quid for havin' a howlin' good day. I was feelin' a great chill in my pocket by this time, but Venus was not done yet; he was pickin' up hints an' splinters all the time.

"Presently he makes a brilliant change in his tactics, an' swings round in front of the goats between them and the hole in the fence, and starts playin' monkey tricks with the old billies, tryin' to lure them on.

"For a time I couldn't get on to his game, but at last he kidded a big bearded William to rush him, and then, like a flash, he was through the opening in the fence, and the goat after him. He'd got one through.

"Venus followed up his success. He came out again, an' started the same game once more. This time three rushed him through the opening, and the crowd suddenly stopped laughing, an' the long fellow said that it promised to be an unpleasant evenin'.

"It was my turn now, an' I encouraged that there dog all I knew. He didn't need it; he'd discovered the weakness of goats; he'd got on to the kink in their intellects, an' he worked it for all he was worth. He worked up them goats into a perfect lather of disgust, an' every time one rushed him he turned tail, an' scuttled through the fence, an' he never failed to get a goat or two on the bounce. Once six followed him in a string, eager to butt his spine up like a shut concertina.

"Sometimes a goat inside would wait for him coming, and get a bat on to him that made his head ache, and shook all his ideas loose, but he never backed down till he'd got the last goat through that fence. He just waited to see the fifteen quid paid over to me fair and square, and to have a good long look at the crowd which was now all crumpled up, an' lookin' as miserable as a wet Sunday in Geelong, before he turned tail an' left for the township.

"When I got back he was waitin' for me to rub him with a bottle of embrocation what he'd stolen from the corner store.

"There he is," continued Swinnerton, pointing to Venus, who was kicking out fleas one at a time and in parcels, "the most accomplished dog from Hobart to the Gulf, and any man that's wanting a dog to be a guide to his old age an' a teacher to his children can have him for two half-crowns an' a medium beer."

There were no takers.

His Greatest Friend

Critic (Adelaide) 14 Dec 1904

HERVEY PHIPPS went slowly up the long stairs leading to his rooms. He was weary, and the morning hour had come. Of course., the lift was inoperative at such a time, and, for the hundredth time Hervey admitted, with embellishments of impolite speech, that living in rooms high up in the city had its inconveniences.

Phipps was a prosperous young man, an industrious and a frugal one, but he allowed neither his industry nor his mother caution to wean him from the enjoyment of the joys of life. He did not mind spending money on the thing he liked, whatever it might be, but he did not spend all he earned. He saved well and invested wisely, always with an eye to that future time "when he might marry."

His marriage was not a lively possibility just now, however, for the excellent reason that he could not marry the woman he wanted, she having been guilty of the indiscretion of marrying somebody else. At present Mr. Phipps was maintaining ai bachelor establishment in a lofty city building, where he slept and worked, taking his meals at a convenient; hotel, and he was very pleasantly situated on the whole, despite the drag up the long stairs in the wicked morning hours, when the goodness of a good time begins to look dubious. He had furnished his two rooms very neatly, and was rather proud of them.

Climbing up the long stairs in the dark, he wished himself comfortably a-bed. In his Bohemian days he had lived in cheap rooms in damp basements, or at the top of skyscrapers. Now that some measure of success had come, and papers and patrons were actually running after him for drawings and paintings, he chose the happy mean, and lived about half-way up the elevator.

As he climbed his thoughts went back to the days of his semi-vagabondage, when, with a small drove of devil-may-care artiste and journalists, he had lived from hand-to-mouth in poofly furnished rooms, and had exhausted all tihe known methods of dodging rent collectors. He had been happy then. He paused to think. Was he as happy now?

"Yes," he said emphatically, and the echo murmured down the stairs. "Happier," he added to himself, "much happier. The old friends are gone, but the new friends are almost old ones now. Halliwell—"

The name switched his thoughts off. Halliiwell was his greatest friend. He acknowledged it with a little feeling of impatience. Their friendship had once been a joy. Halliwell was already prospering when Phipps began to find his work becoming valuable. They chummed in, they became practically

inseparables, and then Halliwell married. They had been friends ever since. He had visited Jim and his wife often, their house had been almost his home, but the thought of the friendship no longer pleased Hervey Phipps.

He shrugged his shoulders angrily, and continued his ascent. Hervey fumbled for his door in the darkness, found it, opened it with his latchkey and entered, closing it after him. He stood for a moment fumbling for a match, having felt his way to the gas bracket. Presently the nicely furnished apartment was flooded with light. Hervey Phipps turned slowly towards the fireplace and started back, uttering aai exclamation of amazement. At the table was a man, a white-faced man who sat erectly, his eyes staring straight at the wall, his hands lying inert upon the table before him.

"Jim," cried Phipps, "what are you doing here— at this hour?"

Hervey's eyes fell upon a large blue envelope lying by Halliwell's side, and he recognised it at once. It contained five thousand pounds' worth of bonds belonging to him. He had been going to put those bonds into the care of a safe deposit for over a year past, and had never done it. His eyes turned instinctively to the sideboard, in a secret drawer of which he had hidden the bonds. The top was broken from the sideboard, and lay in splinters on the green linoleum; beside it lay a small pointed bar of iron like a burglar's jemmy. Phipps swung upon his friend again.

"Halliwell," he said, "what is the meaning of this? Why are you here?"

He backed to the door as if to cut off an escape. Halliwell noticed the action, and a faint, cold smile stirred his pale face.

"Why am I here?" he said, and he spoke like a man just awakened. He lifted up the bonds and placed them down again.

"Robbery!" said Phipps.

Jim Halliwell nodded. "Yes, burglary," he said.

"From me, Jim!"

Halliwell looked at Phipps again for a moment in a dispassionate way, and he smiled the same cold smile.

"Yes, from you, Hervey. Why not?"

Hervey Phipps took up the bonds, thrust them, into a drawer, and turned the key, and Halliwell smiled again.

"That was quite unnecessary," he said. "I recognise that the game is up. I submitted to the inevitable when I heard your foot on the landing."

"You a robber, Jim! Why? You are doing well. In the name of heaven what does it mean, man?" Hervey had taken a step nearer, and stood staring at his friend, a new, a keener anxiety in his face.

"Doing well!" Halliwell's smile was painful. "I am doing so well that for five months past I have hovered about the gaol door. I am doing so well that I am

in debt, head over ears. I intended replacing bonds I have stolen with these of yours, or their value."

"My God!"

"Has it not occurred to you, Phipps, that my wife is rather an expensive luxury?"

Hervey looked into his friend's eyes, wondering. "I know she is fondest of those things that cost most," he answered.

"Yes; that cost most in money or in blood and tears."

"Jim!"

"My wife, has the beauty of an angel, with the manners of a modern lady, but she has the soul of an amiable tigress. You start, you are shocked, perhaps you are a bit frightened— scandalised. Permit me to know my wife even better thain you, Hervey. She is a sweet, smiling, softly spoken, welldressed devil. When Daley, in his fine ballad, made the devil a woman he must have known something of women like my wife. Our home life has been happy, hasn't it? You never heard us exchange a harsh word, did you? My wife does not deal in harsh words, but in her soft selfishness she is as remorseless as the hungry tiger. To save tears or blood she would not abate one desire. The misery of others is nothing to her; she would cheerfully consign me or you— or even you, Hervey— to perdition for the sake of a frock she wanted or a jewel she craved. I have done well, considering my age and my position, but Beatrice is for millionaires. She could spend three times my earnings without seeming to have anything to show for it. To gratify her I have ruined myself completely. If I had succeeded in securing these bonds all might have been well; at least I should have been rescued from a Pentridge career."

"And of all the rich you chose to rob me."

"Yes; it was easier to rob you than any of the others. I had secured your duplicate latchkey; I knew how to get in; I knew where the bonds were kept."

"And our old friendship counted for nothing?"

"For absolutely nothing." Hervey Phipps tried to look grieved; James Halliwell maintained the same attitude in his chair, his pale face showed slight twitchings about the mouth.

"Had I got away with your bonds, Hervey, I should never have felt a twinge of conscience for having robbed you. In fact, the thought might have been a source of satisfaction through a long life."

Phipps was watching his friend closely, sorely puzzled. He had no notion, what to do or what to say.

"I suppose it's my duty to send for the police," he said, rather feebly.

Halliwell smiled his inscrutable, cold smile again, and answered in an even Voice:

"By all means do your duty, Hervey, my friend. Hitherto you have let grateful consideration for me sway your every action; but now you owe something to society. You owe it to society to sea that the guilty are punished. Send for the police, or go for them. I promise you will find me sitting here when you return."

"You know I cannot do it."

"Have no compunction on my behalf. I assure you that had you been five minutes later I'd have robbed you of your careful savings. It was only the infernal caretaker pottering about till after midnight that delayed me. Moreover, I was even considering the advisability of blowing your brains out the moment you lit the gas."

Halliwell drew a revolver from his pocket and tossed it towards Phipps. The artist blanched, and kicked the revolver into a corner of the room.

"I don't understamd you. I don't understand this animosity towards me."

"I have none. I know my wife too well."

"Explain yourself." Hervey's face flushed. He stepped forward almost, threateningly.

"Do you imagine that I did not know of your appointment with Beatrice to-night?" Halliwell said. "Do you think I am not aware that half your amazement on seeing me here was due to your belief that I was on my way to Sydney? Do you think I have been blind or more of a fool than ordinary during the past three months? Dear Beatrice even took the precaution of seeing me off by the train, but there are ways of leaving a train which did not occur to even her acute mind."

"Halliwell, you lie if you say there is anything wrong between me and Beatrice. My interest was that of a friend. You misunderstand her. She came to me for sympathy. She is too good for you, do you hear, a thousand times too good for you, scamp and thief as you are."

Phipps spoke passionately; he stood as if in anticipation of an attack, but Halliiwell merely raised his eyes to him, and there was in them a sort of sneering pity.

"I do not understand her. Phipps, women who complain of being misunderstood hate none so bitterly as those who really understand them. I understand my wife— she is vile!"

"You lie! You hear me; you lie! Your wife is an angel; you are a liar and a thief!"

Phipps advanced to Halliwell and struck him; but Halliwell only smiled.

"You will not fight?" cried the artist.

"No."

"Then leave my room."

"No; you will find it rather difficult to be rid of me."

"I'll kick you down the stairs."

Halliiwell leaned forward on the table, his pale face was convulsed as if with physical agony, beads of perspiration stood upon his brow.

"You may find it difficult to explain the presence of a dead body at the foot of your stairs," he said. As he spoke Halliwell kicked a small phial from under the table in the direction of Phipps. The artist picked it up. The word "*Poison!*" was printed across it in red letters.

"Great heavens! You have taken this!"

Jim Halliwell nodded.

"Yes. It is useless to move; in two minutes I'll be a dead man. I'll not waste my final breath cursing you, Hervey. You love my wife; you'll marry her; and no man could wish a bitterer revenge than that. It was partly that induced me to take the poison when I knew you were at the door."

Halliwell fell forward upon the table, and slid slowly to the floor under it, where he lay inert for a moment, and then his limbs moved in terrible spasms for a minute or more before they composed themselves in the stillness of death.

Jim Halliwell did not have his revenge.

After the inquest Hervey Phipps considered many things, and weighed much evidence, and then determined to carry his talents to a distant market, where he is now moderately successful, while Mrs. Halliwell has become a celebrated actress who never acts.

———————

The Trapping of John Hobbit

Punch (Melbourne) 2 Dec 1909

MRS. COLLARD wanted to marry John Hobbit. She admitted as much honestly and openly— to her own heart. To he sure, there was no reason why Mrs. Collard should be reticent with her heart in this important matter. She was a widow, she was only forty-one, and John Hobbit was a very desirable young fellow of fifty-two, or years somewhere adjacent. There were grounds for the belief that John Hobbit wished to marry her; but John was one of those most unsatisfactory men who are satisfied with things as they are, and being satisfied are content to let well alone.

John was satisfied with the comfortable home he had at Mrs. Collard's, and well content with the elegant little meals Mrs. Collard prepared for him, and saw no immediate necessity for a change. Mrs. Collard was more far-seeing. She saw that her fairly profitable ring of boarders had dwindled to John Hobbit, and understood the possibility of it dwindling still further if John were not made a permanent lodger. Naturally, Mrs. Collard did not stand alone; her neighbours, kind souls, were entertaining similar opinions. They, too, thought she ought to marry Mr. Hobbit.

An attractive widow of forty-one, looking much younger, and having the kind of fair hair that invites suspicion— although in Mrs. C's case the colour of her hair was absolutely original— may keep a dozen gentlemen boarders, and escape tittle-tattle and ungenerous inferences, but if she keep only one be she chaste as ice and pure as snow she cannot escape base aspersions. Mr. John Hobbit was in some measure responsible for the fact that Mrs. Collard's ring of boarders had so seriously diminished. One after another gentleman had gone to Mrs. Collard and said:

"Either he goes, or I do."

Mrs. Collard had been very sorry, but really she could not send Mr. Hobbit away. He had been with her so long; he had always been a good friend. So the others went.

The fact is Mr. Hobbit received too much attention. The others were made jealous, and with excellent reason, for without doubt John got the best of everything going and the warmest regard. Had Mrs. Collard been plain, and had she looked five years older than her age instead of six years younger, this might have been bearable. As it was, it cut the gentlemen boarders to the quick, and they left in high dudgeon.

Mr. Hobbit's rather selfish notion that he had a sort of prohibitive right to Mrs. Collard's regard and attention did not assist in retaining the other lodgers. John was as indignant as an angry camel if he imagined his needs had been

overlooked for a moment in the interests of any other paying guest, and went about stamping and puffing and grunting in a most disconcerting manner.

Now that the others were gone, Mrs. Collard perceived that, far from assisting her project, the new conditions retarded the hoped-for issue. While the boarders were about there was always a possible rival in sight, and this made Hobbit irritable and anxious. Now, however, seeing no possible counter attraction, and being very comfortable, John ceased to worry.

"It won't do," said Mrs. Collard to her own heart. "He is capable of dawdling on like this for years. Something must be done."

What to do, though? John Hobbit was touchy; he had to be handled carefully. He was fairly well-to-do, and rather a good-looking, semi-military sort of a middle-aged Johnnie, and distinctly worth while. At any rate, Mrs. Collard thought so. She was very fond of him.

John Hobbit was fond of the widow, too. He thought her very fine. He loved to sit hack comfortably, and watch her through a pleasant haze of cigar smoke.

"Dashed fine woman," he told himself. "Dashed good-looking. Dashed good little soul. Never knew a better. One of these days I'll do it, by Jove! But no hurry, very comfortable meanwhile. Ah-h-h!"

He lay still further back, and drifted into pleasing retrospect. That had been John Hobbit's way all through life. He had always been on the edge of doing things, and always putting them off. Fortunately, a distant relative had died at a convenient moment, and left John in the happy position of being able to put things off. Happily he need no longer do the more painful kind of putting off that had worried his earlier career— the putting off of tradesmen.

"I think, Mr. Hobbit," said Mrs. Collard one evening, "that I shall be compelled to give up the home."

"Give up what?" cried John, in his loud, military style.

"Nonsense! Impossible!"

"But a boarding house with one boarder is not likely to be a lasting concern."

"Poof! What of it ? Call yourself my housekeeper ; charge what you please."

"My son has written for me."

"Eh!" Hobbit sat bolt upright and glared. "Confound his impudence!"

"He wants me to join him in Sydney."

"Can't be done. Impossible. Selfish young devils these boys. What of me?"

Mrs. Collard sighed. She was afraid she would have to go. She was sure of it, indeed. She sighed again. But the expected effect was not forthcoming, John merely gave another impersonation of the angry camel, and stamped and

snorted out of the house, and snorted and stamped up and down the garden path till he attracted the scornful attention of impudent small boys, whose jibes drove him indoors again.

Mrs. Collard had been guilty of a little deceit. Her son had not written to her. In fact, the last she heard of him was quite twelve months earlier when the young rip had gone abroad as scenic artist and general dramatic rouseabout with a theatrical company in New South Wales. She was as much surprised as anyone well could be, when, one morning, a week after the recorded conversation, a bright, beardless fair-haired youth of twenty-two strode into her kitchen, grabbed her from the making of her famous sour-milk scones, and kissed her nine times, mostly on the nose.

"Harry!" she gasped, when released by the ruthless invader.

"Mum !" said the stranger, and kissed her again for luck. "How is it, old girl?"

Harry Collard's filial respect was not, of the hot-house order, it demanded no niceties of expression. His was a not uncommon sort of sonly regard in this somewhat unsentimental and unceremonious age. He was very fond of his mother, but did not think that his position as son entailed any grave responsibilities.

"You have not written to me for over a year," said Mrs. Collard reproachfully.

"I believe I haven't. Well, I had nothing to write about."

"You've been with the theatrical company all this time? I suppose you are a star."

"Not a bit of it. I dropped the 'perfesh' after attaining the dizzy altitude of first old man. I believe I impersonated elderly gentlemen with remarkable talent. At any rate, the country press was willing to think so. I have gone back to my first love, and am drawing comic blocks for any of the weeklies that are willing to print, them."

"Oh, Harry!" Mrs. Collard had conceived a great idea. "I want you to do something for me."

"Certainly, mum; anything but peel the potatoes. You know I always loathed peeling potatoes."

"It's not that." His mother settled down to a deliberate and truthful statement of her position with John Hobbit.

"The old bounder," said Harry. "Do you want me to ask him his intentions? Good enough! And if he doesn't come up to expectations, out he goes on his ear."

"No, no, no," cried Mrs. Collard. "John is a good fellow, if slow. If there were only a rival, a rival with some enthusiasm, I am sure this might be done.

Now, Harry, you say you are an excellent impersonator of elderly gentlemen, couldn't you—"

"Mother!" Harry sprang up and pounded the table, then jumped about in glee.

"Yes, my boy, that's what I mean."

"Come here as a suitor for the hand of the charming widow. Great Goschen, what a daisy of a comedy!"

"Will you, dear?"

"Will I? Will a drake dog paddle? My colonial, I will!"

"You need come only of evenings, when the light would help you."

"Mother, he's yours. I'll have a new papa within a month. Trust your orphan boy, Josephine."

"If you succeed, Harry, it might mean that trip to Paris you were dying for a year ago."

"Mother mine, I'm still dying. Here's for it— neck or nothing."

THE FOREGOING accounts for the sudden appearance of Mr. Ambrose Banks at Mrs. Collard's. He came one evening, and took possession of the place at once, a smart, noisy, cheerful, well-set-up man of fifty-five, who, it appeared, had been a friend of the late Mr. Collard's, and had known Josephine when she was a girl. He was just back from England, and was very free and hearty with the widow.

"Too d——d free," growled Hobbit. "Too cursed gay with his 'Josephine' and his 'my dearing,' blast his blue glasses !"

Mr. Ambrose Banks wore blue glasses; they were the only drawback to his youthful smartness. John disliked Ambrose from the start. The latter had not been in the house twenty minutes before John was exploding in indignant grunts.

"All over the place, confound the fellow," said Hobbit on the third day.

"Yes, but you know he is a very old friend," said Mrs. Collard.

"Old friend, be blistered and blowed! That doesn't justify him in taking charge of me. Why, he patronises me!"

"That's only his friendly disposition. He has a kind heart."

"Bust his kind heart!"

"We were very fond of each other as girl and boy."

"Oh, were you? But you needn't adopt the bounder in his old age."

"He is talking of coming to live here "

"He is? Let him do it! Let him do it, and, by heaven, there'll be manslaughter! I won't be responsible for my actions. I'll do him to death!"

"Now, don't be unreasonable, Mr. Hobbit. I have my living to seek. I cannot afford to he discourteous to a possible boarder, and a good boarder at that, who is an old friend and— and—"

"And a jibbering idiot of an ancient sweetheart. Out with it, ma'am!"

Ambrose Banks continued to make the running very strong with Mrs. Collard. He was a magnificent gallant; he had Chesterfieldian manners combined with the ardour and gaiety of a Lothario. The widow seemed to be very fond of him. Hobbit had something very like a fit when he caught Ambrose kissing Josephine's plump soft hand. Nothing John could do discomfited Banks who treated John's snortings with a placid cheerfulness that nearly drove Hobbit wild.

"There you are, Hobbit," was Banks's familiar greeting, "still puffing like a happy grampus."

"Confound your impudence!" snorted John

"Why, to be sure. Consider it confounded and be comforted."

His manner of treating Hobbit as if he were a little mad and wholly irresponsible almost set John running up the walls in his fury.

This was the stage affairs had reached when the widow told her lodger that her son Harry had returned to Melbourne, and was coming to see her. She explained that Harry had a position at one of the theatres that, would keep him away of evenings, but he could call during afternoons. So it happened that Harry was a dutiful son of afternoons and a brisk middle-aged suitor in the evenings. John greeted Harry almost rapturously.

"Awful bounder!" he said. "Here almost every evening."

"What, old Banks?" said Harry. "Oh a decent enough old fellow. A bit soft on mother, but a good sort, and he has a nice pile of bits. It would be rather a snap for me."

Hobbit nearly choked. "Do you mean to tell me he has such intentions, that your mother would— Blast it all, I want to marry her myself!"

Harry resolved to work the lay a little further, and in less than a week John unbosomed himself.

"Look here, my boy," he said, "you have great influence with your mother." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Clear that fellow Banks out of the running, and if two hundred's any good to you it's yours."

"What," said Harry virtuously. "Spoil my own mother's chance of a good marriage for a paltry—"

"No, no, you spoil no chances, lad. Look at me. I'm fit and well, ain't I? Good and hearty? I'm sound at the bank, too. What price me?"

"Yes," said the young man thoughtfully. "I have no objections to you; you're fairly eligible for the position of pa."

"And I'm sure if this other fellow were out of the running your mother would say yes. Do what you can for me."

"Two hundred, you said?" mused Harry.

"Yes, my boy— cash. Only spoil his chances!"

Within a few days Banks was supposed to be absolutely out of the running.

"Let him go, Josephine," murmured John Hobbit. "A bounder— a pure bounder! Have me?"

"Oh, John!"

"By thunder, I love you, Jo! This business gave me no end of a turn. Say it's a go?"

Mrs. Collard said as much! The wedding happened almost immediately.

SOME TWENTY MONTHS later John Hobbit, nursing Harry's tiny stepbrother, admitted in a jocular mood.

"Ha! we had you, Joey, over that Banks fellow— Harry and I."

Here he went off into a fit of chuckles. "You never suspected that Harry was with me all the time. It was he put that spoke in Banks's wheel. I gave him two hundred to do it."

"You gave him what?" cried Mrs. Hobbit.

"Two hundred pounds, my dear, and I don't regret it."

"He took two hundred pounds from you for pretend— for sending Banks away?"

"He did, and it was worth it."

"Oh, the young ruffian!"

Mrs. Hobbit was thinking of the trip to Paris she had provided as Harry's reward for producing Banks, but she wisely refrained from further speech

———————

A Meal Well Won

Gadfly (Adelaide) 12 Dec 1906

HIS name was Marmion Nahr. In a previous existence he had been known as Jimmy Sliggs. Jimmy Sliggs was a useful member of society, who broke up bags of sugar and whole hams into small lots at a great grocery. But Jimmy had ambitions. He indulged in amateur theatricals, debating clubs, and other evil practices.

Marmion Nahr was an actor a long, hairy, ugly actor, gaunt and unshaven, a type sometimes seen in cities, leaning against corner-posts, gazing fixedly into pub doors. Marmion's professional career had been passed almost entirely in the provinces, where he had made acquaintance with many vicissitudes. The companies with which he was associated were continually going to pieces in the strangest places.

This process of sudden disintegration had recently befallen the "Accusing Scar All-star Dramatic Co.", and Marmion had battled his way from Godforsook to Sandyblight, and was now sizing up the latter township as a foraging-place, the eminent actor having eaten nothing all day.

Sandyblight had one street. At this end was a butcher's shop, in the middle were a hotel and bakery, further on was a greengrocery. Having made his survey, Marmion Nahr planted himself before the green grocery, assumed an imposing professional attitude, and commenced his splendid recitation:—

" 'There was movement at the station,
for the word had passed around
That the colt from old Regret had got away.' "

The proprietor of the grocery— a short, thick man, with the appearance of one giving up drink, and finding the task too much for him— came out, and looked long and earnestly at the actor. He was followed by a couple of customers, who also looked at Marmion as if it was suggested to them that he might be mad.

" 'So he went— they found the horses by the big mimosa clump;
They raced away towards the mountain-brow—' "

continued the reciter in that fine, fluty, influenza voice that has been the admiration of millions. "Wha's 'e doin'?" asked one customer.

"Wha's 'e doin' it for?" answered the wondering proprietor. Marmion finished with a splendid declamatory effect—

" 'The man from Snowy River is a household word to-day,
And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.' "

There was no response, so the eminent tragedian cleared his throat, and made a fresh start:

" 'When you wear a cloudy collar, and a shirt that isn't white,
And you cannot sleep for thinking how you'll reach to-morrow night—' "

The greengrocer and his two customers were joined by a boy and a dog. They all stared at Marmion in the same stolid way, saving that the dog moved forward once and barked at the actor in a speculative spirit, as if anxious to hasten developments.

" 'You are rather more heroic than are ordinary folk
If you care to fish for pity under cover of a joke—' "

cried the actor, with subtle emotion and appropriate gesture.

" 'E's barmy! That's what," said the greengrocer.

Marmion went straight through to the heroic conclusion, and there was a pause, but nobody seemed called upon to do anything. Marmion made a fresh start.

" 'He's an old grey horse with his head bowed sadly,
And with dim old eyes and a queer roll aft.' "

"Or-r go-ter-ell!" said the green-grocer, with some dawning impatience. Marmion braced up. Hope was stirring.

" 'In that whim he worked when the night winds bellowed,
On the riven summit of Grant's Land;
And by day, when prodigal spring had yellowed—' "

"Fer Gor sake, give it er rest!" snorted a customer. Marmion threw out his chest, put a little more lung into it, and thrashed ahead.

" 'All the hands have gone, for the rich reef paid out,
And the company waits till the calls come in—' "

"If yer don't shift yer pitch I'll land yer one!" said the greengrocer, handling a potato threateningly.

" 'See the old horse take like a creature dreaming, —' "

continued Marmion heroically. The potato hit him on the shoulder; but Marmion did not desist. One of the customers threw another spud. The boy threw an onion.

" 'While the old drum creaks and the shadows shi-ver!' "

The greengrocer's second potato took Marmion in the wind. He surveyed the collection— three potatoes and an onion. It was sufficient. He gathered the vegetables into his coat-pocket, and moved on to the baker's, abating not one jot of his majesty.

At the baker's he resumed operations. It took the whole of "The Billiard-marker's Yarn," "For'ard," and seven stanzas of "How We Beat the Favourite" to evoke a response from the baker, and then he dashed out, and hurled a stale loaf at the tragedian, hitting him on the top of the head.

"N' iv yer don't git outer this with yer 'owlin' yeh'll cop somethin' 'otter!" said the baker.

Marmion was content. He took the stale loaf under his arm, and passed on to the butchery, the patient boy and the puzzled dog following.

The butcher was hard to move. Marmion gave him "The Man from Snowy River," "When Your Pants Begin to Go," "The Sick Stockman,' and was half through "The Rescue" before he came to the door, hiding one hand behind him.

"Yorter be shot!" he said bitterly.

" 'By the faint yellow glow of the candles,
where the dank drive is hot with their breath,
On the verge of the Land of the Shadow,
waging war breast to bosom with Death!' "

yelled the great artist.

"Oh, blazes!" groaned the butcher, and let fly. This missile caught Marmion on the right cheek and stuck there. It was about a pound of steak. It had wrapped itself half round his neck. Marmion peeled it off, and examined it critically.

"By my soul, thou mightest have made it rump, good sir!" he said.

With his loaf in one hand, his meat in the other, and his vegetables in his pocket, Marmion Nahr, the eminent actor, turned to seek his primitive cooking utensils hidden in the bush.

Before the hotel he paused a moment.

"Marry," he said, "I'd thirst no more to-day if beer were made in blocks."

But there was no hope of anyone assailing him with beer, so Marmion Nahr, having earned his daily bread, sighed profoundly, and went his way.

Much Ado

(As by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 20 Sep 1917

ANDY MALCOLMSON, leaning against the well-polished front of Daniel Carter's Star and Garter Hotel, was greatly dissatisfied with an ill-ordered universe.

Andy was leaning against the outer wall of the Star and Garter because a tyrannous early-closing law interfered with his customary habit of leaning on the inside fixtures.

Since six o'clock closing the outer parts of Daniel Carter's licensed premises had been polished to an almost incredible smoothness by the shoulders of Daniel's old customers, of whom Andy Malcolmson was one.

Andrew Malcolmson was bored, incredibly bored— bored almost to extinction. No longer permitted to drown his troubles in beer, he even speculated on the advisability of drowning them in water.

What was a man to do? What could a man do shut up in an accursed continent, every door of every bar in which closed almost of its own volition precisely at six p.m., just when a honest, hard-working man was free to set seriously to work to satisfy his natural craving. Man's natural craving is for beer.

Andy looked up the street. It was practically deserted in that direction. He looked down the street. It was empty of interest.

Oh, for a fire, a murder, even a case of common assault— anything to make a man forget himself and his appetites— anything to make life tolerable.

At last— a motor-car. Andy had small delight in motor-cars. He considered their owners beastly plutocrats, who made the highways dangerous to decent, drunken citizens. But a motor car meant movement. Andy watched this one.

The car was new— a smart, fawn-coloured, low-set, resolute-looking car— a car that carried a suggestion of speed in all its clean, smart lines.

Andy sighed. A car like that represented a lot of beer— fifty thousand pints probably. Think of it— fifty thousand pints! The smart young man in the smart new car was literally wallowing in a sea of beer— rushing about the town immersed in twenty-five thousand quarts of it. The swine, the monopolist!

The car swerved into the kerb right opposite the Star and Garter; the monopolist sprang out, and entered Abercrombie Buildings. The owner of the fawn-coloured car, the bright brasses of which sparkled and glimmered in the wavering street light like the fittings of a smart bar, was a well-dressed, good-looking, thick-set, young man in a light grey suit.

Time passed. All Andy's early companions, it would seem, were faded and gone. No one appeared to mitigate his loneliness and share his thirst.

Suddenly Andrew Malcolmson became instinct with life. He started forward— he uttered a cry. Then he ran into the road, waving his hands wildly, and calling aloud.

Andy's excitement was due to the fact that he had just seen a wretchedly shabby, dirty nondescript, with a conspicuously red nose and a deplorably bad hat, step into the neat fawn motor-car, and calmly drive off with it.

"Stop thief !" cried Andy. Andy was inspired with a lightning-like idea that if he were instrumental in rescuing the beautiful fawn car from the robber the rich young gent in the light grey suit might in his gratitude dispense some portion of the fifty thousand pints the vehicle represented to reward integrity and right-thinking.

"Stop thief!" said Andrew yet again.

The street was how fairly alive. People were oozing out of the walls, and rushing round the corners.

"What's the matter here?" A tall man in brown, with an authoritative air, confronted Andy Malcolmson.

Andy knew the man-it was Plain-Clothes Policeman Wynne.

"Bloke stole a car," said Andy. "A gent left her at the kerb there, and I saw a drowsy dead-beat slip right in 'n' bowl off with her."

"There he goes! There he goes!" cried the crowd. All eyes were on the fawn car climbing gracefully up the hill far down the street.

"You're sure of this said Plain-Clothes Policeman Wynne.

"Dead certain sure," replied Andy with enthusiasm. "Didn't I seen him do it?"

A taxi had stopped in the press. Plain-Clothes Policeman Wynne jumped in. Andy, without order or request but acting in his capacity of public accuser, followed.

"After him," said Plain-Clothes Policeman Wynne.

The taxi chauffeur waited for no further instructions, but set off in pursuit, dividing the cheering crowd as a whale cleaves the water,

Andy Malcolmson gave further details as the taxi sped in the tracks of the wanton robber. He elaborated with great enthusiasm.

"I'm torkin' iv the car," Andy explained. "The lad drivin' was a gent in grey. He let out 'n' chased into the Abercrombie Building, 'n' presently 'long comes this 'ere scallywag, steps into the car, 'n' offs with 'er."

"Why didn't you say the owner was handy?" growled Wynne. "We should have got him."

"Oh, it won't be 'ard to find him. I reckon that moty 'iv his is worth six or seven 'underd iv anybody's money. What salvidge do we get?"

"Salvage?"

"Yes. I bin knockin' round the port ' a bit, ' 'n' I meets a sailor bloke what cut into a great hunk o' money as a salvidge on, some ship him 'n' some other blokes rescooed at sea."

The constable grinned. "I'm afraid you're due for a broken heart," he said, "if you dream you're out to pick up money."

Andy's face clouded. "What," he said, "ain't we entitled to no salvidge?"

"Not a bean."

Andy groaned. "But there'll be a quid or two comin' to us. That bloke in grey was lined with quids. He had the look iv it. Hit her up, shuvver."

The night had fairly set in ; but far ahead along the road now dipping into an outer suburb they saw the glimmer of the tail light of the fawn car.

"Give her all she'd got, Jimmie," said Wynne to the chauffeur, who growled back something about not expecting to get a hundred an hour out of an old road roller.

Andy and Wynne were silent for a space of ten minutes, watching the light ahead. It grew brighter and brighter as they overhauled the fawn car.

"He isn't bustling himself," said Wynne. "Get quietly alongside. Don't let him think we're out for his scalp."

Andy Malcolmson jigged with excitement as they drew nearer and nearer. The nose of their taxi was already in line with the fawn car.

"Got 'im!" breathed Andy. Never in his life had he earned a few quid (say a fiver) so easily, so absolutely delightfully.

Then all of a sudden the driver of the fawn car woke up. It seemed to him that the lumbering taxi at his elbow might mean danger, or that it was audaciously challenging him. He touched her, and she purred ahead. He called her gently, and she slid away into the deepening gloom.

Wynne thrust his head out of a window. "Stop!" he cried.

A derisive laugh came floating back through the fawn car's dust.

"In the name of the law!" shrieked Wynne. No reply. But the fawn car was walking out into the distance, with a soft, noiseless, easy speed, while the clattering taxi fell behind, labouring hopelessly, and rather suggesting an old Sydney steam tram, in mad pursuit of an aeroplane.

"Keep at him!" yelled Wynne.

Again the man in the fawn car permitted the taxi to draw in on him; again Wynne pushed his head out of a window, and called on him to stop; again the runaway laughed. But the laugh ceased suddenly when Wynne, to convince the thief that serious business was in hand, fired a shot.

This seemed to satisfy the Weary Willie that the joke was too pointed. He put his car to it, and she walked clean away again.

"Keep right on!" barked Wynne.

They kept right on. Melbourne's glow had faded out behind them. Fairly thick bush crowded in to the post-and rail fences on either hand. Time passed-space also.

Then, quite unexpectedly, the taxi rattled into Seaville, and there, in front of the Seaville Hotel, stood the beautiful fawn motor, chirping softly, a small group standing about her.

Wynne and Andy came out of the taxi in a simultaneous dive.

"Where's the chap that drove this car!" demanded Wynne.

"He was a dirty old loafer in rags," said Preston, of the Seaville Family Hotel. "He asked if there were any police about, and made off."

"Gone!" cried Wynne. "I'd have given a quid just to have had a hand on him for half a-minute."

"But we got the car all right-o!" cried Andy gleefully. "Let's get away with her."

Wynne thought the matter over. "Well," he said, "there's thick hush all round this place. To get after that beat to-night would be like a blind man looking for a pin in a hayfield. I suppose we can't do better than take the car back to its rightful owner."

"That's the move," Andy was enthusiastic in support. Andy was dreaming of "salvidge".

Plain-Clothes Policeman Wynne drove off in the fawn car, with Andy at his elbow, leaving the taxi-man to follow at his leisure.

The chauffeur was no teetotaler, nor was he in any particular hurry to return. He would be paid by the hour, and the money was sure. He accepted the hospitable invitation of the publican, and went indoors for hot meat and cold drink.

Four minutes later the dead-beat came tramping back. Two or three residents of Seaville were discussing the points of the taxi.

"There's no d—d policemen to be found," said he. Then he put up a cry of anguish. "Where's my car?" he yelled.

"A coupler blokes took her off."

The beat pointed out the taxi. "And left this!" he said. "The infernal thieves! It's highway robbery. Which way?" he demanded. He was already in the chauffeur's seat.

"They 'eaded back fer Melbin." A Seaville citizen pointed into the darkness.

The Weary Willie swung the taxi round on the road, disregarding protestations, and went clattering off by the way he came, but this time seriously handicapped. He now drove the antediluvian taxi. His enemies were in the slick up-to-date, space-annihilating fawn car.

Within ten miles of Seaville the taxi, blundering down a hill, almost rushed into the fawn car. Something had gone wrong.

"That you, Jimmie ?" cried Wynne. "I've got to put in a new tyre. Ripped a hole a foot long. Lend's a hand, will you?"

Wynne thought he was addressing the taxi chauffeur, and did not realise his mistake until Weary Willie was upon him.

"You infernal scoundrel, you stole my car!" said Willie, and he went at Wynne with such impetuosity that the plain-clothes man was borne down. Then, systematically and earnestly, Willie set to work to choke his victim in the dust.

Andy watched the struggle for a moment, then, still apprehensive for his "salvidge," took up as handy a little spanner as you'd wish to see, and gave the dead-beat such a clip on the nape that he rolled over, all out for the time being.

Wynne arose. "Good!" he said. "That stroke was timely." He clapped, darbies on Willie, and propped him on the back seat of the motor. "Hold him there," he said. "I'm happy to have him. We've done a good night's work."

The plain-clothes man completed the exchange of tyres, and once more the fawn car was boring her way through the night, making Melbourne at a great gait.

"He's a desperate d—d villain, that fellow," said Wynne back to Andy. "Think of him having the cheek to pinch that taxi, and come after us licketty split."

When the fawn car rushed into the city the Weary Willie was still dazed. Wynne ran the car up to the detective office with the comfortable feelings of a big man who had effected a coup that was going to send him up a step or two.

"Loss of a fawn car A07962 reported?" he demanded.

The authorities had received no such report, and Wynne wondered.

"Well," he said, "I've got her here, and the thief, too. That's the beaut."

Weary Willie was flopped on the office floor. A detective bent over him.

"Why," said the D., "this man's in disguise." He plucked off the Weary Willie's false whiskers, he rubbed a streak of red off Willie's incarnadine neb.

Willie sat up. "For the love of heaven, give me a drink!" he said. He had a drink, and then pulled a wig from his head, and with it smeared much make-up from his face.

"Mr. Jacobs!" cried the detective.

"Yes," answered the Weary Willie, vaguely. "Where am I? I was going to a fancy-dress ball at a friend's place in the country. I went up to Westover, the actor in Abercrombie Buildings, to be made-up as a tramp. Then somebody followed me, and tried to shoot me, and then they stole my car, and then—"

But here the recital ended. Wynne had fallen gasping in a corner, Andy Malcolmson had gone off in a fit.

_____

The Understudy

(as by Ward Edson)
Punch (Melbourne) 20 Nov 1902

SHE WAS a pretty girl, even her enemies admitted that. She had quite an attractive figure. A testimony to that effect had been provided by the committee of elderly gentlemen of the Society for the Suppression of Interest on Theatres, who had seen her as one of the pink boys in the Christmas pantomime. The committee in its report described Daisy as a "lure."

Daisy Capulet had a charming, rich voice. She danced well; she was intelligent, had a sense of humour quite remarkable in a member of a comedy company, and scores of people had declared their unalterable conviction that she was bound to get on.

Aleck Short was among the many who believed Daisy was destined to be a glittering star in the theatrical firmament. Already she was the bright particular star of his life. His love for her was a dog-like devotion, the kind of love with which popular sentimentalists in fiction always endow their large, strong, quiet Scotch heroes. Aleck was neither large, strong nor Scotch, but he was very dog-like in his attitude towards Daisy Capulet. He was always at heel, always eager to fetch and carry, and always in the habit of humbly admitting his own unworthiness.

"It's like my beastly cheek to bother you at all, Daisy," he was in the habit of saying, "but I'm awfully fond of you, and I can't help it. I'm just nobody in particular, and you're so beautiful and clever."

Short had an idea that all the world was amazed at the loveliness and the amazing gifts of Miss Daisy Capulet, and it seemed to him that the fact of the management not having given her leading parts was absolute proof of the utter incompetence, if not the complete mental derangement, of said management.

The management was not wholly blind to Daisy's attractiveness and her ability, but it was a wily management, and did not excite itself in giving the young lady what it vulgarly termed swelled head.

Daisy admired Short. He was a good-looking fellow, he dressed nicely, and his hand was open and free. When they walked together people looked after them, and the popular opinion was that they were a well-arranged couple. Miss Capulet noticed this, and it pleased her vanity, of which weakness she had a fair amount. Nobody thought any the less of her on this account, for it is only in highly moral story books for the young that a due proportion of vanity is regarded as something shameful in a character.

"I suppose I'll marry Aleck some day," she said, "but there's lots of time. Meanwhile I want to make my way in the profession. I want to be famous, if only for a little while. And I shall be!"

Daisy's eye would flash, and she would stamp her foot at this as if encountering unmannerly opposition.

"I tell you I shall be! I only want a chance. Just a little chance! If that wretch Crammer would only lift me out of the ranks and give me a part, just a tiny little part, anything that will give me an opening for doing something, I'd be satisfied, but he won't, the beast— he's got me set."

"Wait, dear," Aleck once replied, in his troubled. way, "it's bound to come in time. They're not so blind, but—"

"I say they are blind— all blind, stupid, dunderheaded idiots. Why else would they keep that May woman chirruping her little songs and limping her little dances, and simpering her silly lines, while I come on in the chorus and count for no more than one of the lanterns?"

Aleck took her woes very much to heart. Daisy was evidently fretting over the delay of her opportunity, and they never met without a reiteration of the old grievance. His was not a keen mind, but he schemed heavily in the hope of helping her up. At length he hit upon an old idea. He wrote anonymous letters to the management, praising Daisy, and bribed certain mall Pressmen on small papers to print appreciative references to her voice and figure.

Short said nothing of his bright idea to Daisy, but hastened to put it into execution. He wrote letters, purporting to be from various persons in various suburbs, congratulating the management of the company on the possession of such a jewel as Miss Daisy Capulet, and continued doing so for some time.

One afternoon, Daisy, looking very flushed and very angry, entered his office, and rudely slammed a rough bundle of letters down on the table before him.

"There!" she cried. "Your letters. A pretty mess you've got me into."

"Why, Good Heavens, Daisy! How— why— what—"

"It's no good your denying it. They are your letters !"

"But, my dear—"

"Crammer called me into his office this morning, handed me those, letters, and said : 'Return them to your friend, my dear. Tell him we can run this little business on our own, without the advice of any chuckled-headed tin idiot who's suffering from a bad mash.' Yes, that's what he said— 'chuckle-headed tin idiot.' And so you are."

"I— I did it for the best, Daisy."

"For the best! And now I'll never get a look in, if I live till I'm eighty."

Daisy dropped into the nearest chair, and wept with the heartiness of a girl who can trust her complexion, and Aleck sat before her, gaping, stammering, apologising, and having the worst time of his life.

"But I thought it would help you. I did, upon my word. And it must have" helped you a little, or they wouldn't have made you Jane May's understudy."

"A nice fat lot of good that will do me," snapped Daisy, through her tears. "May has got a constitution like a carthorse. Once give an actress an understudy, and she becomes imperishable— you couldn't kill her with a hundred ton gun. Making me May's understudy will just finish me. I'll die of heart-sickness, induced by hope deferred."

Short's contrition was painful to behold, and now commenced a long time of waiting.

Through two local seasons and two seasons abroad Daisy remained in the ranks, coming on with the flock, undistinguished, excepting for her natural charms, and watching Miss Jane May all through the long weeks for some sign of sickness or breaking up. But May fattened and grew more shamelessly healthy and selfishly strong every day, while poor Daisy was actually losing flesh from sheer exasperation, and carrying about with her a worn and worried look.

Aleck was struck to the heart when he saw Daisy on her return from the provincial tour. She looked quite haggard and old, though still only in her teens.

"It's that May woman," moaned Daisy, " she's positively killing me. She goes on like a machine. I've understudied every part she's done, and I've watched and waited like a condemned prisoner expecting a reprieve in the hope that she'd fall ill for a day— just for one day, but she won't— the wretch, she won't! I believe she knows I'm eating my heart out, and she remains well to spite me."

"There, dear, why bother about it? Why worry?" pleaded Aleck.

"How can I help worrying? My only hope lies in something happening to that woman— if she'd break a leg, if she'd get drunk! She adds teetotalism to her other vices. Nothing will ever happen to her, and I see myself a grey, broken old woman, hardly able to walk, tottering on in the chorus with creaking joints, still waiting for May to give out. And she won't. She's indestructible!"

The young man tried his best to comfort her, pointing out all the possibilities.

"See, dear," he said, "there are so many chances of her being injured in town. She may get run down by a cab, or a bicycle, or a cab or tram, or a chimney may fall on her. You never know your luck in these large cities."

"No, you don't. But if a chimney falls on anybody it will be me!"

But in spite of it all Daisy continued to hope, and to watch and wait, and continued to be mortified by May's unreasonable health and preposterous strength, and poor Short found but little comfort in her society, although he loved her still.

He continued to waste his time pondering over the case, devising wild schemes for helping Daisy. In his imagination he headed bands of desperadoes that carried May off and imprisoned her for a year in a cave in the bush, commanded a pirate lugger that transported her to a South Sea island, where she was eaten by an appreciative tribe, and as a sort of Sherlock Holmes, proved her guilty of various crimes, for which she suffered long terms of imprisonment. In her absence, of course, Daisy rose to great glory, and became the most entrancing light opera artiste of this or any age.

"I'd do anything to help you, dear— anything!" he said.

"Then rid me of this woman," replied Daisy, in her most theatrical tones.

Shortly after this a marine picnic for the opera company was organised, and Aleck received an invitation.

The day was spent upon the sea in a frisky excursion steamer, and a most delightful day it was to all but Daisy and Aleck, who reflected his sweetheart's depression, and couldn't quite rid his mind of his wild schemes for helping her to the opening she so ardently longed for.

Miss Jane May was of the party, and one of the happiest of a particularly cheerful crew. The sun was setting, and the steamer was heading for home, when suddenly Aleck came upon Miss May in an exposed and very dangerous position, the sea wind blowing through her loose hair.

Like a flash an abominable idea struck into his soul. The least touch would send her into the sea. Of course she would be picked up, no harm would be done, but she might not be able to appear that, night. It might so easily be an accident.

Short made a little run forward, his foot slipped on the wet deck, and he collided heavily with the young woman. There was a shrill scream, and May disappeared over the side.

Aleck had made no plan, but, starting up, he tore off his coat and plunged into the sea after the struggling woman. He could swim like a fish, and soon found the actress. To his great astonishment she lay composedly in the water, and when he came near she said quietly: "You look after yourself, young fellow; I'm all right. I can just live and eat in the water. I could dress my back hair here if I only had a mirror."

For a second time Aleck's wits worked quickly. This would never do. He insisted upon rescuing Miss May. There was a struggle. He did rescue her, and

everybody else said it was a most gallant rescue, but for ever after the actress insisted that he was a great blundering ass, who had nearly drowned her. Anyhow, when the boat reached them Miss May was half full of sea water, and quite unconscious.

Miss Daisy Capulet played Miss Jane May's part in *The Slippery Slavey* that night, and played it so well that the part was for the first time a tremendous success, and the audiences saw nobody but Daisy Capulet as Saucy Sue for many a night.

Daisy became a person of great consequence and great salary, and married a popular tenor.

As for poor Aleck, well, of course, a great actress couldn't marry a no-account man like Short. Anyhow, he ought to have been satisfied if he wasn't—didn't he get the Royal Humane Society's medal for saving life at sea?

———————

The Opportunity That She Seized

(As by Silas Snell)

Punch (Melbourne) 18 Oct 1917

IF CABBIT HAD had faith in the Allied cause it would not have happened at all. But Cabbit was of little faith— or, possibly, none at all.

This lack of conviction that right must triumph, and that Australia would be permitted to continue the uneven tenor of her way under varying Governments of Australians, for and by Australians, led to a great accumulation of gold in a tough leather bag hidden under the fourth flooring board from the door in the bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Cabbit.

Cabbit argued in this way, but never aloud, and always to himself, for the reason that Mrs. Arthur Cabbit was so afflicted that confidential communications of an oral nature were barred— "If the blinkin' Germans wins this war, where'm I? I'm up a blinkin' tree, there's where I am. Onct them cows has the run iv things here banks is no good, 'n' bank notes is no good. On'y gold's good."

Arthur never parted with a bit of gold, he was even dubious about allowing a silver coin to give him the slip; but, as the conduct of business was impossible without some medium of exchange, he extended his saving grace to half-crowns only.

All the half-crowns that came to A. Cabbit in the way of trade, he bestowed in a canvas bag, which was hidden in a cunning cavity under the hearth in Cabbit's parlour.

Arthur Cabbit was a grocer and provision merchant— at any rate, the sign along the front of his small suburban shop read, "A Cabbit, Grocer and Provision Merchant, Produce Dealer," and on the two tiny windows the legend was repeated and insisted on.

Cabbit had no family apart from Mrs. C., and Mrs. C.'s demands upon C.'s resources were extremely limited, and even then she got less than she demanded.

Cabbit was not exactly a miser; there are penurious persons who might consider him lavish in the use of tobacco, for instance, and corn salves. Cabbit was always smoking; he ran riot among the corn salve. There was never a corn salve, potion, or plaster that Cabbit did, not give a long trial, let Cabbit continued to have more corns than any other man in his suburb.

The corns are relevant, for had the corn dealer been quicker on his feet this story might never have been written. Had Mrs. Cabbit been less deaf there might have been no story worth mentioning. Had Ruby Tootell been less courageous and enterprising I should have had to find another plot for your entertainment.

But Cabbit was corny, Mrs. Cabbit was deaf, and Ruby was courageous and venturesome.

RUBY TOOTELL was Cabbit's maid of all works. Mrs. Cabbit's deafness and Mr. Cabbit's corns rendered her necessary. Mrs. Cabbit was too deaf to take the orders in the shop, and Mr. Cabbit had too many corns— soft, hard and medium— to get about household and business affairs with sufficient alertness. Ruby was not deaf, she had no corns, she served the Cabbits well for a small weekly remuneration.

Ruby was a nice girl, twenty, a little taller than ordinary, a little more solidly and symmetrically built than usual, a little better looking than common. If it had not been for Ruby, Cabbit would not have done one-tenth of the trade he did in tobacco and cigarettes

Probably the draw Miss Tootell was among susceptible young men of the locality resulted in a profit on tobacco alone far beyond what Arthur Cabbit paid the young woman.

Miss Tootell did the greater part of the Cabbit housework. Mrs. Cabbit fussed about all day, and she did the big bedroom; but the bulk of the work was left to Ruby, and she did it willingly enough, and was always bright, a quality no Cabbit seemed to appreciate.

Ruby's troubles! Arthur Cabbit's humours passed off her like water off a good young duck. They did not even dampen her ardour.

"Phew!" said Ruby, with a flip of her fingers, "who cares for what you say, or think, or do?"

Cabbit beat upon the palm of his left hand with the index finger of his right, emphasising his utterance.

"You care, my fine miss, dash you!" said he. "What I sez you does, or outer this 'ouse you go, bag 'n' baggage, 'ead over heels."

The girl laughed gaily. "Who'd do it ? I fancy I see you firing me head over heels! Why I'd tread on your corns, old party, and where would you be?"

Cabbit winced at the very thought. "Whoa!" he said. Then with recovered courage: "I'm your boss, miss, feet 'r no feet."

"Well, yes, you're boss as long as I let you be, and as long as you pay my wages, which, by-the-way, are a half-crown higher from Saturday week."

"Never, never! I won't pay it. I'll get another girl."

"Then that's understood?''

"It is— it is. A pound a week for a mere servant. Lor's trewth, one'd think you was a guv'ner! A pound a week! A pound a week!"

So it was understood that in eleven days' time Ruby was to go if the rise was not forthcoming, and it was not likely that Cabbit would relent. He felt he

could, never bring himself to spare another whole half-crown a week from the canvas bag so snugly hidden under the parlour hearth.

There was just this one consideration though: Ruby was a big girl, a strong girl, and a brave girl. It was she who caught Daniels in the act of stealing a whole New Zealand cheese, knocked Daniels helpless with an axe handle from stock, tied him up with a clothes line (also from stock), and had him nicely trussed and ready for delivery when the police arrived.

There was much comfort in the knowledge that they had a girl like that about the place, a girl upon whom one could rely to put up a good fight in a moment of need, and Arthur Cabbit never forgot the bag under the fourth board of the bedroom floor, the tough leather bag with the cord through its neck drawing the mouth of it tight upon— whisper— eleven hundred and seventy pounds ten in gold,

There was the bag of half-crowns, too, a lesser joy, but a treasure of such rapidly increasing bulk that its hiding place under the hearth was already overcrowded.

Cabbit's one consolation in the thought of losing Ruby Tootell lay in his absolute conviction that no one ever dreamed of the existence of the gold under the floor and the silver lining to the bricks under the parlour grate

THEN came disillusionment.

Five days of Ruby's brief remaining term had passed, the hour of one on Monday morning had struck some twenty minutes since The striking of the raucous clock so near his eat had awakened Cabbit, and he had only drowsed since, half fretful at this loss of refreshing sleep. Suddenly there came the sharp crack that brought him up with a jerk, eyes wide in the darkness, ears pricking. like those of a terrier.

Presently Arthur climbed out of bed. He took the heavy ebony ruler that had been his protection from imaginary "burglars far years, and stole from his room. He crept along the passage in his bed-socks, je pushed his way gently into the parlour.

Then things happened. Arthur saw streaks of light, he heard quick, low voices. He uttered one cry, and hit about him blindly with his ruler Hands were upon him, he was driven into a corner, fierce fingers at his throat, and darkness about him, save for the shaft from a bullseye lantern.

Suddenly the room was lit up. Cabbit saw Ruby Tootell step in from the passage, a lighted candle in one hand raised above her head, in the other the kitchen poker. The girl was clad in her nightdress only, an unpicturesque robe of pink flannelette, alas! Ruby entered the room, peering about her. She saw the men and screamed. She turned as if to run, and screamed again, and then

the man nearest struck with the weapon in his hand, and she fell, and lay a huddled heap on the floor, a trickle of red staining the lambskin rug at her ear.

Crack ! and Arthur Cabbit went out. If he had room for thought at all in that flash between the cruel blow and unconsciousness, he thought of death.

Cabbit was the first to come to. He recovered consciousness slowly in the darkness, with the feeling a half-drowned man may have, struggling up through great depths of black water. He lay in confused thought for some time, and then he started to crawl across the floor. Near the floor he encountered an obstruction. He felt it. He found a face, hair, and a sticky something that was blood.

It was Ruby Tootell's body. The cry Cabbit hoped to utter became a mere dry cackle in his throat, He arose, and staggered into the passage, and along the passage to his bed room.

Arthur found the matches and lit the gas. The fourth board was torn aside. The bag of gold was gone!

Frantic at his loss, Arthur Cabbit' dragged his deaf wife from her ted, he pointed to. the rifled treasure house, and then, half dragging her, sought the parlour once more, carrying a lighted candle.

Ruby still lay as he had seen her fall. As his wife raised the girl, Miss Tootell opened her eyes, looked about her in vague wonder, and closed them again with a great sigh.

Cabbit ran into the street, crying his misfortunes. There was no policeman available but soon Cabbit's house was full of curious and profoundly interested neighbours. Telephones were set going. Ruby was carried to her bed, and doctors and police came from many directions.

Miss Tootell had sustained a nasty scalp wound and slight concussion, but was in no danger. Cabbit's half-crowns were gone from under the hearth, his gold was gone from under the floor

So far as could be seen, at noon the thieves had got clear off. Mr. Cabbit estimated his loss at about twelve hundred pounds.

RUBY was up and about again in the course of the day, her head picturesquely bandaged, but apparently little the worse for the nasty blow she had received. Her story was a simple one— she had heard noises in the night, she had gone to investigate, she had seen two men in the parlour, one of whom was choking Mr. Cabbit, she had turned, intending to rush into the street and give the alarm, when she was struck down.

Ruby remained with Cabbit for a time. There was no further reference to the rise she had demanded. She felt that to insist would be ungenerous in the circumstances.

"I'll stay for a while," the girl explained, "but I am going to be married in a few months, and you had better keep an eye out for some one else."

Ruby was engaged to a boy who had been to the war, and had returned recently with an artificial arm. It was her intention when they married to set up in a business, like Cabbit's, the details of which she had mastered.

Meanwhile she had begun furnishing, and among other things had bought the old horsehair couch stowed in Gamble's shed next door. Gamble next door was a dealer in second-hand furniture, and found many items for the fitting up of Ruby's new home.

Sam Hotch, who was the boy back from the war, despite his imitation arm, helped to carry the couch into Ruby's little back room, and there Ruby, in her spare moments, re-covered it with a pretty patterned cretonne, and made it look so smart that subsequently Gamble regarded it with lively emotions of remorse, recognising the bad bargain he had made.

But Gamble did not know how bad a bargain he had made. He did not guess— how should he?— that when he sold the couch to Miss Tootell, and when he helped to carry it into Ruby's little back room, deep down in its bowels, hidden among the rusty springs and the fuzzy padding of horse-hair, was a tough, tightly-tied leather bag containing £1,170/10/ in gold.

No one was more perplexed over the full text of the report of the Cabbit robbery than the thieves, for they had received an inkling of the treasure hidden under the hearth only. They got away with the bag of half-crowns— nothing more.

Their belief was that Cabbit, for his own purpose, lied about the loss of his gold.

But Cabbit had not lied.

HOW, then, are we to account for the fact that the gold was really stolen? Can we, as fair-minded, reasonable people, assume that a nice girl like Miss Ruby Tootell, recovering from the blow she had received, and finding the gold had not been stolen (of the existence of which in its hiding-place under the bedroom floor she had previously been aware) had seized it, ran and hidden it deep in the intestines of that old couch in Gamble's shed next door— there being access through a broken fence— and had then returned and resumed her position on the floor, cunningly pretending to be still unconscious?

Would so nice a girl as Ruby do such a wicked thing— a girl who had never stolen sixpence in her life before?

Please yourselves what you believe; but it is true, on my honour as a faithful scribe, that Miss Ruby Tootell was not in the least surprised when she

found that bag of sovereigns in the old couch from Gamble's, and Mrs. Sam Hotch is keeping even from her husband the knowledge that it is still there.

_____

Gobb's Christmas Box

(As by Silas Snell)

Melbourne Punch 24 Dec 1896

BLUFF-STREET is a retired, semi-genteel thoroughfare in a retiring, semi-genteel suburb; it is inhabited mainly by people who have been something once, and who, apparently, have no hopes of ever being anything again. Birds of a feather will flock together, yet it is really strange that so many people in apparently the same stage of discreet hard-upness should have congregated together in that two hundred yards of narrow, quiet and shady street.

There is a profusion of trees in Bluff-Street, and every house is surrounded with much shrubbery run wild, in the midst of which the habitation cowers as if modestly seeking to avoid observation. This is a characteristic of the inhabitants too, the most of whom are very reticent and extremely retiring.

Usually there is a furtive man in seedy raiment lurking the shrubbery or behind the tree guards. The people of Bluff-street know him to be the bailiff manoeuvring to get into No. 9, or No 11 or No. 26, and being in the main people of some little refinement they pretend not to see him and to have no idea whatever of his mission.

Nobody in Bluff-street was surprised on finding out one fine morning, a day or two before Christmas, that the Gobbs had fled quietly by night. This was no unusual thing in Bluff-street, the people there having an Arab-like fondness for folding up their few belongings and silently stealing away.

The Gobbs had lived at No. 11, a modest little four-roomed cottage standing in the centre of what had once been a fine garden, but what was now simply a chaotic tangle of vines and creepers and towering rose bushes. The house, one window of which peeped out shyly like an eye from amongst the wild growth of ivy and pepper trees that smothered it, had quite an old and mysterious air for a house in this new country, and would have made a snug resort for an amiable young ghost who had no desire for notoriety.

Perhaps it was this very suggestiveness about the house that sent a rumour from one end of Bluff-street to the other on the evening after the departure of Marmaduke Gobb and his family that there was some mystery about No. 11. Strange cries had been heard issuing from the place, it was said, and people who had previously expressed a belief that the house was haunted were delighted. There was no disputing the fact that something unusual was happening at No. 11. Several ladies of Bluff-street had heard strange unearthly voices issuing from the house, and up till midnight people hung about the fence, listening eagerly and swopping ghost stories.

NEXT DAY neighbours peered in at the front windows of the house, and, although the same sounds had been heard within ten minutes, nothing was to be seen in any of the rooms but a long rough deal box turned on its side and apparently empty. This lay in the front room

Throughout the day the awful voice was heard at intervals, and by nightfall the news of the mystery had spread through the suburb, and by ten o'clock there was quite a crowd in Bluff-street.

Once in a while the assemblage was gratified by hearing the wailing of the goblin, and one or two people ventured to the windows, and peered in and listened, but these saw and heard nothing, and retired presently, awed and quaking. At about eleven a policeman arrived, a substantial Milesian, with flame coloured hair and a boundless faith in all sorts of elves, banshees, spooks, ghosts and goblins. He affected to laugh to scorn the supernatural fears of the crowd, but approached the house very reluctantly, supported by the nervous populace.

Constable Kagan listened anxiously at the keyhole, and backed off precipitately when a wild, marrow-freezing yell awoke the echoes of the deserted house. The officer of the law was a long time recovering from the shock, and longer in deciding to burst open the door, and at the head of a picked band of men to push investigations further.

Candles were procured, the door was forced open, and Ragan and his brave following entered reluctantly and all trembling. A thorough search of these rooms revealed nothing, and the constable was feeling quite reckless again on entering the last.

"Shure," he said, "yez have all been desaved: there's nayther divil nor ghost here at all, at all."

At that instant a great yell issued seemingly from the floor at his feet, and the crowd fled precipitately for the outer air, the men falling over each other in their hurry, and Constable Ragan falling over the whole crowd. A council of war was held, and it was found to be the general opinion that the voice issued from the long box in the front room.

So Kagan screwed his courage to the sticking point and led his army in again. He approached the box very gingerly and tried to turn it over with his foot, but found it too heavy.

"Are yez there?" he murmured feebly.

"Let me out! let me out!' cried a faint, muffled voice from the box. "Be yez a ghost or pwhat?' queried Ragan, rtill more dubiously.

"Let me out! let me out!" answered the voice.

The box was very roughly constructed, and apparently filled with straw. The policeman poked his finger through an opening and pulled away the straw,

and up through the hole thus made came a man's nose, decidedly a tangible, human nose, very red, very large and visibly grog-blossomed.

"Sure," said Ragan, "it's a rale man; divil a doubt av it. No dacent ghosts ever had a nose the loike av that."

An axe was produced, and the top boards of the box were pressed off, and then, out from amongst the straw, they dragged a man— a weary fragment, gaunt and wolfish— in a seedy suit of pale black.

"For Gawd's sake, give us a drink!" gasped the spook.

A boy brought him water.

"Water!" he snorted indignantly. "I've been stowed in that box nigh on forty hours. D'ye think I'd insult the thirst I've got with water? Git me beer!"

Whilst they were bringing the beer, he sat on the edge of the box, nursing his head, and using occasional bad language, and when the beer was he wanted food, and no word of his story would he tell till food was forthcoming. They filled him up with bread and cheese at the policeman's expense, and then the man out of the box deigned to explain matters.

"Name's Giffen," he said, "I'm a bailiff: I'm in possession here. Ye see, I was tryin' ter get inter this bally house for a month when Gobb was here, but Gobb was a cute feller— somethin' in the literary line, I think— used ter write pomes on tea bags an' sugar paper an' all that— he was too smart fer me, an' kep' me out no matter what tricks I tried.

"At last however, I hits on a plan to do him. I 'eard he'd some well-to-do relations in South Yarra, I has meself packed up in this 'ere box nailed down an' labelled a Christmas 'amper, an I 'ires a van to deliver me here so.

"Well, Gobb was awfully surprised, but he took the box in. An' after a while he gets a hammer an' chisel ter open it. First lick the chisel took this bit outer my ear, an' I jes' fetched a yell that made Gobb jump like a kangaroo. That let me out— leastwise it kep me in. I hears Gobb talkin' the matter over with his wife.

" 'It's that infernal bailiff,' sez he. 'Well, as he wanted to get in so badly he can stay in now he is here, but meanwhile we'll shift, my dear.'

" So off he goes for a van. They removed every stick that night, bar my box, an' here I've bin' howlin' an' cursin' ever since. I tell you 'tain't no fun bein' a bailiff, specially when you're dealin' dealin' with literary people. I'm off it. Anyhow, I'll 'ave some more beer!"

He left for the nearest pub, accompanied by Eagan, and Bluff-street knew him no more, but it will never forget the story of Gobb's Christmas Box.

———————

An Incident at the Old Pioneer

The Argus (Melbourne) 3 July 1895

MANAGER McFie had seen the 12 o'clock shift below, and now, tired and disgusted, he kicked off his wet things, and "turned in." Manager McFie's hut was quite a salubrious summer residence, but the rain had already picked holes in the bark roof. An iron bucket suspended above the head of the bunk caught the tiny stream that would otherwise have dribbled upon his pillow, an oil-skin coat turned the drops that rained upon the foot of the bed into a miniature river meandering along the hard clay floor, and the darkness was made musical by the tinkling sound of drops falling into tin dishes placed here and there about the hut to catch them. Mack curled down amongst the blankets under his great 'possum rug, swore a prayer or two, and endeavoured to give himself up to sweet forgetfulness of his "danged roomertism," the fact that she was pinching out— "she" being the reef— and his many other managerial troubles.

Outside the night was pitch dark, and the rain raced by in successive charges, driven by the howling wind that caught and tore the gusts of phosphorescent steam above the engine-house at the mine, and sent the fragments streaming and curling away amongst the complaining trees like maddened wraiths. The driver in the well-lighted, rain-tight engine-house whistled contentedly over his work, and the battery boys, under comfortable shelter, rather delighted in the storm, the howling of which could be heard even above the thunder of the stampers; but the unfortunate braceman, crouching in the lee of one of the poppet-legs beneath the misty yellow glow of his lantern, cold, soddened, and more than half afraid of the tempest, that shook the brace vigorously under its bare poles, muffled the chattering of his teeth with a big quid, and heartily envied the facemen in the warm stopes and drives below.

Sleep was long coming to the weary "skipper;" he lay awake for hours, feeling the rheumatism like rats gnawing in his old bones, and swearing quietly but with the emphasis of a devout "Geordie." At length, whilst listening intently for the four o'clock whistle, oblivion fell upon him, and a deep organ note mingled with the tinkling of the raindrops in the scattered tins.

Mack imagined he had not slept twenty minutes when he was roughly awakened. He felt himself being energetically shaken, and heard a voice with a decided note of terror in it mixed up with the march, march, march of the rain and the long shrill cries of the wind in the dead gums. A shower of water rained upon his face from wet oilskins as he turned, and the voice of Tom White called again:—

"For God's sake, boss, tumble up! The 'big blow' has caved in, and the old shaft is choked with reef."

The manager was out on the sloppy floor in a moment, groping for his clothes.

"An' Brierly, Brierly— D—n it all, man! what about Brierly?" he gasped.

"He is trapped like a rat."

"Lord, Lord!" groaned McFie, "an' there hasn't been a man near the cursed hole for months before to-night."

Mack discovered the matches, but they were like mush in his hand, and he was compelled to tear his way into his clothes in the darkness. Presently he rushed after White towards the mine. The whistle was piping piteously against the storm, which still thundered in the gully.

A hasty examination served to inform the manager of the extent of the disaster, which troubled him all the more for the fact that it was not quite unforeseen and might have been avoided. About forty yards from the working shaft of the Old Pioneer mine was another and a smaller shaft, one that had been sunk by the discoverers of the reef. At the lower-most level of the latter hole the two shafts were connected by means of a drive for the purpose of improving the air in the workings. Within about fifty feet of the surface the original workers had opened out and struck a big blow of quartz, the very richest of the lode, and in taking out the stone had excavated a great irregular chamber, reaching in places to within twenty feet of the surface. This chamber they eventually stowed full of loose reef from the lower workings, with the dual object of saving hauling and holding up the ground. It was a bad job from a miner's point of view, but when a small independent party is on rich stuff that is not expected to hold out the members rarely waste time on fancy mining. Long since the surface over the excavation had settled down, leaving a large hollow place. To-night the great pressure of the many tons of earth, combined with the force exerted by the swelling of the reef, caused by the moisture that percolated through, had crushed out the timbers that walled up the mouth of the old drive, and sent the broken reef pouring into the pit, like the waters of a cataract, filling eighty feet of shaft in the winking of an eye.

If this were all the accident might not have been very serious, but at 12 o'clock McFie had sent Bill Brierly to put in a shift in a small drive leading from the air-shaft towards the Old Pioneer, and about thirty feet from the bottom of the former. Scarcely any work had been done in this drive since it was opened out, and now the shaft was choked, and Brierly was penned in that tiny chamber, with air enough, Mack reckoned, to last a man five hours, provided he had sense enough to put out his candles, and sit and wait for death in the

dark— a hair-bleaching, marrow-freezing experience men say who have so sat and waited.

"Stop the battery!" roared McFie, after his cursory inspection. "Send the boys to knock up the men at the Piper an' up at Mother Murty's. They'll never hear that penny whistle agin this wind. White, you take Harry an' Bricky an' a couple of others when they come, an' rig a win'las over the air-shaft, an' pull reef till all's blue! Ben, go below— I expect Evans an' Castro are already on the job. Chuck it down the winze, stow it anywhere, an' work— work like fiends. If we don't get at Brierly inside five hours I'm a done man, an' so is he!"

The manager remained on top a few minutes longer, giving orders to the brace-man and the engine-driver, and then went below with a couple of volunteers who had come out of the black bush, half-dressed and puffing like engines. In No. 3, which drive ran into the old shaft, three silent men, stripped to their flannels, reeking in the faint, ghostly light of the candles, worked desperately upon the broken reef that had gushed into the drive.

McFie and the others "took a hand," more men came down in the next cage, and the next, and next, and presently wherever there was room for a man to plant a shovel or push a truck a man was toiling with the magnificent energy with which the meanest miner is endowed when the life of a mate is at stake. On the brace three or four men handled the trucks as the cages leapt to the landing. The engine throbbed, groaned, and strained like a living thing, and the eager volunteers, stoking vigorously, kept steam up to a dangerous pressure, while the safety-valve fairly shrieked under it. At the mouth of the air-shaft a brawny contingent whirled the windlass, pulling dirt from the top of the heap below, where two men toiled like heroes. Six or seven others, waiting to relieve exhausted mates, gathered in the red glow before the boilers, and talked of the imprisoned man in low voices and with a newborn respect, telling all the best they knew of him; and two or three frightened, curious women, with shawls drawn over their heads, peered with white faces out of the surrounding darkness.

At daybreak the struggle was still going on with undiminished zeal, and every handy place that would hold a truck of dirt was choked with reef, and the cages sprang up with the full trucks or rattled down with the "empties" swiftly, and with scarcely a pause.

Manager McFie worked with the best of them. Drenched with perspiration, bruised and cut by pieces of falling reef, he faced the mass of dirt in the old shaft, careless of danger and ignorant of fatigue. As fast as the reef was shovelled away more rolled into the drive out of the shaft, but at length Mack uttered a sharp exclamation of joy and pointed to a dark open space showing below the cap-piece of the first set. Enlarging this with a few strokes of the

shovel, he seized a candle and examined the shaft beyond; then, staggering back in the drive, bellowed a cheer that was caught up by the men and echoed on the brace.

The unexpected had happened. The choked pit was a ladder-shaft; a stout ladder, well stayed, ran up the side of the shaft, past the drive in which Brierly was immured; between it and the slabs lining the shaft was a space about 18 in. wide; large lumps of reef had jammed between the rungs, and now, right up the side to the mouth of the drive, was a clear passage, large enough to admit of the escape of a slight man like Brierly.

"Steady lads— easy does it!" said Mack, as the men attacked the reef again. "A wrong stroke might bring the stuff down again. Clear a way, an let's see what can be done."

Mack put his head into the shaft and called, but no answer came back. He called louder, again and again. Still there was no reply, and the old manager turned away, and looked meaningly into the blank faces of the men, and his own cheeks were grey with dread.

"I'll chance it, boss!"

A young fellow stepped forward— a trucker, a boy merely— with a plain, strong face and glowing eyes, luminous with resolution.

"No, no, lad! it might mean death."

But young Stevens pushed by the extended arm and seized the ladder. Somebody stuck a lighted candle on his hat with a scrap of moist clay, and he went up the shaft on the under side of the ladder, climbing gingerly, conscious that the least vibration might bring the reef rushing in upon him. Mack watched him from below, and no man spoke a word. The boy reached the drive, paused only a moment, and started down again. Half a minute later he was dragged from the ladder by McFie's eager hands, and the same instant the reef rushed in, and filled up the place where he had been, and poured into the drive with a vibrant roar like thunder.

Stevens stood with his back to one of the legs for a moment, a superstitious fear transfiguring his face, his limbs trembling painfully.

"He is not there!" he gasped in a choked voice.

"Not there?"

The boy shook his head.

"Then," murmured McFie, "he is there;" and he pointed towards the filled-in shaft with a despairing gesture. "He must have made a rush for the ladder when she started to run, and he's under the reef. It's all UP, boys!"

Something like a groan broke from the lips of the men, but they seized their shovels and went to work again— all but one man. Graham turned away and walked towards the working shaft. He went up on the cage, and in less

than five minutes returned and drew McFie aside. He whispered a few words in the manager's ear, and Mack followed him with an amazed look in his face. The two men got on the cage, and Graham pulled the knocker, signalling to the engine-driver to drop them at No. 2.

Graham led the way along No. 2, in which drive no work had been done for some months, and presently stopped and threw the light of his candle full upon the recumbent form of a man sleeping heavily upon a few slabs, his head pillowed on his arm. Mack turned the face towards the light, and beheld Bill Brierly, the supposed dead man. Graham, and McFie stared at each other for a moment. Graham grinned feebly but Mack breathed a mighty oath. Brierly's tea-flask lay near. The manager picked it up and brought it to his nose.

"Drunk!" he ejaculated, kicking the sleeping miner.

"As a jackass," responded Graham, tersely.

Ten minutes later the brace-man called to the men below to knock off and come up.

"We have got Brierly. He is alive!" he cried.

The men rushed the cages, cheering, and wondering. On top a circle of disgusted miners stood round Bill Brierly, who lay sprawling on the floor before the boilers, grinning inanely in his drunken sleep. The truth was told in constrained whispers. Brierly was probably "half-screwed" when he went on at 12; he had made his way to No. 2, the driest and warmest drive in the mine, early in the shift, taking his flask of rum with him, and intending, no doubt, to "do a comfortable loaf" up there; and there he had lain, stupidly drunk, throughout those dreadful hours of anxiety and toil. The men thought of their long struggle and their wasted sympathies, of the reef piled everywhere about the workings, yesterday so orderly and correct, and each man glanced into his neighbour's face, but none spoke; no one even ventured to swear, and they could not laugh— the situation was too tremendous for any form of expression of which they were capable.

One by one the worn-out miners dragged themselves away towards their huts and houses, but McFie remained, sitting on a log, glowering at the drunken man, his mind full of the choked winzes and drives below, and of young Stevens cheek by jowl with death on the buried ladder.

"Ain't you going to turn in, boss?" someone asked.

"No," he said, angrily. "No. I'm goin' to sit here till Bill Brierly sobers up, an' then, by thunder, I'm goin' to kick him from here to the Piper, an' back again!"

"But, man, this is better than having to fish him from under the reef."

"I dunno, I dunno!" snarled Mack, striking his knee fiercely with his great gnarled fist, "but I must kick that man or blow up!"

Monk's Scheme

The Bulletin 12 Dec 1896

MONK was a tall, dark, thin, morose man, who looked as if he had been built hastily and upon the run-'em-up principle. There was in his actions an uncomfortable suggestion that he would assuredly collapse in the next gale. He had high cheek-bones, meagre, dusty-black whiskers, and a long, pendulous nose, afflicted with a twitch that made him a continuous joy to the small boys going heaven-wards under compulsion via the little wooden chapel on the corner. Monk had small, misty eyes that floated in their sockets without volition. He was a ponderous and melancholy man, and spent most of his time out of doors, backed up against his house, or shuffling dejectedly up and down the neglected garden walks, "making inventions," my landlady said.

I had come to live next door to this man, and as he was the only view from my room window I presently knew him pretty well by sight, and used to wonder what he was living for. He struck me as one who might possibly have done some good in the world, but for his feet, the largest and most inartistic extremities I have ever seen out of the pages of an American comic paper. He was apparently so conscious of the hopelessness of any physical effort on his part, hampered and handicapped as he was with wide, flat, unwieldy feet that were lark-heeled, pigeon-toed and over-run with foreign growths, that he had fallen into comparative inertia, and continually brooded over his boots, looking down upon them with a hurt, accusing expression that was unspeakably pathetic.

Under these circumstances, it devolved upon Mrs. Monk to keep the house going, which she did by running a music-school for infants and beginners. None of the pupils ever got beyond the beginner stage, and the tortured piano wailed and shrieked continuously from early morning till late at night, so that house-rent was ruinously cheap in our street, and no dog could be induced to live in the neighborhood.

Monk was an inventor; he had invented a patent, ventilated, damp-proof coffin that had turned out a great success for another man as a butter-cooler, I believe, and he was now busy on a new boot that supplied its own motive-power and would walk alone.

We had been neighbors for some time before Mr. Monk discovered my existence or allowed me to divert his attention for a moment from his depressing feet. Presently, however, he began to nod occasionally in my direction, and in time I found him throwing out signals and inviting friendship and confidence. He sidled in my direction when I passed of an evening, and came coughing insinuatingly at the dividing-fence when I took mine ease under

the pepper-tree. I observed all discreetly with the tail-end of a glance, and manoeuvred with much strategy, for he did not promise to be a cheerful or companionable man.

But he invaded my room one evening on the heels of my landlady, and refused to be driven forth with conventional phrases. He was big with a great idea; he wished to make my fortune and give me fame and the reverence of men. The landlady left us, and, having carefully closed the door, he selected a chair and sat down near me, nursing his dropsical belltopper, and allowing his vague, fish-like eyes to float all over and about me; and then he asked, with impressive solemnity:

"Do you want to make a big fortune, young man ?

He had discovered my weakness. I admitted that a modest competence would meet my wishes, and he went on gravely, tapping me on the knee as he spoke, one tap for each word, by way of emphasis:

"I can lay you on to a scheme that'll make you rich in less'n two years!"

He drew off momentarily and studied the effect, and a spasm wobbled his long nose like an agitated table-jelly.

"Make both of us rich," he continued. "I'd go alone on'y it'll p'raps want a active man he glanced reproachfully at his feet— "an' I ain't what you'd call a quick-an'-lively sort. You're young an' enterprisin', and you're a newspaper man, I b'lieve, an' could boom the Metropolitan Funeral Reform and Mortuary Cold Storage Company."

He drew bundles of papers from his pocket, and, having carefully provided for his sacred hat, spread them on his knees.

"P'raps you don't take much interest in funerals?" he said. "I do. I'm an undertaker by profession and breedin' an'— an'— instinct, an' all my life I've given a great deal of attention to this question of funeral reform, an' at last I've hit it— Mark me, I've got here drawn up a scheme what's goin' to revolutionise funerals throughout this country. The present manner of conductin' funerals is costly, wasteful, indecent, an' a blot upon our civilisation. Eh?"

He evidently expected support, and I admitted guardedly that there was room for reform, certainly.

"I'm goin to bring about that reform," he said eagerly, "me an you, if you care to stand in . In the first place, now, what do you think is the annual waste of horse-power in Melbourne alone consequent on the existin' ridiculous manner disposin of the dead?

"Thirty-six thousand seven hundred an' fifty three horse power is wasted weekly. That's a preposteris waste of energy which should be devoted to wood-cartin', or haulin', or chaff-cuttin'. My scheme will let that power free fer the service of production an' trade.

"As an observin' man," he continued, after another dive into his documents, "you must 'a remarked the indecent haste with which the beloved dead is hurried underground in this country— 'specially in summer. Likely enough you've lost a dear one yourself an' been harrared up when they tore the departed from your bosom to bury it in the dismal tomb. Bodies turn very quick this time o' the year. My idea'll change all that— mourners'll be able to keep deceased by them for months if they want to— keep him quite fresh an' sweet.

"When there's a epidemic about— typhoid, influenza, scarlet-fever— it often happens three or four'll die in one fambly in the course of a month or so. What's the consequence? People are bothered out o' their wits with funerals, and ruined, most like, with the fearful expense of em an the cost of openin' up the old grave or buyin' new ones. My scheme does away with superfluous buryin' an' extra wear an' tear. Save up your dead till the epidemic's over, an' then bury 'em all together in a job lot!

"How is it done? Easy enough. Cool storage that's the idea! We build a refrigeratin' chamber, same as for freezin' mutton. Advertise funerals at ten shillin's a head. People rush us with orders. We store the bodies in the freezin'-room till we have a good hearse-load, an' one cartin does for the lot. It must have struck you— the ridiculousness of puttin' one solitary coffin in a big hearse, an' hirin' a lot of undertaker's men, an' employin' two, maybe four, horses to haul it to the cemetery, when you might save money, time, an' wear an' tear by makin' one journey of it. I used to puzzle over that when I was in business, but couldn't get over the difficulty of storin' 'em. I've hit on the idea at last, an' there's millions in it!— millions in it!"

Monk had been pecking nervously at my knee with his dexter finger all through this explanation ; he finished with an energetic blow, and backed off, flushed and triumphant, to note the impression.

"S'pose people want to keep the late lamented for a while," he continued, fearing that I was still unconvinced— "heart-broken widow, an' all that, you know, wishes to have the mortal remains of her loving husband where she can drop in an' see him any time— we store him on ice under glass, with paper filigree all round him, everythin' lovely, an' charge so much a week for cool storage. Won't that catch on an' be pop'lar? Blesh you! we'll have the place full of 'em. Money! Why we'll be rollin' in it, take my word! We would have a branch freezin' works in each suburb. Most mourners, 'specially widows, 'ud rejoice to have deceased near, where they could go an' weep over him on Sundays for a few months, an' put flowers on his still, cold breast. There ain't much satisfaction in a mound of dirt for a sorrowin' widow, besides the cost of

trammin' it to the cemetery. Now, what d'ye think of the prospects of the Metropolitan Funeral Reform and Mortuary Cold Storage Company?"

Monk had risen, and his concluding words were spoken with the air of a man who had accomplished a great thing, and who realised the fact.

I temporised. I said the idea was a brilliant one. I think I succeeded in convincing him that it dazzled me. It was, I said, an inspiration, the master-stroke of a great and original mind. It should not be trusted to the hands of the inexperienced, but should be brought under the notice of the acutest intellects in the country.

Monk brightened.

"Would you advise me to move the Government?" he asked eagerly.

"That s the idea— move the Government."

He arose again, glowing with resolution, but his cumbersome feet weighed him down, and he sat once more and sighed reproachfully.

"Now, would you undertake to move the Government, and stand in?"

I explained that I was not on good terms with the Government, that the Government was prejudiced against me for various reasons, and my appearance in the matter would be likely to bias the powers against his epoch-marking idea. So he left me, dragging his feet after him, resolved to move the Government in sundry places.

About a week later Monk whispered through the fence that the Government was visibly moved but I heard no more of the Metropolitan Funeral Reform and Mortuary Cool Storage Company and presently Monk was leaning up against the sunny side of his house again, gazing dejectedly at his feet.

———————————

Editor Pike's New Departure

The Bulletin, 12 Apr 1890

THE AMOURS and bitterness of the common, domestic obituary poem and its attendant journalistic wickednesses, the birth and marriage proclamations, which tend to elevate the soul and burnish up her mental attributes, have not been entirely exhausted by the gaunt and soulless human objects who fabricate long links of irreverent literature for the comic papers, as has been evidenced by a new phase of wretchedness that has recently appeared in the domestic column of a small and dreadfully solemn organ run in the interest of liver-pills and lung-blisters in a lost and disconsolate township called Cooneybungle, South Australia.

The Cooneybungle *Bugle* is under the dreamy supervision of a stunted literary individual named. Pike, who has worn all the nap off his head wrestling with European complications and supporting the awful aggravation and weary responsibilities of propelling and controlling a Weekly paper with only the assistance of an offensive and dunder-headed small boy.

Mr. Pike is an underdone and tremendously depressed gentleman with a stealthy, sidelong gait, and a face expressive of all the deeper emotions of a prize Swede turnip; he devotes a great deal of the time and attention that should be spent in pushing and furthering the *Bugle* to indulgence in beer and other native products of a kindred nature, and is occasionally seen spread about in public places in a state of mental and physical incapacity at moments of great importance to the well-being of his valuable journal.

Towards the end of last year a brilliant original idea, having for its purpose the spread and wider popularity of the *Bugle*, occurred to Mr. Pike, and in an early issue of that brainy and popular organ an announcement to the effect that the proprietors, always anxious to increase the usefulness and interest of their paper, would in future, on the 30th of every December, publish a summary of all marriages and births advertised in the *Bugle* during the past year, also an In Memoriam over each late-lamented person whose death had been notified in their columns within the same space of time. The aforesaid proprietors cunningly intimated hopes that their enterprise would tend to encourage the births, marriages, and deaths in the neighbourhood, which institutions certainly partook of the general depression in business in and about Cooneybungle. The *Bugle*, of course, had only the interest of the township at heart in making this departure, and was confident the residents would do their best to second its endeavours and make the birth, marriage, and death-rate of Cooneybungle second to none in Australia.

The idea evoked immediate expressions of public approval; the residents were not expected to pay anything, and that alone was sufficient to excite their hearty co-operation. At the instigation of the local doctor, a meeting of prominent inhabitants was held for the purpose of taking into consideration the best means of expressing their high esteem for the character and ability of Mr. Joachim Pike, the editor of the Cooneybungle Bugle. The doctor, two clergymen, and the undertaker addressed this meeting, and dwelt in glowing terms upon the beautiful morality of Mr. J. Pike and his untiring efforts for the good of the township. Dr. Kidd instanced the Murphy-street drain, the post-office lamp and the Burnt Creek bridge, as lasting monuments of Mr. Pike's indefatigable zeal, and remarked that this last sacrifice in throwing open the already sorely-pressed columns of the *Bugle*, with a view to accelerating the local birth-rate, proved that he was fully alive to the most pressing necessities of the township The doctor hoped all present would unite in giving their able editor a fitting token of their appreciation. The Rev. Peter Pope had long been animated by the keenest admiration for Mr. Joachim Pike's literary abilities, and felt that his wonderful penetration in discovering the infrequency and irreligious reluctance with which the young people of Cooneybungle contracted matrimony, and his self-sacrificing endeavours to ameliorate that evil deserved some return; and then the reverend gentleman started off on a lingering dissertation on the impiety of single life, and was overtaken by. the chairman an hour, later, and called off to make room for Brown, the undertaker. Brown said old Pike was a smart fellow; he knew a thing or two; he could see that some people remained alive away beyond reason and religion— lived overtime, so to speak— to the ruination of business and public morality, and was not afraid to tell them so. He (Brown) had a great admiration for the editor of the *Bugle*, and would be happy to supply him with a German-silver-mounted coffin gratis, if he would step round and leave his measure. The meeting resolved unanimously to tender Mr. Pike a public banquet at an early date.

Mr. Pike got his banquet— it was a small, inexpensive banquet, consisting chiefly of wet refreshments,— and it was bought and paid for by the doctor, the undertaker, and the clergymen. But Joachim was modest in his desires, and manifested his appreciation of the fare provided by getting as drunk as time and circumstances would permit. He was carried home in the morning on an armchair, and returned to consciousness some hours later, animated with an unconquerable desire to protract the festivities.

The next number of the Bugle was looked forward to with considerable anxiety by the people of the township, few of whom had not experienced either a birth, death, or marriage in their families during the past twelve

months; but when the paper came out a sudden chill fell upon the general expectations, and Cooneybungle retired within itself, abashed, to cogitate and endeavour to unravel a great waste of tangled-up birth-and-death proclamations and distracted in-memorial at the *Bugle* sufficed to convince its numerous subscribers that its gifted editor must have been violently drunk just prior to its publication; the promised column looked as if it had bean struck by lightning and then printed in a mangle; expressions of howling despair and bottomless grief were hashed up amongst songs of rejoicing and heartfelt congratulations, and all the most influential gentlemen of Cooneybungle were, given due, pro vocation to get up in tumultuous bitterness and kick the enlightened Pike and welt him with a waddy from Dan to Beersheba.

Whether the aforesaid offensive small boy had inadvertently knocked the stuffing out of a forme and then filled it again according to the dictate of his own mildewed conscience, or Joachim, in one of his fits of vinous aggravation, had set the matter up regardless of law and order, has never been made known, but the Bugle's new departure was a miserable failure, and moved large, muscular residents to call upon Mr. Pike in his office and express their sentiments and invite that gentleman out to fight; but they found the guiding intellect and full staff of their only journal spread in an attitude of abandon on a pile of exchanges, in a dumb, solid slumber brought on by rum.

Despite kicks and profane expostulations the editor maintained his somnolent composure, and his interviewers, each armed with a *Bugle*, dropped one by one into the Old Coach Hotel to ventilate their grievances and invite sympathy. Here an impromptu public meeting was held, and Doctor Kidd was voted to the chair.

The doctor was painfully agitated and ruthlessly undone; he arose and flourished a Bugle, and without preliminaries stigmatised Pike as a debauched reprobate, and an old, bald-headed, rattletrap scoundrel, with no conscience and no reverence for the finest emotions that animate the human bosom.

"You all know," said the raging medico, "that early in March I was united in the holy bonds of wedlock to Mrs. Stretch, the relict of your late respected pound-keeper. Hear what this low-minded, rum-ravaged animal of the *Bugle* has to say of that joyous compact:

KIDD-STRETCH.— On the 8th of March, at St. John's Church, by the Rev. Amos Boland, Dr. William Kidd to Mrs. Mary Stretch, daughter of Mr. Heffernan Stretch, of Liverpool, England.

Not many months have sped since he
Was reft of all the joys of life
And laid in that cold, cruel bed;

But, ah ! tho' here we suffer strife,
And pain and anguish ring our brows,
We feel it all is for the best,
And in that Paradise above
We yet may know a perfect rest.

"There!" yelled the doctor, growing extremely red and tearing up the paper he held, "there's a pretty way to speak of one of the happiest unions ever sanctioned in Heaven! I'll give him 'perfect rest,' the low, brainless outcast! I'll make him 'suffer strife,' the animal— the mean, crawling, doddering object of abhorrence!"

Here the medico sank gasping into his chair and feebly mopped the leakage off his bald tract with a bar towel, and the meeting proceeded in an informal way.

The next complainant was a tall, thin, placid man who begged to state, without heat or prejudice, that Joachim Pike, editor of the *Cooneybungle Bugle*, was everything low and degraded, in nature and several supernatural things detestable to humanity, and he requested to be allowed to move a motion that that meeting, without further consideration, seize upon the person of that wretched man, dip it in a barrel of tar, and roll it down a hill overgrown with thistles. He called the attention of all present to the *Bugle*'s notice of the birth of his tenth daughter:

MORAN.-On the 11th of June, at Graham-street, the wife of A. Crawford Moran, of a girl, the only daughter of the late John Sheehan, of Belfast, Ireland. No cards. Home papers please copy.

Mr. Moran drew attention to the ambiguity of this intimation in quiet, but forcible, language, and said that if Pike could not keep wholly irrelevant birth and marriage notices from coalescing in that disgusting manner he was quite unfit to run a paper, and ought to be hung to prevent further complications. He observed, moreover, that the utter villainy of the man was to be seen in his request to the Home papers to copy the report and thus reflect upon the character of Mrs. Moran in a country where she had hitherto been regarded with respect and reverence.

The Rev. Mr. Pope then got up in a state of rage ill-befitting a man of his cloth and complexion, and read:—

POPE.—On the 21st of September, at her late residence, 42 Grant-street, Jane, the only wife of the Rev. P. Pope, after a long and severe illness. Both doing well.

The reverend gentleman went on to say that such a notice was enough to convince all thinking men that Editor Pike was an atheist and a scoffer at all good, human or divine. He solemnly assured all present that there was a place prepared for the devil and his angels and the man who could publish a notice like that. To say he was "doing well" after the death of his dear wife was a base and malicious libel, as everybody knew who had witnessed his grief and seen him weighed before and since.

Brown, the undertaker, next took the floor. Brown had been married a few months prior, to the daughter of the local publican, and in the *Bugle* the record of their nuptials got mixed up with the following In Memoriam, bearing on some late lamented young lady:

Weep not for me, my parent dear,
Cut off in early bloom
From all I loved and cherished here,
And wedded to the tomb.
Wipe off the briny tear-drops now
That down your dear face run.
Drive wrinkled care from off your brow,
And say— "God's will be done!"

Mr. Brown seemed to think that rather rough on him somehow, and hastened to revoke the promise of a coffin which he had made to Pike, and alluded to that literary individual throughout a long harangue in unvarying terms of bitterness; he said he was inconceivably abject in mind and ugly and insanitary in person, and he offered, should the meeting agree in its wisdom to destroy the editor, to undertake to bury him with the utmost ignominy at his own expense.

After these a long list of severely distempered men and ladies started up to ventilate their grievances, and lay their cases before the meeting, and offer suggestions for the harassing of Editor Pike. One large, fierce female was awful in her wrath, and thought Pike ought to be boiled because of the following ;

PURDEY—SHANNON.—On the 12th of March, at the bride's residence, by the Rev. P. Pope, John Purdey to Matilda Shannon. May he R.I.P.

Mrs. Purdey resented the insulting inference in that "R.I.P.," and lamented the fact that Joachim had no hair by which she might haul him a mile to drop him down a mine.

A gentleman named Jones used a lot of intemperate language and violent gesticulation previous to reading this to the assembly

JONES—LYNCH.— At St. John's Church, Cooneybungle, on the 6th of May, 1889, by the Rev. A. Boland, Edward Jones, of Graham-street, to Miss Elizabeth Lynch, second daughter of Barnard Lynch, of Cross Cut, S.A.

In affectionate remembrance of my beloved wife Helen who passed away on the 3rd of February, 1889; —

She was a loving wife and true
Whilst here on earth she stayed,
And when above the clouds she flew
And with the angels played
On golden harps, my broken heart
To follow her was fain.
Dear wife 'twas hard from thee to part.
But soon we'll meet again.

Inserted by her sorrowing husband, E. Jones.

This was simply a little over-sight in giving the notice of Jones' second marriage in conjunction with his obituary poem for Mrs. Jones No. 1, but Jones seemed to consider it a matter of great gravity, and offered to hang Pike and find the rope if the meeting would only lend its moral support.

One man who was young and rash took passionate exception to the fact that the dates of his marriage and the birth of his first child were reversed, and another tabled this as justification for his awful wrath

BUCK.—In loving and affectionate memory of her grandfather, the wife of Mr. William Buck of a son.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

The rest of the birth-and-marriage notices and obituaries were all either incoherent blocks of "pied" type or drunken and incapable verse, or contained more or less implied aspersions on the moral character or mental capacity of the persons mentioned therein, and the demand for blood rose to a mania in and about Cooneybungle; but after calling Editor Pike everything fearful and disagreeable in the English language and giving due deliberation to the case, the meeting resolved not to resort to bloodshed, but to appoint a deputation of eight to wait on the journalist and demand an explanation and a retraction of everything, and then to tar him and let him loose.

The deputation appeared at the *Bugle* establishment in office hours next morning, thinking to catch the editor sober when their admonitions would have due effect, but were grieved to learn that Mr. Pike had been called away to visit a sick aunt in Adelaide. The shock-headed, vicious small boy imparted

this information from a top-storey window, and then carelessly spilt a lot of used-up machine-oil on the deputation of eight and withdrew.

There was no issue of the *Bugle* for three weeks, and when public animosity had got cold and flaccid, Editor Pike managed to get out an edition containing a full and complete apology to everybody mentioned, and a good many who were not mentioned at all, before the people were aware of his return, and as yet no murder has been reported from Cooneybungle.

———————

After the Accident

The Bulletin, 9 Nov 1895

ONE MAN sat upon a heap of broken reef near the face, with his broad palms supporting his chin. His thin, hollow cheeks showed between the outspread fingers, a sickly yellow in the candle light. One candle in a spiked holder burned against the side of the drive. Two billies and two full crib-bags hung near on dog-hooks driven in an upright leg, and at the man's feet lay a couple of picks and a shovel. Kyley sat with his back to the face, staring with glowing, vindictive eyes into the gathered gloom down the drive, where the passage to the shaft was choked to the roof with splintered timber and fallen mullock, and where the head of a second man was dimly visible. Only the head and shoulders of this other were free; the rest of his body was hidden under the debris. The second man was thrown face downwards; across his back, pinning his arms, lay the great cap-piece, which alone seemed heavy enough to have crushed the life out of him. Beyond this the tumbled reef and splintered slabs were piled to the roof.

But the buried miner was not dead. The tough red-gum log forced down by the mighty pressure had ploughed its way diagonally down the side of the drive, and pinched him to the floor, stopping when the pressure of another inch must have been followed by certain and speedy death. A stout iron truck was jammed under the log beside him, torn and doubled like a card-board box. The young man could lift his chin a few inches from the floor of the drive, and turn his face from one side to the other, but was incapable of any other movement.

Presently he spoke. His voice came with an effort, and sounded feebly shrill, like that of a very old man.

"Dick, Dick! in the name o' God, speak man! D'ye think there's a chance for us?"

Dick Kyley dropped his hands, and there was an expression of grim satisfaction in his gaunt face as he replied deliberately, "There's a chance fer me, William,"

The buried man lifted his clay-smirched face, startled by the other's tone, and gazed eagerly at his mate, and continued gazing for fully a minute, puzzled and frightened by the incongruous levity in the face that confronted him. Then, the position becoming painful, he dropped his cheek in the wet clay again.

"What d'ye mean?" he asked anxiously. "Why only fer you?"

"Because, William, I don't think you've got a dog's show."

The reply was without a trace of sympathy; there was, in fact, a touch of malicious banter in the mincing tone of the "William." William Hether had never been anything but "Hether," or "Bill" to his shift mate before.

Again Hether looked anxiously into Kyley's face. Its cadaverous hollows were filled with dark shadows, and the high-lights brought out the salient features in a grotesque caricature that struck Hether as simply fiendish. He turned from the sight, with a new horror in his heart.

"This ain't no time to fool a man, Dick," he said humbly. "How can there be any chance fer you if I ain't in it?"

Kyley arose, plucked the candle from the wall, and advancing close to his mate held the flame low down, and showed him a small pool of water fathered upon the floor within 18 inches of his face.

"That's why," he said.

Hether understood, and a cry broke from his lips.

"Keep it back, Dick!" he gasped.

"William," said Kyley, calmly replacing the candle and resuming his former position on the reef, "you're a fool. That water's coming in from the face, as usual. The fall has dammed the gutters, and it can't get away; consequently, in less'n five hours the pool will be above your ears. And you know what that means."

"But you can build a dam around me. Get the shovel— quick! Make a dam with that loose reef, an' the clay off the floor. Dick, Dick! Give us a chance, for God's sake, man!"

Hether stopped short, staring at the ether who sat calmly regarding him. Presently he spoke again in a quavering whisper:

"You won't see a man drown without lendin' a hand t' help him?"

"No, I won't see it," replied Kyley, "because I'm goin' to douse this light. A candle burns up the air, an' I'll want all there is here, I reckon, before the boys reach me."

Driven almost wild with terror, a terror occasioned no less by the grim significance of Kyley's leering countenance and the brutality of the words than by the horrors of his position, Hether began to plead piteously, with tears and meanings. The pain of broken bones and the sickness of exhaustion had quite unmanned "Big Bill Hether," but his agony did not touch the heart of Kyley, who seemed to have forgotten that death also threatened him in the delight that the young man's sufferings awakened within his breast.

"Why've yeh rounded on me, Dick? What've I done—what've I ever done?" moaned the helpless man.

"I'm not goin' to lift a finger to keep you out of hell," answered the other, "because of her, William— because of Hannah."

Bill turned his face to the light again, and once more he stared at Kyley, sharply, inquiringly, reading every line of his fateful countenance. Then a groan of despair broke from him.

"I'll go away, Kyley," he said— "true's Christ, if we get out I'll go away, an' you'll never hear of me again. Only make a dam. Quick, man, quick, it's comin'! God! this is worse than murder, Dick—"

The water having filled the depression at the side of the drive was now running down and forming a pool in the hollow under Hether's chin. Kyley turned and blew out the caudle. For a long time Hether continued to supplicate in the darkness, and Kyley, leaning comfortably against the face, heard the thin voice, weakening to an almost inarticulate whisper, beseeching by all that is good on earth and holy in heaven for a little grace— another poor chance of life, and answered never a word. By a painful effort the young man continued to keep his mouth above the gathering water, but gradually the torture that afflicted his extended neck became unendurable, and now in his last extremity he railed at Kyley as a murderer, and abused him with curses in weak, childish tones that were nevertheless pregnant with passion, and sounded distinctly, and with terrifying emphasis, in that black chamber of death.

Suddenly there was silence. Dick Kyley listened, and presently heard a bubbling sound in the water. That ceased, and all was still. He felt now that his vengeance was complete— that Hether was dead, and at that moment the fierce emotions of resentment and revenge-hunger that had possessed and uphold him departed in a breath, and left him weak and cowed. His limbs trembled, and beads of perspiration gathered about the roots of his hair and rolled coldly upon his brow and cheeks. He was thinking, too, of his own wretched case. He heard, fitfully, a distant drumming, the sound of timber being driven home, and knew that the rescue-parties were working as hard as men may work; but whether theirs would be a job of hours or days he could not tell, and already he fancied he detected some taint of vitiation in the air.

Dick Kyley, sitting alone in the blackness of his prison, waiting for salvation or death, was soon the victim of an ungovernable fear, a supernatural terror entirely new to him, and the more awful for its novelty. From the moment he believed Hether dead he began to fear him. He strove with all the energy of his strong sense to drive him from his thoughts, but do what he might his mind would revert to the dread subject, and his eyes turn, staring intently into the darkness where at times they seemed to detect a yet blacker form in the pitch-black night that filled the drive— the shape of the dead man's head.

The horror grew, and with it an agonising conviction that Hether's dead face was staring at him with dead but seeing eyes. Imagination had pictured

the pallid cheeks stained with blood and clay, and the wide, accusing eyes, till the vision became a reality to him. Tortured beyond endurance, Kyley fumbled in his pocket, and found a match, which he struck upon the shovel blade. As the light filled the chamber a groan of relief broke from the miner's laboring breast. Only the back of Hether's head was visible; his face was sunk to the temple in the water. Dick extinguished the match— his last— and sat down again, only to struggle with another relay of horrors that presently arose against him.

William Hether still lived. He had discovered that by taking a deep breath and sinking his face till the forehead rested upon the clay he was enabled to allay the pain in his neck and to continue the struggle. He persisted in this course, noiselessly, for the sound of the rescuers at work had filled him with a glorious hope, and with that hope had come a fear that Kyley might be moved to murder him if he thought his rescue possible.

So another hour fled. The water in the drive, which had now found a broad level, continued to rise slowly. Kyley had lost the power of appreciating time, and sat huddled against the wall, distraught with fear and despair. Hether's face was haunting him again, standing forth visibly, threatening and awful in the tomb-like darkness. His mad fancy stretched every hour of his imprisonment into a long day, and he believed that it was his fate to be stifled by the foul gases from his mate's decomposing corpse. Even now the taint was in his nostrils. Although he was listening all the time with agonised intensity, he no longer heard the hammering of the miners beyond; his mind was too full of its unspeakable fear— he awaited the attack of the inhuman thing that his irresponsible faculties had fashioned out of the impenetrable gloom at the end of his narrow prison.

At this crisis, Hether called again in a piercing voice full of the supreme terror

"Help! help! Kyley, you murderer! fiend! devil—"

At the first sound of the voice, Kyley sprang back against the end of the drive, and shrieked, with all the power of his lungs, again and again; and there he remained, crouched down, pressing his face into the gravel, clutching his ears, shivering and moaning.

Three hours later the rescuers broke through, and found Hether under the fall, with his head in a pool of water, dead, and Kyley squatting at the face, babbling of spectres and devils.

It is still Mr. Richard Kyley's quaint belief that he is a conspicuous figure in hell.

———————

The Fire

The Bulletin, 25 Mar 1899

MOST women have a forté— the pathetic appeal was hers. The pathetic appeal is woman's most effective bait: it confers upon the man, in addition to the usual sentiments, the gratification of a large intention of benevolence.

Hippleton thought it would be an act of charity to take this poor, lone, helpless innocent into his heart, and shelter and protect her. Eventually he desired to do it, and was much gratified. She made him pleased with himself, and there is no surer way to a man's affections.

She posed as a friendless, suffering creature, craving sympathy; but one whose misfortune it was to be misunderstood even by those who should have been most anxious to tend and comfort her. Harvey Hippleton might have seen that the relations who had taken the orphan into their family circle were assiduous and tactful in their efforts to make her comfortable and happy, but he did not observe it. When he was in Ethel's company she monopolised his faculties.

Ethel was not a clever girl, and Harvey was not more of a fool than the average, but she deluded him to the top of his bent. She had dark, languishing eyes, which she rolled clumsily, with the disingenuousness of a ballet-girl; but he found them expressive only of suffering borne with humility. She was stupidly, incurably lazy; hated the calms of suburban respectability with inward ferocity, and longed for vulgar gaieties; but he thought her a gentle lady of weak health, galled by an odious obligation.

He proposed and was accepted. She clung to him, weeping, murmuring that he at least understood her. This love had saved her from something or other unspecified.

They were married, and the usual disenchantment began—but it began earlier than usual. What maddened Hippleton most was to find his wife resuming her old pose of the afflicted and persecuted innocent, but now it was he who misunderstood her. She still rolled her eyes, but now it was in the direction of other men, particularly in that of Horace Conyers, a slim, fair man with a complexion and small feet. Already Ethel had told Conyers that he alone really understood her— which he did not. A women reproaches the men who do not understand her, but she hates the man who does.

Although Harvey and his wife had had a quarrel or two about Conyers, the young man— who was still in love— did not doubt Ethel's fidelity; he questioned her discretion only, and they quarrelled about that. But of late they quarrelled about most things. Mrs. Hippleton continued to languish, and Conyers to offer sympathy. Hippleton thought his wife's sole object was to

irritate him, but at length he was impelled to speak his mind to the man, and Conyers, with a fine contempt for the fool-husband, answered insolently. In the fight that started on the spot Horace was grievously man-handled, and then he was kicked ignominiously along the whole length of a passage, and down ten stone steps.

Mr. and Mrs. Hippieton quarrelled over this— quarrelled brutally, with bad language and broken china.

"You have degraded me in the eyes of the world," was the wife's lament, damnably iterated.

Hippieton defended his position: "The man insulted me to my teeth. As if his attentions to you were not insulting enough!"

"It is you who have insulted me. You never understood me, never! Oh! if I were not alone in the world— alone! alone! But you have presumed on my defencelessness all along. I will leave you."

And so on, and so on, until Hippieton had smashed the last vase, and then he grasped his hat, confounded by the invulnerability of a wife's unreason.

"I will leave you!" he said, purple with passion, "and I will come back when you send for me—not before!" He flung out of the house and away.

Hippieton took up his residence at an hotel, and waited for his wife to come to reason; but, happen what may, the sex only comes to its own reason. He still believed in her basic honesty, and expected his recall every hour. He waited for six days, and it did not coine. On the seventh night he sat late at his bedroom window, gazing in the direction of his home. He ached to return— pride alone withheld him. The streets had long been deserted, and as Hippieton gazed, absorbed in bitter thoughts, a luminous spot grew out of the blackness just where it had seemed to him his house must stand. At the same moment there came to his ears the clangor of a big bell.

Hippieton sprang up and started from the room. He rushed down the stairs and into the street, hatless and coatless. He was going home. The young man's instinct had been true to him— his house was afire. When he reached the spot a crowd was already congregated in the street, and the firemen had battered down the door, but were standing irresolute.

A policeman attemped to keep Hippieton back with the crowd.

"For God's sake, let me go!" he cried. "My wife is in there. My wife, man!"

"Best leave it to the firemen, sir. You—"

Hippieton sent him down with a blow, and sprang up the steps and past the firemen into the burning building. A minute later the crowd saw him tear aside the blinds of an upstairs window and peer out, as if seeking a way, and it cheered him wildly. He disappeared again, and a strange hush fell upon the people, and they were silent till he staggered forth from out the flame and

smoke, bearing in his arms a human form swathed in blankets, just as he had plucked it from the bed.

A fireman took the figure from his arms and laid it upon the ground. Two others supported Hippieton tenderly. His hair and whiskers were burnt away, his face was blackened and disfigured, and his hands and arms were not nice to look upon.

"She is unconscious," he muttered, pointing.

"Only the smoke. The hospital— quick!"

The crowd pressed closely as the folds of the blankets were hastily thrown aside, disclosing a pale face, an immobile, handsome face, peacefully insensible— the face of Horace Conyers!

———————

The Old Selector

Argus (Melbourne) 4 April 1894

NIGHT AT EEL CREEK in the year 1880; a night so dark and boisterous that it was hard to believe there had ever been or ever would again be sunshine and peace amongst the Three Hills. The rain fell in successive waves upon Buckle's clearing ; and beyond, where the great, high white gums rose suddenly and precipitately in a compact wall, the elements rated and struggled, and the trees threw out their limbs and fought like sentient things. The creek, surprised into unaccustomed activity, blundered amongst the numerous tree trunks and stumps that lay in its bed and across its course, and boiled with infantile fury over its miniature falls and around the barricade of boughs and bark it had thrown up on the fork. The thunder rolled incessantly amongst the gullies between The Three Hills, starting into the open every now and again with a deafening roar that seemed to herald universal ruin.

And yet only a few hours earlier the sun had reigned supreme over Eel Creek , it had subdued the dignity of the tall, efflorescent gums and bowed their blossoming branches in sad humility; it had driven Buckles prime poultry ignominiously from the field and left them panting in bored langour, dipping their heads in the comfortless shade; it had blighted the gay sarsaparilla blossom and the honeysuckle bloom and the proud priest in the pulpits and lit a triumphal fire upon Little Hill. It had even forced Buckle from his clearing— the hopeless, heartbreaking work of dragging and bowing the fruitful soil from the grasp of the dense and stubborn bush and the scrub that contested every inch with him— and hunted him into his hut.

Ki Buckle's hut is a substantial chock-and-log structure, cool at noon on the hot midsummer days and warm and cozy on the keen winter nights Now it glows and steams in the darkness and the rain like a great beacon, offering shelter and comfort. Within it is a marvel of neatness, geniality and adaptation to the needs of the life of the simple "hatter"— its tenant. The remains of a fire smoulder in the wide fireplace, and a candle burnt upon the table. Mr. Buckle has been reading, but the book lies as it slipped from his fingers, title-page uppermost, upon the slab floor. It is a *Popular Melodist* of almost ancient date the only literary consolation the old selector has allowed himself for many years The dog Brick sleeps stretched at full length before the fire, dreaming of 'possums and bandicoots, and barking inwardly at intervals. Brick is a large ungainly animal of doubtful descent the implacable foe of dingoes and mountain cats, and the watchful guardian of poultry of all sorts, but filling a higher office as the recipient of his masters confidences and the delighted object of his many soliloquies. Brick is a model listener, but to-night his

amiable qualities are not brought into requisition. Buckle sits with his back against the foot of the bunk, nursing one knee, communing with the past, and following a vivid panorama of his own life marching past in the embers of the fire— and in the ashes.

For three years Ki (Ezekiah, presumably) had been in possession of his selection at Eel Creek. By tireless energy and patient application he had succeeded in clearing a few acres of the land. He was apparently over sixty; his nearest neighbours— about two miles off— said that he had no friends and no relations; that he possessed a little money made at mining, and that he kept on slaving away regardless of the fact that he would be ready for the grave ere he could make the land worth "two damns." In conclusion, he was an old fool. The conclusion was always garnished with many adjectives, and given with quite unnecessary emphasis.

Buckle did not cultivate his neighbours, he loved the seclusion of the bush, and when he had remarked upon the present state of the weather, and hinted at the probability or otherwise of a change, he had exhausted his eloquence on ordinary occasions. With Brick, he was often loquacious, a condescension which the faithful animal received with every evidence of canine appreciation. The old selector was strong and active at his work, though he walked with a stoop, and his movements at other times were awkward and slow. He was over the middle height, raw-boned, and tanned an ever lasting brown; his hair was long and thin, and he shaved regularly, leaving no hair on his face but a grizzled stubbly moustache.

As Ki sat in the softening light his face chastened by the influence of old memories, there was an unwonted refinement in his appearance, as if an almost forgotten self were asserting itself above the roughness born of long years of hard life and miscellaneous friendships on the gold fields, and still longer years buried in Australian bush solitudes. The memories were strong upon him to-night, and the thunder bellowing around the Three Hills, the wind wrestling with the trees, the torrents lashing upon the bark roof, and the musical drip drip of water falling from a leak into the tin dish set to catch it, served only as a vague but fitting background to the recollections in which his mind was absorbed.

So deep was his preoccupation, it was not until Brick had abandoned a warning growl for a decided roar that he became aware of the approach of a stranger. Then he started to his feet, but as he turned the door was dashed open, and a pale faced bareheaded woman, with streaming hair and large, frightened eyes staggered into the hut, amidst a rush of wind and rain.

Buckle uttered a sharp cry, and retreated step by step, as if before a phantom menacing him, to the furthest corner, and cowered there glaring at

the intruder. This was the central figure out of the procession that had circled before his eyes in the embers— the one ever-recurring form and face. It was surely a spirit.

"Ruth!" He put his hands out towards her with a sudden yearning.

The woman advanced a few steps, and spoke—

"Help me I am lost!"

The next moment the tall, slight figure was stretched upon the floor of the hut in a dead faint.

Ki approached, amazed and trembling. He shut the door, kneeling by the prostrate woman, slowly, reverently fearfully, he turned the pale face to the light, and then started back with a muttered exclamation. Presently he seemed to recover himself somewhat and he lifted the stranger from the floor, and laid her gently upon the bunk. Then he hastened to attend to her comfort. He forced warm brandy and water— duly sugared in deference to a woman's weakness— between the compressed, blood-less lips, he drew off the soaked outer garments, and threw fresh wood upon the fire; and when he had done all that suggested itself to restore the woman, and she appeared to be sleeping peacefully, the nervous excitement returned to him again, and he stood gazing down upon the handsome face, his own features strained with bewilderment and dread.

" Same chestnut hair, Brick," he muttered.

Brick, who all along had been sniffing at the stranger with friendly curiosity, whined a reply.

"Same mouth, same nose," continued Buckle, speaking like a man in a dream. " 'Bout thirty, I should reckon. Blue eyes, I'll swear, Brick. Good God ! What is this?"

His eyes had fallen upon an old-fashioned, massive gold locket suspended from the watch chain at the woman's breast. He tore the trinket from its fastenings, and thrust it into his pocket with a trembling hand, as if he feared some prying eye might detect the theft And now the excitement increased upon him, and he walked back and forth within the narrow confines of the hut, silent but greatly agitated. A nobbler of brandy steadied his nerves, and he stood by the woman again, and touched her white hand to convince himself that he was not the victim of a delusion or of madness.

"She is there, Brick, he murmured, and there was a wistful yearning in his face as he drew back the long, wet hair from the strangers brow. Then an idea came to him.

"She must be Gleeson's wife from Caroona— the girl he picked up in England two years ago. She's bin bushed. They must be out after her."

Ki took his gun, and hastened out. The storm had abated its violence somewhat. Waiting for a lull Buckle exploded both charges. Then he expanded his lungs and sent a long, clarion like coo-ee circling about the Three Hills. He waited and listened, but no answer came back. When he re-entered the hut the young woman was still sleeping in the death-like slumber that follows on complete exhaustion

Every quarter of an hour or so Buckle discharged his gun from a little eminence at the back of his hut, and coo-eed into the night, and at length he detected a faint answering call away to the left. He coo-eed again and again, and the answers came nearer, and presently he heard the beating of a horse's hoofs. Somebody was riding at a reckless pace along the old post-track. Ki re-entered the hut. The horse was pulled up sharp at the dog-leg fence, and, a few seconds later, a young man appeared in the doorway. He was drenched, and spattered with mud from top to toe. He was about to speak when his eye detected the form upon the bunk, and e entered, with a cry of joy, and bent over the woman and kissed her lips

"Thank God, I have found you, Ruth, my darling!" he whispered.

"Ruth, did you say, mate? Is her name Ruth?" Buckle plucked him by the sleeve with a trembling hand.

The young man stared at him, surprised by his eagerness.

"Yes," he said, "Ruth Gleeson. She is my wife. How still and pale she is!"

"Best not move her," answered Ki, awkwardly. "She's dead beat, that's all. Bin out long?"

"She left home about an hour before the storm broke, while I was away at the township. They thought up at Caroona that she had gone to meet me, but she must have lost herself in those infernal fern gullies. She's a stranger here, you know. Where did you find her?"

"Never found her, she jes' drifted in et about 9, an' fainted on the floor. I did the best I could."

"Thank you for it, with all my heart," answered Gleeson warmly.

"Perhaps I'd orter take your horse an' ride up to Caroona, an' let 'em know, while you tend to yer missus."

"You are a brick. The boys are all out searching the gullies, but Mrs. Bray will be there. Get her to make up a bundle of dry clothes. Tell her that if Bastow or Curtain return, the American waggon must be at the bridge by daybreak. Thank you again, old man; I'm your eternal friend for this night's work."

Disconcerted by the others earnestness, Buckle blundered out of the hut and was soon forcing Gleesons jaded horse towards Caroona. Ki had heard Gleesons history, but had never met the man before. He knew that he was well

to do, that he had married in England about two years ago, and that he had brought his wife to the new homestead at Caroona within the last few months.

Ki saw Mrs. Gleeson again at daylight, when her husband was carrying her to the trap at the bridge. She gave him her hand and smiled, and thanked him as well as she could.

"You must come and see me," she said.

The old man did not answer. The voice amazed him ; he stood like a man before whose eyes a miracle has been wrought, and did not move till she was out of sight. Then he expressed his astonishment to his dog and for hours he went "mooning" about the clearing, revolving over in his mind the incidents of the night and the sorrows of his life, muttering every now and again an exclamation or a half-spoken thought, to each of which Brick never failed to answer with a whine of encouragement or commiseration.

After a time Ki remembered the locket he had taken from Mrs. Gleesons watch-chain. He drew it forth, and, sitting on a log, gazed long and earnestly upon the portraits it contained. Then he pressed the jewel to his lips, his face sank between his hands and for the first time for many a long, bitter year he wept— wept unreservedly, and Brick, astonished at the unusual spectacle, pawed at his masters leg, and whined in sympathy.

This adventure quite upset Buckle's accustomed mode of life. He tried to sleep but could not, and when he attempted to work the axe fell once or twice, and then remained embedded in the log whilst his thoughts led him far away from Eel Creek, and back into other days. At length he wandered into the bush, and abandoned himself to reverie. The morning was comparatively fine, but he heeded neither the sunshine nor the fact that his clothes were still wet from last nights rain.

Late in the afternoon, after roaming about in the vicinity of Caroona for over an hour, he ventured to interview the house-keeper. When he learned that Mrs. Gleeson was little the worse for her rough experience, he turned and walked away again, disregarding a pressing invitation to "take something."

Next day the fever of unrest was still strong upon the selector. Hitherto work had been his great consolation, now he could not even work. He drifted from one point to another, and talked all the time in fragmentary and unintelligible sentences to the ever-attentive Brick. Towards three o'clock, whilst he was sitting on a stump by his hut, with the old-fashioned locket open in his hand, Mrs. Gleeson, accompanied by one of the men, rode up to the fence. She dismounted, and leaving her horse with Bastow, advanced to where Ki was now standing, with the locket clasped behind him, supporting himself against the hut.

"Good morning, Mr Buckle," she said. "I want to thank you again for the service you have done me."

She looked much younger now— there was a bright colour in her face and a gay light shone in her fine, blue eyes.

"T'was nothin'," he answered almost doggedly, swinging his body and keeping his eyes upon the ground.

"It was a very great deal. My husband has told me how kindly and carefully you treated me, and if you can understand what a paradise your bright hut seemed to me after I had been rushing about for hours, distracted by the awful darkness of the bush and the horrors of that awful storm, you will know that I must always regard you as a good angel. Won't you shake hands?"

He held out his hand towards her with the large locket open in the palm.

"Didn't you lose somethin'?"

He watched the effect of this anxiously, but with furtive eyes.

"Oh, yes, yes!" she answered joyfully. "I value that locket very much."

"I—I once knew a man named Rimpole," said Buckle, pointing an uncertain finger at an inscription on the jewel. He spoke with an effort, and watched the young woman narrowly. "Was a mate of mine on the diggin's in '64."

If he expected these words to have a deep effect upon his visitor he was not deceived: the young woman went suddenly pale, and her breath came in long gasps.

"Was— was he like that man?" she asked, indicating a face in the locket.

He glanced at her set lips, her swimming eyes, and marked the agony in her face : a momentary struggle passed within him, but his bettor self conquered.

"No," he said, "not a bit like him. Tall, with red hair an' a wart jest here. Name of John, came from Cornwall."

"Of course, of course, it couldn't be; but the name is uncommon." She recovered herself with a palpable effort, and went on to talk of her obligations to him.

"Was they your father an' mother?" asked Ki, apparently unconscious of her last words, and still harping on the faces in the locket.

"Yes," she said. "Both dead?"

"Both— a long time ago."

She chatted for a while about various things, and pressed him to visit them at Caroona.

"Bastow tells me you are quite a hermit," she said at parting, "that you make no friends. I hope you will change all that now and be good neighbours with us."

"Thank you!" he said simply. "Maybe I will."

When she is gone the old man resumes his seat on the stump. The lines in his face have deepened in a remarkable manner during the last twenty-four hours, and the great restraint is gone from it. He looks weaker and much older. Brick expects a conversation, and pushes his nose into Ki's hand.

"It's no go, ole boy," murmurs Ki. "No go. We must keep mum, Brick—musn't say nothin' t' put her away. She's happy up there, an' it don't much matter about two played out ole geysers like ma an' you."

Rumour did not travel fast on Eel Creek, but in the course of a few weeks the peculiar behaviour of Ki Buckle was the stock theme of conversation whenever two local settlers met, and with the customers at the old Tollbar Hotel on the cross-roads, and the general opinion expressed in the common language was that he had "gone off his chump." He only worked now by fits and starts, and was often met wandering about the bush, usually at no great distance from Caroona. However, not all the combined eloquence of Mr. and Mrs Gleeson could induce the old man to visit them. If he were able to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Gleeson, remaining unseen himself, he was happy, but when she stopped to speak to him, as she often did when riding down to meet the coach, he was constrained and uneasy, fidgeted with a gum leaf, and answered only in indistinct mono-syllables. She often talked of his peculiarities with her husband, and was at length compelled to admit the impossibility of cultivating his friendship, though she never failed to give him a kindly greeting and a bright smile in passing.

One afternoon, nearly six months after Mrs. Gleeson's adventure, Dobson's boy rode full tilt into the yard at Caroona. He appeared before the mistress, breathless.

"Please, mum, you know ole Ki Buckle down the creek? Well, he's bin pinned by a tree. One uv them fellers fencin' the wattle paddock found him, an' he's nearly done for. Wants ter see you afore he pegs out, mum. Ses please bring the big locket what you wore, an' oblige. Yeh gotter be quick if yeh wants ter see him alive, the fellers ses. He's very pertickeler about that locket. I'm goin' on ter the township fer the doctor."

All Mrs. Gleeson's sympathies were alive at once. After ordering one of the men to follow as quickly as possible with bandages and anything that might be needed, she rode away in the direction of the settler's hut at a rattling gallop

In less than half-an-hour alter the departure of the boy Ki heard the beat of her horse's hoofs.

"Cover it up, boys, so's she won't see," he murmured, "an' then leave her alone with me, will yeh?"

The man drew the blanket up over his shattered shoulder and passed out as Ruth entered. There was blood upon everything, and the young woman

noticed with a great wave of pity the agony in Ki Buckle's face and the fever sweat on his forehead.

"Poor, poor fellow ! " she cried. "Oh! what can I do for you?"

"Nothing that way, mum." He put back her hands gently, "Don't attempt it. I'm done for completely."

"No, no! you must have attention. It may not be as bad as you think!"

He held her arm with his uninjured hand, and the terrible truth in his face convinced her.

"For God's sake," he said, "don't go wastin' time! It's no good. I've got a lot to say. Did you bring the locket? Open it for me, please."

She opened the trinket, and laid it in his left hand, marvelling at his earnestness, and he gazed for a few seconds upon the portraits it contained. Presently he spoke again in a low anxious voice.

"Ruth," he said, "I lied when told you the chap named Rimpole I knew on the diggin's in '64 was not like this picture. He was its dead image, an his name wasn't John, it was Abel, an' he wasn't a Cousin Jack, he was from Preston, in Lancashire. Hush! Keep close; don't cry out. Nobody'll know but you an' me. Don't be frightened I'll tell you his story; I must do it quick. He was a dentist at home. He married Ruth Vine, who was like you— wonderful, wonderful like you. They was happy for a few years, an' a baby came. A little girl, an' she was named Ruth too. Hush! you mustn't cry. It won't matter when I'm gone. Then a friend started visitin' them, a gay an' handsome man, with money, an' a day came when poor Rimpole went back from bisness an' found his home deserted, an' a note sayin' his wife had gone off with his friend They had taken little Ruth with them. Rimpole was very quiet about it. He went an' bought a pistol, an' he followed them— followed them for three weeks, an' found them. When he left them his han'some friend was a dead man— dead with a brace of bullets in his brain."

Ki paused. He had wrought himself into a state of feverish excitement, and was gasping for breath. Mrs. Gleeson's head was bent over him, and she was sobbing bitterly.

"You never heard any more of Abel Rimpole, did you?" continued the old man, speaking feebly, "He escaped, an' was lost to his friends for ever, he thought. This is his picture here, an' that woman was his wife. Ruth, he was your father, what I knew! Don't be frightened— don't cry— I'll never whisper it to another soul."

He held the open locket up towards her.

"Pull that curtain away from the window," he said, "an' now look. Hold me tight, an' look close. S'pose I had a beard like this man in the picture, what'd you think?"

Ruth looked from the agitated old face on the pillow to the happy young one in the locket, and checked the cry that rose to her lips.

"Father!" she gasped, "My father!" He was still anxious there should be no doubt in her mind.

"Did your mother ever tell you how you—"

She divined his thoughts, and turning back the blanket saw a peculiar pink mark like a flower upon his neck near the shoulder.

"You did not tell me," she cried. "You did not tell me. How wonderful it is!" She had thrown her arms about him and was kissing his sunken cheek.

His whole manner had changed, and he had now an appearance of rest and peace. Ruth, dared by the strange revelation, could only cling to him and repeat, "You did not tell me."

"No," he answered presently, "I meant to keep dark. You was happy with you your husband. 'What,' I said to Brick, 'what if he knew her father, the murderer Abel Rimpole, was his next neighbour? Would that be likely to make them more comfortable. No, no, it 'ud on'y lead to mischief an' trouble."

"My husband knows our story," she whispered, "every word of it. He once said he thought you had done right."

"Did he but?" Ki's face brightened. "It is better, though— it's better. I'm a murderer, the law wants me. It's much better. Tell me one thing— your mother, Ruth, how—"

"She repented— she suffered a bitter, life-long repentance. Her father took her to his home again. She was a good and loving mother to me, and taught me to respect your memory. She told me her story before she died."

After this they were silent for a time. He kept his wound from her sight, and resulted every attempt she made with the object of relieving his pain with one answer—

"No good, Ruth. It doesn't hurt a great deal. I'm goin', an' it's best."

When Gleeson entered the hut (he was away when the news of the accident reached Caroona), he found Ki dying in his wife's arms, and Ruth weeping silently over the drawn face of this stranger.

A few minutes later the men standing about awaiting the arrival of the doctor saw the young farmer stagger out of the hut, and they guessed that the old man was dead, but Ki was still breathing.

The doctor appeared at length.

"It is a wonder he has lived so long," he said.

He lived till midnight, and Ruth sat by his bunk holding his hand till the end. Every now and again he talked of his wife and of baby Ruth, and his language was no longer that of the bushman, but he reverted to it at the last, when he seemed to be addressing Brick again:—

"We'll keep it dark, ole boy. Mum's the word. It'd on'y make trouble, an' we don't count."

His grave is in the Eel Creek cemetery, and the marble head-stone over it is "sacred to the memory of Abel Rimpole," and was "erected by his loving daughter, Ruth Gleeson."

The Advantages of Falling off a Bicycle

Melbourne Punch, 4 May 1899

"THAT'S all right," said Phil. Officer, "the more you fall off a bike, the less likely you are to fall off."

"Rot!" said the Victim, grimacing between his bandages; "you want to imply that this is an advantage, that the temporary loss of my ear is a permanent gain, and the fact that I have to hobble in feeble pursuit of my calling on a crutch and looking like a cheap new mummy in fresh swaddlings is something to rejoice over."

"Certainly," said Officer, "if you look at the matter like a philosopher."

"Your sort of philosophy is a matter of digestion," groaned the Victim.

"How much of this would it take to knock it all out of you?"

The Victim indicated his ruins with a painful gesture.

"My dear fellow, I have learnt in suffering. That is how every man learns the bike. Just let me show you the advantage you derive from falling off your machine. Presuming, of course, that you do not intend to give up the bicycle—"

"Give it up!" cried the Victim, with the ferocity of a brave man who is afraid of nothing but ridicule. "I'll stick to it till it's shredded me out on these abominably blocks."

"Very energetic of you. Well, have you considered that there is a limit to the number of ways in which the average intelligent man can fall off a bicycle?"

"I have discovered no reason for entertaining any idea of the kind."

"Nevertheless, it is true. Mind, I said the average intelligent man, and you are no fool, Crossboy."

The Victim grinned maliciously with the half of his mouth still available.

"It was a narrow escape, but I admit you're not fool. So, my friend, there is a limit to the umber of ways in which you can fall off a bicycle. I have placed the maximum for myself at twenty-five ; perhaps you will run to thirty. Let us say thirty. Now, how many times have you fallen off op to date?"

The Victim went into a laborious calculation, and remembered ten times, not counting three occasions when he was run into by a dog, a boy and a perambulator.

"We count all in," said Phil Officer. "Each of those encounters has added its quota to your education as a cyclist. You have at least learned that it is folly to trust to the discretion of a dog, that a small boy would rather be run down than steal peaches, and that the only sensible course to adopt on the approach of a perambulator is to dismount, hold your bicycle firmly and await the arrival of the doctor. Had Solomon been a cyclist he would have given us a different

rendering of a familiar proverb, so: 'There be three things which are too wonderful for me— yea, four which I know of: 'The way of a dog upon the road; the way of boy upon the blocks ; the way of a perambulator on a crossing; and the way of a man with a maid.' You have fallen off in thirteen ways up to now. That leaves you with seventeen experiences to come before you will have learnt wisdom as a bicycle rider. Do you begin to see the advantage of having fallen off on this last occasion?"

"Hanged if I do, growled the Victim. "You're talking bally rubbish. If you still think it the decent thing to sit there sipping a cripple's goodly whisky, and making a gibe of him because he is afflicted with a temporary derangement of the foot with which he usually expostulates, go on by all means."

" Good ! Observe. Do you find yourself falling off your machine twice in the same way ?"

"No, can't say I do. There is a large variety in my methods of falling off."

"There you justify my apparently hasty and unwise conclusion that you are no fool, Crossboy. The ordinary man who is not a fool does not fall off his bicycle twice in the same way, riding at a legal pace in paths of peace. This being so, it will begin to dawn upon you presently that falling off is one way of picking up. You are gradually exhausting your possible falls, and by the time you have gone through those other seventeen you will be a master of the bicycle."

"Or the subject of an *In Memoriam*."

"That is a pleasurable possibility. Supposing, however, that you survive the necessary seventeen falls, what remains of you will be just as safe on the machine as on foot. You will still be liable to the natural misfortunes of man and subject to the operations of fires, floods and the income tax, but you will not fall off your bicycle in the needless, foolish and extravagant way peculiar to you at the present stage of your development."

"You are a reincarnation of the several foreign gentlemen who carried consolation to Job. Will it be necessary for the forthcoming falls to be quite as emphatic as the last?"

"The more emphatic the fall, the more permanent the impression. You see, man has been learning by falls ever since Adam's time, When you come down from your wheel with a suddenness and emphasis that make you feel like a grass widower, the effect is permanent. Your better-half is away on the road, and after recovering from a vague sort of uneasiness inspired by the belief that an advertisement about yourself inserted in the *Missing Friends* column is the only thing that will hasten your restoration, you begin to think about that fall. You have numerous reminders of it scattered all over your surface, and you couldn't forget just how you fell off if you wanted to. You realise all the

conditions that led up to that spill, and the lesson is beaten into your nerves. You are vaccinated against that particular sort of fall for the future. You are immune. If you bet fifty pounds to a peanut that you could fall off in precisely the same way again, you would lose the fifty pounds. I hope I am beginning to reconcile you to the consequences of your last high dive into the wood-blocks, old boy; if not my valuable time has been wasted."

"Well," lisped the Victim, "half an hour ago I lamented the accident for a dozen reasons; now I lament it for only one."

"And that is because you cannot arise in your might, and smite me hip and thigh. I remember how Galileo and Bruno were treated; why should I escape? However, I have not thought out this great public matter and discovered my noble principle for the sake of a battered pagan who has no respect for the eternal verities. Not I. Next season I intend starting an academy, in which bicycling will be taught on a system based on the principle I have just expounded."

"Doctor and surgeon always on the premises, and a clergyman for the worst cases?"

"My friend, there will be a fully-equipped hospital attached to my academy, in all other academies pupils are taught to sit on their machines and keep them going. When they have acquired the rudiments, they go forth, believing they are riders, and then they learn all the essential elements of cycling in miscellaneous smashes and spills. Now, my pupils—"

"Patients!"

"Now, my patients will be put through all the spills necessary to their complete education. I intend to arrange a perfect list of all the possible ways of falling off the bicycle, and no graduate will be permitted to shirk a single spill. He must go through the complete course before receiving the diploma of the academy. The falls will be authentic, of course, since we only learn by taking pains, but the learner, instead of falling about in the street, where he is open to tetanus and public ridicule, will take his spills on the blocks, rocks, macadam, gravel or tram curves in the academy, where all the onlookers are entirely in sympathy with his sufferings. When necessary he will be carried straight into the hospital, or, in extreme cases, into the mortuary. No dirt, no publicity, no derisive spectators, you see; no danger from trams or milk carts after the fall, no inquisitive and suspicious policeman to add the insult of a summons to the numerous injuries received. Everything clean, neat and pleasant. Crossboy, you had best go through the remainder of your series at my academy."

The visitor arose, stretched himself and reached for his hat. "I am going," he said.

"Don't hurry," replied The Victim, with mock politeness. "Stay to the funeral, won't you?"

"Can't, old boy; I've got an appointment to go and console Brown. He had a smash, too, the other day."

"Get out! Didn't know Brown biked."

"Oh, no! his smash was not as serious as all that— merely went insolvent, you know."

Then the consoler marched out.

A Virtuous Imposition

(As by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 28 Sep 1916

SHE KNEW she was in a large sense responsible for his going.

"I am no fighting man," he said. "I never was. Even at school when other small boys were always ready and willing, I invariably wriggled out of active hostilities."

"Are you frightened?" she answered, and there was just a suspicion of contempt in the tone.

He looked at her, and smiled whimsically. "I don't know," he said. "Possibly I am."

"Aren't you ashamed to say it?"

He shook his head. "No," he answered. "If I am frightened it is something for which I am not responsible. You do not imagine, lrma, that people are frightened of their own free will! We would all be utterly devoid of fear if we could. Cowardice is held shameful; but no man is voluntarily a coward. Our hatred of cowardice is an inheritance from our ancient forebears, who detested a coward because he was a burden on the tribe, and could not do his fair share of the killing when the tribe was beset by wild animals or wilder men; and because he was a poor hunter, and did not contribute his fair share of meat to the feast. We retain something of that instinctive hatred of the coward long after bravery has ceased to be a daily necessity, although we are supposed to have acquired reasoning powers which should teach us that a man is no more responsible for his fears than he is for the colour of his eyes and his hair."

"But the need for courage has not passed. It is here to-day— a greater necessity than ever before," she said with spirit.

"This is an extraordinary condition," he continued. "I said that bravery was no longer a necessity of our daily life. We have not to look in the face of the lion to get meat; our ordinary life is not beset by hostile tribes, consequently, we have not the same excuse as the cave-dweller had for despising the chickenhearted."

"I wish you would not talk like that. I know I could not care for a coward."

"Well, my dear girl, I am not pretending to be a hero. I never did a particularly courageous thing. 'Till I was sixteen or seventeen I was always afraid in the dark; and, even now, alone at the dead of night, my flesh is affected with strange quakings. My mind tells me it is all nonsense; I have no belief in the supernatural; but the terrors of my superstitious forefathers remain in my hones."

"People are talking about you. They say you ought to go."

"I have heard them; and if I go it will be because I am frightened to stay."

"I think you are talking wilful nonsense."

"I am not. I am actually frightened of public opinion. I shrink from the contempt of my friends as I would from the stroke of a whip." '

And in the end George had gone—"I go," he said, "because you wish it, and because I love you better than anything in the world ; but I am no soldier. Nature designed me for a studious worker, and here I am in all the pomp and panoply, aping a son of Mars." He displayed himself in Khaki.

"And fine, and brown, and bonny you look," said Irma proudly.

"I have your promise, sweetheart. If I come back you will marry me."

"*If* you come back! Of course you will come back."

He had been gone many months now, and absence had made the heart grow fonder. Irma Stephan had let him go lightly enough, thinking only of the glory he would win, for she put little faith in his presentation of himself as a man lacking the qualities of a fighter ; but now -she wondered she. had been able to do it.

At first he had written regularly, telling her of incidents of the voyage and experiences in Egypt, and reiterating his love with the fine eloquence of a capable pen driven by an earnest heart. Then came a brief letter:

"We go into action to-morrow, I fancy. I don't know how I feel about it. I have numbed my sensibilities, drugged myself, as it were, by sheer power of will. If I tight well it will not be because I am not afraid, but because I have set my teeth deep into the task, and let myself think of nothing else. There I am wrong, I do think of one other thing— of my love for you. Dearest, if this should be my last word remember that under my lightness, and my love of the whimsical side of things, even of myself, there lay a love for you as sure as the rock of ages."

Irma cried a good deal over that letter. It seemed that she had come to understand him better in his long absence. Or was it that she understood herself better, and knew at length how dear he was to her?

There followed a long silence— and then came a bald announcement: his name in the list of the "severely wounded."

Nothing more for long week's. Driven almost distracted. Irma endeavoured to seek out news of him. Assisted by a distant relative in politics she even reached the ear of a minister; but there was nothing to be gathered hers, and the girl's one gleam of comfort was in the fact that the name of George Weldon had not yet appeared in a list of the dead.

At length it came, a feeble letter from him, an utterly pitiful document, a mere crumpled scrap of paper with a few tremulous lines to say that he lived.

"I am still in hospital. They say I shall be about again. I do not regard it as, particularly good news. There has been an operation. I suppose they will pack home what is left of me as soon as I can be shifted. I hope you are well."

The letter opened: "Dear Miss Stephan"; it concluded: "Your faithful friend, George Weldon."

Irma sat for a whole hour with, the note in. her hand, feeling stunned, as if from a heavy blow.

"He has been. terribly injured," she told herself. "He comes back crippled. He blames me for sending him. He no longer loves me."

There came another brief note four weeks later. He was being sent home with a batch of wounded in the course of a week or two. He said nothing of love.

She went to meet him when he landed, although he had written on the eve of his departure, praying she would not. She saw him helped down the gangway by stronger comrades, and her heart almost broke in her breast. He was gaunt to extreme attenuation; there was a grimness in his face she had never known. He had lost a leg, and she saw later that two fingers were gone from his right hand— his drawing hand.

Irma wondered after that her heart did not break there and then. She sat by him in the motor-car, tears streaming down her cheeks; and he talked coldly, evenly, without a trace of his former spirit.

"What will you do?" she asked wretchedly.

"My grateful country pensions me. I shall be all right," he answered.

''But your drawing— your work?"

"I shall probably never draw another line."

She dreaded the stony quiet of Win worse than, she would have feared an outpouring of emotion. That night she did not sleep. He no longer loved her; she felt that perhaps he hated her; but her love for him had become boundless, an almost unbearable longing to mother her poor, broken soldier swelled in her heart, till it almost stopped her breathing.

Seeing more of him during the following weeks, Irma came to another conclusion, one that warmed her soul again, and set happiness singing in her soul like a spring bird.

"He still loves me," she whispered ; "but because he is crippled he will say nothing."

How to win him became the problem of her life. What would move him?

One day George Weldon received a letter from Irma:

"I am sorry I could not come to see you on Sunday afternoon as I promised. I found at the last moment I could not get away. My mistress needed me, and as she is very kind, as mistresses go, I was compelled to give up my chance of seeing you. Unless others have told you before this, you will be surprised to hear that I am now earning my own living. I have lost

the £7 a week my father left me. The securities were amongst those stolen by Pascott, the lawyer whose defalcations you have probably heard of. I was left with about £50, and before that was quite finished, I went to work. I am doing the only thing I find myself capable of— I am a fairly efficient housemaid at sixteen shillings a week. May I come to see you my next evening off?"

Irma gave the address of the house at which she was working, and after recovering somewhat from the emotions with this surprise packet had filled him, George took his crutch and limped forth. He trammed to South Yarra, and asked boldly at Mrs. Henderson's front door for Miss Irma Stephan.

Irma was permitted to see her friend. She went to him well-aproned, a duster in het hand.

"It's true, then?" he said,

"Why, of course," she replied.

"You a servant." He looked at her in sheer amazement. "I couldn't believe it."

"And why not? Was not I as liable to be robbed as another?"

"Yes, of course. It is not that. But you were given an expensive education. Could you not do something better for yourself?"

"Nothing," she answered, somewhat hopelessly.

"But you could teach."

"I might have become a nursery governess, but it is paid even worse than this."

"Come on your evening out," he said some what tremulously. "We will have dinner together, and have a chat over things."

He told her at the dinner that he was working again.

"I find I am getting something of my old mastery of the pen. The missing fingers are not absolutely necessary, it appears. I sold a drawing."

"No!" she cried, rapturously.

"Yes— a full page in wash. One of the papers is to use it for a Christmas cover. It brought £5. Not so bad."

"Oh, lovely! I am so glad. You have been so— so morbid."

"I am doing line drawings, too— joke blocks. They are going to be saleable all right. I think I am certain to knock out a decent living, and perhaps do fairly well when this lame member has become a little more docile." He was speaking quite cheerfully again.

"It isn't so bad, then, George. Life still has much for you."

"A man must accommodate himself to his circumstances. I have a mechanical leg. It's a bit unmanageable yet, but presently you shall see me stalking round on it, pretending to be a whole man, and you shall tell me how you like it."

That night there was a marked return of George's old manner. Irma's heart told her he was wooing her again.

Three times he took her home on her evenings out. The third time he kissed her at the gate.

"Oh, my dear one, I love you still!" he whispered. "I swore I would never speak a word of love to you again— never offer you a vulgar fraction for a husband, but, circumstances have so changed. At least I can give you something better than a servant's life. Do you care for me, dear?"

"I love you! I love you! You have nearly broken my heart. I have been longing for your love, and you have been like a stone."

"Will you be my wife?"

They were married. They returned from their honeymoon to their new home, which was Irma's surprise. "

"It is my wedding gift to us," she said.

He looked upon the tastefully furnished villa.

"All our own— house, land and furniture. You see, I was saving so much while I was in service."

"But it's impossible that you could have saved all this."

"George, when a girl loves a man as I loved you, when she sees that to win him in defiance of his pride she must lie— she lies! I lied. I lied because I saw that the only way to win you was to let you see how necessary you were to me. I removed my bonds from the care of Pascott five months ago. I have still my seven pounds a week."

"Base deceiver!" He held her in his arms, pressing the words upon her lips.

"And you'll believe I love you, knowing how much trouble I took to catch you."

"I have been tricked, fooled, bamboozled by the sweetest, the dearest little confidence woman in the world."

———————

The Man Who Eventually Did

(As by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 24 Oct 1918

HE CAME TO SUNUP (Sunup being an exclusive sort of resort for sore-heads, contrite drinkers, nerve sufferers, and convalescents of sorts), and put up at Wallington's Hospice; but, finding that Hammil's Zephyr Place, was more expensive, commodious, and tony, had his traps and ware carted over next day, and entered into possession of two of the next-best rooms looking east, only because the first best rooms looking north were all occupied.

W. Hanniwell Guest, which was the name scored all over his luggage, was very much hurt to find there was no very best room available, and said so frequently, and with every evidence of exasperation.

"It's the same everywhere, sir. Dem!— the same everywhere," he said, severely, addressing Hammil. "Wherever I go somebody else has got the things I want. Dem! Most aggravating. I say, most— most aggravating and irritating, sir. Dem!"

Zephyr Place was much frequented by a certain type of valetudinarian ladies of elderly airs, even if not always of marked antiquity. There were fattish widows and slimmish spinsters in quantities; and their habit was to sit iii the cool, commodious hall-way, or in the large garden, and knit inexplicable things that had never had a beginning, and would never have an end, and chatter and drink tea.

Mr. W. Hanniwell Guest created commotion among these simple people.

"Most impressive," said Miss Dix.

"Reminds me of Lord Kitchener," said Mrs. Cobb. "Not so much in appearance as in manner. You would think he was always drilling an army."

Guest was a slim, tallish, sandy man of about fifty, with the bones of his face rigidly outlined, and a tall, thin, imperial nose with two humps like a dromedary. His temper has been described as uncertain. It wasn't. It was dead certain. There was never a more reliable temper afflicted upon a peaceful community. Sun or gloom, warm or cold, wet or dry, W. Hanniwell Guest, was always exasperated.

Guest had a curious habit of talking to himself, particularly at meals. At breakfast, over his bacon, he would fix an intense, watery, grey eye, blinking through a sandy fringe of lashes, on the party directly opposite, and say:

"I will. I will. I'll do it. By Jimminy, I'll do it!"

The party opposite, assuming that he was supposed to be in the conversation, suavely replied: "What is it you will do, sir?"

Guest blinked at him for a moment, recalled himself to his bacon with an effort and retorted :

"Dem! How dare you, sir? How dare you interfere, sir? Go to the deuce, sir!" Which was most disconcerting.

Guest had other extraordinary qualities. He was a ruthless borrower, and his method amounted almost to pillage. If he saw an article he fancied, and he could get his hands upon it, he said:

"Dem! I like this. I'll take a little loan of it. No, no, no, no. I'll hear of no refusal. Just a loan. Dem!" And off he would go.

In this way, William Hanniwell Guest secured Bean's shaving set, Bell's silver-backed brushes, Nicholl's bull-hide travelling bag, Kingham's dressing-gown, Mrs. Patterson's gold-top sunshade, Sloan's calf-bound set of Robert Louis Stevenson's works, and Weber's silver cornet.

Everybody protested, but nobody got any satisfaction out of Guest, and the talk of calling in police assistance and the protection of the statutes concerned him about as much as if they had threatened him with the vengeance of the moth.

But William's most successful efforts were among the spinsters. He was not altogether a dismal failure with the pining widows, but the afflicted spinsters were carried off their heels by his tremendous snorting manner, and his air of a generalissimo dealing with a refractory regiment.

W. Hanniwell Guest made love to ladies in an extraordinary way.

"You're a dem fine little woman, Lucy," he told Miss Dix, when he had known her rather less than two hours— "an uncommonly dem fine little woman. Never saw a dem finer pair of eyes in all my life. Dem!"

"Oh, Mr. Guest!" exclaimed the spinster, quite overcome.

"Now, you are," persisted Guest, threatening her with a forceful forefinger. "No denials. I'll take no denials. I wonder you never married. Dem, if it isn't wholly inexplicable to me, the number of dem fine women who have never married. This will have to be altered. It'll have to be seen to."

"But, Mr. Guest," tittered Miss Dix, "one may have had one's chances. One may not have wanted to get married. Te-he! Te-he-he."

"Stuff!" thundered Guest, in his best military manner. "Stuff and dem nonsense! Every woman wants to get married." Then he fell into his sudden habit of self-communing. "I'll do it!" he said. "I'll do it! Yes, by gad, I will!"

Miss Dix was a timid little thing of thirty-eight, with hair that curled naturally after nine hours close confinement in curl-papers, a long thin neck, too much nose, and a strange, insistent, and most despicable simper.

"Te-he!" she tittered. "What will you do, Mr. Guest. Te-he-he!"

Guest was recalled to himself. "Don't interfere!" he commanded. "Mind your own dem business, if you please."

"But you said—"

"Nothing of the kind." Guest transfixed her with his probe-like digit. "Nothing of the kind, I tell you." Then with one of his surprising lightning changes. " 'Pon my word and soul, that's a lovely bangle you're wearing dear lady. Would you permit me? Black opals and diamonds. Yes, yes. Never saw anything finer. Would you mind if I took this to compare it with a set in my collection? Superb! Superb! Ah, thank you, thank you."

Miss Dix had not said a word, but Guest put her diamond and opal bangle in his pocket. A wild idea had taken possession of her maiden heart.

"Pie wishes to get an engagement ring to match," she whispered to her own soul.

Guest had paid his first fourteen days' board with a wonderful blue and purple cheque, signed with a paralyzing arabesque; but it was met all right, and when the bill for the next fortnight was presented, W. Hanniwell Guest suffered a whirlwind of indignation, tore it up, and threw the fragments at Hammil.

"Dem if I'll pay oftener than once a month. Dem if I'll be bothered," he said. "Dem if I ever met such a man. Dem!"

And all this while, W. Hanniwell had been voicing his absurd asides all over the house. "I'll do it! I'll do it! Wouldn't you? I will. I will, by gad!"

Newcomers within hearing usually replied, whereupon Guest, awakening from his trance, would retort:

"Dem, madame, never said a word. Dem! Suggest that you mind your own dem business. Dem!"

Guest had since borrowed Plover's gold-top umbrella, Miss Quine's scent spray, MacFarland's telescope, Henty's shaving-mirror, Earle's camera, and Mrs. Pett's hand-painted fan.

ONE AFTERNOON W. Hanniwell rang up for a stout cord. A length of clothes-line was sent him. He went to the proprietor, raving.

"Dem!" he said, "what you mean? What you mean, sir, by sending a gentleman an abominable thing like this? Dem! Dem, sir, I want something better. I want your best. Dem! Yes, dem!"

He got twelve feet of fine window cord, and seemed content.

"I'll do it," he said that evening over the soup. "I'll do it, by Jove! Why not?''

"Most remarkable man," whispered Miss Dix to Bean, on her right. "Tremendous brain. Always active— thinking, thinking, thinking."

"Dippy as a headless hen," growled Bean. "That's his greatness, if you ask me. The confounded fellow's always going to do it, but he never does— whatever the 'deuce it may be."

"Ah, but he will. Te-he-he-he-he! He will. He's going to."

"Going to what?"

"He's meditating a— te-he-he!— I don't like to say. I really am so shy. But he is meditating a great event, dear man."

Miss Cobb had fixed the tittering Miss Dix with a cold, hard, scornful eye.

"Much you know about it," she said. "If William has any confidante, it is I. If he were meditating any serious action I am certain he would not keep it from me. Would you, William?"

Miss Cobb had addressed W. Hanniwell Guest, pointedly, across the table. Mr. Guest had borrowed a gold-top umbrella of hers, also a scent bottle of beautiful silver filigree. Miss Amelia Cobb imagined that these facts and same few emphatic remarks on the dem folly of a dem fine girl of Miss Cobb's proportions remaining single gave her right of familiar address.

"Did you address me, young lady?" demanded Guest. He pulled his Norseman moustache, and his high old Norman nose was inflated threateningly. "Did you presume to address me in that way? Well, don't do it. Won't have it! Dem impertinence."

Miss Cobb gasped like a cod out of water; she flushed crimson; she half arose.

"Well, I never!" she said. "Well, I never did t In all my life I never did hear of such a thing!"

There were others, of course. From Mrs. Steven Howe, William had taken a handsome wrist-watch, with the accompanying bracelet.

"I want it," he said. "Not for long, perhaps, but it's necessary." He put it in his pocket.

MRS. Steven Plowe was a little fat widow, full of dimples, a comfortable lady whom the late Howe had left well cared for, and who, although the afore-mentioned, definitely-departed Plowe had not been the sort of husband to induce a woman to repeat the matrimonial experiment, was still willing to try her luck, especially with a gentleman of undoubted breeding and apparent wealth, like William Hanniwell Guest, for instance.

And William had only said: "You're the type of woman that should marry again, and again, and again, if necessary. You should not remain unmarried. It's wrong. Dem me, it's a sin. I— I almost ask 'How dare you?' "

"But, Mr. Guest, one has to be so careful."

"No. Drop that. Don't talk dem nonsense to me. A woman hasn't to be careful. That's for the man. You ought to marry. By gad, you shall marry!"

"Oh, Mr. Guest— William!"

"I'll do it," said Guest, in a half-whisper, again dropping into his absurd habit of soliloquy. "I'll do it. One of these days, I'll do it."

Mrs. Steven Howe took his hand, and pressed it. She had forgotten all about her watch,

"When?" she said, shyly.

"I'll do it," said Guest. "I'll do it!" and he left her without another word.

THEN came Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh. Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh was a tall, fair, full-busted, severely corsetted woman of forty. She had a nose of marked character, and carried a dog, and a lorgnette.

William encountered her as she entered the hall before the knitting guests. He seemed amazed.

"Sophie!" he gasped. Then he seized her clog. "By gad I'm glad you've come. You're going to marry me!" he said. "It's agreed, then?"

"William, don't be an idiot," said Mrs. Beanleigh. "Before all these people, too. I have just come up to have a little rest and change. I have not altered my mind at all."

"You won't marry me? You are still the same dem obstinate, pig-headed, blackguard of a woman." Guest was dancing with indignation. He dropped the dog.

Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh was now conscious of the fact that she was the centre of a throng of distinctly hostile females.

"Excuse me, madam," said one, "but that is my wristlet watch you are wearing."

"And that is my lorgnette," said another.

"And that is my gold-topped sunshade," observed a third.

"I'll do it!" said Guest. "Dem, I'll do it!" He fled upstairs. From the first landing he cried. "I'll do it! I'll do it!"

The lodgers at Zephyr Place had made an astounding discovery. Guest had been sending all the articles of value secured from them to Mrs. Beanleigh, in Melbourne. He had even sent her Bean's shaving set. "

"He has been wanting me to marry him for two years," Mrs. Beanleigh explained— "ever since soon after my first husband's death. He left me in a rage because I refused him. He sent me these things, and many more, as love gifts."

HAMMIL, the proprietor, having heard all this, perceived that the moment was opportune to urge a settlement of his bill. He headed a deputation to the rooms of W. Hanniwell Guest,

On the table was a parcel addressed to Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh. It contained a clock valued at seven pounds— Hammil's clock.

In the bedroom hanging from the chandelier by a length of window cord was the body of W. Hanniwell Guest. Pinned to the shirt of deceased was a card, oh which was written in bold black letters:

"Done it!"

"Unsound mind!" said the coroner's jury.

Lost

Grafton Argus, (NSW) 17 April 1899

"SO LONG, mother."

"So long, Alfie. Where to this trip?"

"Up Sydney side."

"And you are going shearing, my boy?"

"My word! Goin' t' find dad, an' get a job, an' bring home heaps an' heaps o' money."

The youngster waved his hand, and hitched up his swag with a professional twist of the shoulders, and the mother sighed deeply as she gazed after her baby boy trotting down the paddock "playing dad."

He was a sturdy, round-limbed little fellow of six, brown-eyed and brown of face, her darling, and her one companion and comfort on the lonely selection. Alf had a tiny swag at his back, carried a blackened billy in his hand, and on his head was an old felt hat of his father's.

The boy, having no child companion, amused himself day after day "playing dad." Sometimes he took his toy tomahawk on his shoulder, and was a great man going splitting or clearing; at others he made himself a swag, and went off on the wallaby as far as the bottom of the paddock, shearing, he said.

Alf Hunt had been absent for some months amongst the stations in Western New South Wales. The selection needed money; it demanded much labour, and gave the young couple little in return for their hard work. These shearing trips were necessary, and although Hunt hated to leave his wife and ' boy, he went because needs must when a certain club-footed personage holds the ribbons.

"So long, mother!" Mrs. Hunt heard the boy's voice calling as she returned to her work within the house, praying in her heart that the son might never be called upon to perform in earnest the roles that he loved best in play. The mother delighted to think of the settlement as a smiling, well-stocked farm in the days to come, when Alfie would be a man, and she prayed the hard, lonely hours that had been hers might never fall to the lot of the wife of her boy.

Mrs. Hunt was tall and dark, delicate-looking for a selector's wife; but, for all that a strong, spirited woman who did her duty with a certain pride and wiih an abiding belief in the better times coming. Her world contained no people of interest apart from Alf the father and Alfie the son, and the hardest day was never wholly without sunshine, because of the little lad she loved to serve, and whose education was the pleasure of her spare moments.

Many a crumpled, ink-stained letter had Alfie written to "dad" in those square print capitals she taught him to trace, and which cantered over the paper like a drunken and dissolute alphabet.

It was more than an hour later when Mrs, Hunt thought it about time for the "shearer" to be returning. She went to the door, and looked down the paddock, expecting to see him under the old light-wood "camping." The boy was not there. He was nowhere in sight.

A chill fear struck to the mother's heart, and she hastened to the creek, calling Alfie's name as she ran. No answer came back to her, and no trace of the child was to be seen. Mrs. Hunt ran from one point to another, calling in a piteous voice, and her fear grew upon her as she ran.

She searched every nook where he might have hidden from her in play; and then, after an hour had been spent, and when the shadow of the range lay like a bad omen on the land, she abandoned herself to the awful belief that her boy was "bushed."

One poor hope remained and down the winding cart track between the great gums she raced to the house of the nearest neighbour— a mile and a half away.

It was a distracted woman broke into Managhan's kitchen with the fierce cry:— "Alfie! Alfie! Is he here? Oh, for the love of God, say he is here!"

Managhan took her gently by the arms.

"Whist, Mrs. Hunt, ma'am," said he, in an anxious voice. " Sure the boy ain't here, but he'll be well, ma'am, he'll be well."

"He is lost. Quick, quick I Oh! be quick!— he is lost, and the night's coming on!"

A minute later one of Managhan's boys was cantering about the district on an amazed cart-horse, calling out the settlers. "Mrs. Hunt's boy's lost! Meet at the creek fork!"

The news travelled with' electric speed, and although the time seemed interminable to the anguished mother, in less than half an hour a party had started out in one direction, and, before an hour had sped, three other parties were beating the bushland towards several points.

The men searched all through the night, and Mrs. Hunt sought with the foremost, and in the dark recesses of the bush on the slope of the range her voice was heard calling tho boy's name in acccents that wrung every heart.

At daybreak she was back at the house, driven by the wild hope that he had wandered home, or that the search had been successful in another direction. Her skirt hung in ribbons, her face was lacerated by the dry twigs in the scrub, and her thick, black hair fell about her shoulders, strongly accenting the pallor of her handsome face, tragic in its agony.

One man had found Alfie's little swag, but nothing had been seen of the boy. There was some hope in the discovery, and the mother started off again at the head of another party, refusing meat and drink, sustained only by the fierce hope to which she clung.

The search was prolonged throughout that dreadful day, a day of furnace heat, and unspeakable agony to Mrs. Hunt, who recalled a score of true stories— stories she had told her boy— of brave men perishing in the bush and on the widespread plains, leaving nothing for the world to know their poor bones by, but a sad and grimly jocund message scratched on a billy-lid, or some beloved trinket.

She never spoke throughout that long struggle, and to the men who looked, in her rags and her wildness, like an incarnation of the desolation of the range.

Through the next day and the next night they searched, and the search was continued with equal vigour, even when the only hope left was that they might find the little body for Christian burial.

The search was vain. At the end of five days when Hunt returned (called home by a letter that seemed to burn dry the very well-spring of hope and joy within his heart), and found his wife raving in the delirium of brain fever, no further sign of his lost son had been discovered.

Mrs. Hunt was nursed back to health, and henceforward the mother and father spent one Sunday afternoon after another for a year or more seeking the remains of their boy. It seemed that every foot , of country within five miles of their house had been searched over again and again, but the boy had disappeared completely, mysteriously, so mysteriously, indeed, that there were those in the district who called in old world superstitions to account for the loss, and talked of banshees and elves. Othets believed the boy had been carried off, and might yet be returned to his mother, upon whom this sorrow had fallen so heavily.

ONE DAY, nearly two years later, Hunt found a stray horse he had been seeking in a small gorge running into the range. After securing the animal, the man's attention was drawn to a big stringy-bark.

At some time someone, probably a sportsman camping near, had stripped a great sheet of bark from the tree, and on the grey, smooth butt two or three sets of initials were carved. After examining these, Hunt's eyes were attracted to the bark at his feet. This had been warped by the heat of the sun into a perfect tube about five feet long and nine or ten inches in diameter. It was something protruding from this pipe that riveted Hunt's attention. He stooped to examine it more closely, and discovered portion of a child's shoe.

Hunt knelt down, impelled by a sudden fierce emotion, and, seizing the tube, tore open the rotten bark. Then, in spite of the hope that was in his heart, he threw himself back with an exclamation of horror at the sight that presented itself.

Cradled in one half of the bark lay the body of a child, a queer, mummified little body. Under the head was an old felt hat, which Hunt recognised as his own hat which was not necessary to convince him that at last he had found his boy. The father, looking down upon the pathetic, wee skeleton, understood why the long search had been in vain.

The boy had lain himself upon the fresh sheet of bark, and had died there. Then the bark, curled by a scorching sun, had wrapped itself over the small body, and Nature had provided a winding-sheet.

One tiny hand was thrown above the head, the long fingers still clutching the handle of a black hilly. Hunt seized the billy, and examined it closely, with eyes almost blinded by unaccustomed tears.

There were deep scratches on the bottom, and the man read in large capitals three words: "So long, mother."

_____

The Whim Boy

The Argus (Melbourne) 10 Oct 1894

A slightly shorter version of this appeared in "Below And On Top and other stories" *(1898), omitting the opening paragraph.*

A GIRL of about fifteen, small for her years, but with the strong, supple limbs of a hale child of nature who has lived her life in joyous bush fashion, breathing the scent of the eyergreen eucalyptus, running at will in the summer's sun, climbing the long, lithe saplings, gay with sweet-smelling sarsa- parilla blossom, high up till the pliant stem, bending with her weight, sways her swiftly but lightly amongst the wild white violets at its roots again, or sporting with the round drops falling from the pointed leaves of the great gums when the winter floods rush in the creeks, thrilled by the lightning that rends the mighty trees, and the thunder billowing like imprisoned genii low down between the hills. A brown faced little girl, with a nose impishly elevated, mischievous blue eyes, and a quantity of rebellious chestnut hair that despises bonds and blows about her head all ends and stubborn curls.

She has sprung upon a corner of the rough table in the chock-and-log hut that is her new home, and sits swinging a small, bare, brown foot and pleading with a big sun-tanned woman industriously churning at a wash-tub just without the door of the hut.

"Are you on, Aunt Jem?" she queries, eagerly pressing a matter that has been long in debate. "I think it's spiffin'. I could manage that ole black horse what you talk about, King Billy, easy as winkin'. Usen't I drive et the Parker's Miners, anyhow, when the boys'd let me?"

"You could drive right enough; 'tain't that," answered Aunt Jem in a deep, manly voice, assumed, like most of her mannish attributes, for so long that at length it had become natural to her. "There's the night shifts"— Aunt Jem paused, grimacing inhumanly over the wringing of a crimean shirt— "an' besides, it's breakin' the law, I'm thinkin'."

"But the law won't know— nobody won't know, 'ceptin' you an' me. An', then, think uv the thirty-five bob a fortnight, seventeen an' six a week— what lux'ries we could buy fer dad with that!"

This triumphant assertion of the advantages of the proposition was not without its effect upon Aunt Jem. She ceased work to muse, and she pensively scratched her chin the while. Aunt Jem's chin was not innocent of a certain vagrant stubble, and Aunt Jem's breath was suggestive of tobacco. Aunt Jem was large of limb and muscular and masculine. She had fought her own battle and taken excellent care of herself in the "early days;" she had roughed it at Ballarat, Bendigo, Blanket Flat, Eaglehawk, Fiery Creek— in fact, on most of the

Victorian diggings in the "fifties" and "sixties;" she had washed dirt as well as clothes, and still boasted herself as expert on a sluice-box with the fork as any man living. In short, this worthy woman had faced the world "like a man" for twenty odd years, and at fifty-four was little disposed to set up any sentimental bounds to woman's sphere.

"Are you quite certain no one knows you're here?" she asked, after a few moments' cogitation.

"Sure's death," replied the girl with enthusiasm. "Ain't been away from the hut further'n them saplin's there since I landed on the mine. Ain't seen a soul, bar you."

"The people down et the township might 've noticed us come through in the coach, then agen they mightn't. Anyhow, there're not likely to come pokin' round here. By thunder, we'll do it."

The girl bounced off the table, danced about the room in a paroxysm of delight, and performed an extraordinary feat of tumbling, finishing in a huddled heap on the bunk.

Kitty Bennet was the only child of Mat Bennet, a digger whose luck was always out— a man who had dug and delved his way through Victoria— north, south, east, and west— without unearthing more gold than sufficed to provide the necessaries of life from year's end to year's end. Mat married late, and his wife died soon after Kitty's birth, leaving her child to the affectionate but not very discriminating care of its nomadic father. Aunt Jemima "lent a hand" in bringing up the girl, "for natural love and affection," as the lawyers put it; but, as the aunt's ideas of conventional refinement had suffered much in the course of long familiarity with, and acquiescence in, the rough and ready customs of society in the camps and about the diggings, it may easily be understood that Kitty's exuberant character was neither tamed nor toned by her fond maternal aunt, and the girl "had her fling," whether sharing her father's tents on some alluvial field, or living with Aunt Jem in whichever part of the wilderness that massive relation happened to be situated for the time being.

A week or so previous to the opening of our story Bennet was stricken down by the fossicker's bane, rheumatic fever, and compelled to go into the hospital at Sale. His sister Jemima had recently accepted an honourable and responsible position on a mine in a comparatively new reefing district, in the hills about twenty miles beyond Bruthen, where she officiated as housekeeper for the manager, in consideration of which service she received fifteen shillings a week and the use of a "furnished" hut standing on the company's lease, a wage she increased by washing for the men working on the Old Identity. Here Kitty found herself on the third day following her father's, departure to the hospital.

Shortly after making the resolution recorded, Aunt Jem wrung out the last article in her tub, and half an hour later she departed for the township on the grocer's waggon. This meant a walk back of eleven miles "by moonlight alone," but Jem was superior to all feminine weaknesses, and too thorough a bush-woman to let a trifle like that trouble her. She returned in due time, bearing a bundle under her arm— returned over Camel Hill, having left the track and cut through the bush to save the long turn round.

NEXT MORNING Spence, the manager of the Old Identity, was bailed up at the dam by a bright-eyed, brown-faced boy, with closely-cropped hair, an intelligent if not particularly clean countenance, and an air of complete assurance.

"Say, boss, can you give us a job?"

The old miner looked down with surprise and amusement at his diminutive petitioner.

"Tendin' ducks?" he queried with a grin.

"Naw!" (with sublime contempt) "drivin' the whim."

"And who are you anyhow, cherub?"

"Name's Christopher Bennet, called Kit. That's my Aunt Jem over to the log hut, an' I want a job bad."

"Too small."

"You bet I ain't! I'll 'tend whim with any kid round here. Used to drive onst. Give 's a show, will you, please?"

"Well," said Spence reflectively, "we do want a boy; the lads we've got are workin' long shifts, and boys are scarce articles here. What's yer age?"

"Sixteen," answered Kit without a blush (she looked fourteen). "Aunt Jem brought me up from Bairnsdale, knowin' you wanted a boy, an' if you don't put me on— well, you'll lose a ringer on a whim, that's all."

Spence grinned.

"Your cheek has outgrown you, sonny," he said, "but you're spry. Go on with the afternoon shift."

"With the old black horse, King Billy?"

"Yes; he's the quietest an' best edjikated. Take him."

"Oh, boss, you're a brick! What screw— seventeen an' six?"

"A quid a week."

"That's great. My colonial! I am erbliged."

The boy set his hat further back upon his handsome head, thrust his hands deeply into the pockets of his new "moles," and swaggered on to the brace. He presently engaged the braceman in conversation on mining matters generally, and the Old Identity in particular. He desired to know the depth of the mine,

the nature, the extent, and the "lay" of the lode, whether "she" was wet or dry, the quality of the air below, and the character of the explosives used. These questions were asked with the freedom of an interested party and the air of an expert, and with a quaint use of miners' slang that pleased the braceman immensely.

With the ready faith of youth Kit conceived an immediate liking for the braceman, who was a young man of about nineteen, tall, strongly built, and clean limbed, with the easy but decisive movements of an athlete. His well-tanned face expressed a lively intelligence and betrayed his kindly disposition and his geniality at a glance.

"What's your monicker, mate?" asked Kit after five minutes' aquaintance.

"Charley Coleman, alias 'Professor.' "

"Professor?"

"Yes," apologetically; "you see, I play the fiddle a bit."

This explanation appeared to be quite satisfactory.

"Wish I was on with you, 'Professor,' " continued Kit; "you're jest my sort. What kinder bloke's on the brace my shift?"

"Faith, he's a sweet mahn; he'll be a father to you, so he will." Coleman's whim boy, Tim Canty, offered this information. Tim was a large-headed, big-footed youth, with wonderfully wild hair, and great, obtrusive yellow freckles— a Bungaree-bred boy, blessed with the intense brogue of his father.

"Go on!" ejaculated Kit, who detected the sarcasm.

"Sure, yes," continued Tim, "he'll barrack the life out av yiz. He bosses the byes like he owned the bloomin' mine— makes 'em yank all the timber fer him, an' truck the mullock, an' shovel the quartz. We calls him 'The Bunyip.' Be the holy, he's ez ugly ez sin, an' he shwears an' curses loike fifty bullockies in a bog."

Kit blew a long, melancholy whistle. "That is tough," he murmured.

"You'll be all right," Coleman broke in consolingly. "Stick to your whim, and be as deaf as a stump when he begins to rip out. There is more bellow than anything else in 'The Bunyip.'"

"S'pose I'll pull through," said the boy, brightening up.

The prospect of having an ill-tempered, lazy bully for a mate did not serve to dampen the youngster's enthusiasm, and after going over the mine, scrutinizing the whim with the eye of an authority, and enlightening Tim on the points and merits of the big, sleepy roan horse trudging solemnly round and round the ring, he walked across to the hut to communicate his news to Aunt Jem, bearing himself with a gravity that became a worker with a grave responsibility and twenty shillings a week.

Kit found, when he went on with the 4 o'clock shift, that Tim Canty had not over-coloured the unlovable characteristics of "The Bunyip." The man's name was Pope; he was large and unwieldly, and common report credited him with an uncompromising antipathy to water, whether applied externally or taken as a beverage— a report which was wholly substantiated by his general appearance, and the vinous flavour of the atmosphere in his vicinity. Mr. Pope walked with the attitude of a gorilla, which amiable animal he also somewhat resembled in his habitual expression. His long arms swung loosely from his narrow shoulders, his face was nearly covered with short red hair, and his small eyes peered out through the slits where his puffed cheeks and bushy brows almost met. "The Bunyip" was said to possess great strength, but he never exerted his powers. He was naturally a tired man, and loved to "doss" upon the reef, or to sit, propped against one of the poppet-legs, smoking like a furnace, whilst the whim boy did his work. This, of course, during the night shifts or such times as the boss happened to be absent from the mine. He also enjoyed a local reputation as a pugilist of extraordinary staying powers and surprising science, till Welsh Harry, a man of little more than half his weight and with none of his bluster, whipped him to a standstill in a nine-round "mill" after he had been convicted of carrying superfluous cards in his shirt front one night in M'Cubbin's humpy.

Pope's antipathy to exertion induced him to look with no favourable eye upon Kit. He wanted a strong boy, and one big enough to be trusted to land the bucket when bailing was going on, whilst he dozed on the chaff bags by the fire through the long, cold nights.

Kit, radiant with pride, led King Billy on to the whim-ring at 4 o'clock, relieved Tim, and harnessed the black horse in the iron bow, and "The Bunyip" scowled down upon him from the brace.

"Say, youngster," he said presently, "who sent you round here?"

"Boss," replied Kit shortly.

"An' ev I gotter nuss yer?"

"Let the boy down easy," interjected Charley Coleman, who was forcing his crib-bag under the billy-lid, preparatory to leaving. "He's a smart little chap, and will pull through all right if you don't scare the heart out of him."

"Nice he'll look humpin' a cap-piece," growled Pope.

"I reckon you're paid to haul the timber," said Charley, with a laugh. "Anyhow, if you don't get along I'll be agreeable to exchange boys."

"Well," responded 'The Bunyip,' "I'll soon be shut of this infant; that's a comfort."

True to his character, Pope lost no opportunity of making the work unpleasant for the boy. He bullied, cursed, and complained incessantly; but Kit

affected to disregard his ill-humours, and whistled or sang with provoking complacence throughout, attending strictly to his fair share of the work the while.

The whim is only used on the Australian gold mines after the windlass and the "whip" have been abandoned, and before the proprietors feel justified in placing costly machinery upon a claim. It is simply an elevated drum around which the rope that hauls the buckets— one on each end— up and down the shaft is wound. The whim is turned by a horse harnessed under a crossbeam, and travelling in a circle below. The horses soon become so accustomed to the work that they will go through all the necessary evolutions when spoken to, and "back up," "turn," "pay out," or "take up slack" as the order is given. Kit's charge, King Billy, was, as Manager Spence expressed it, "edjikated;" he had worked in a whim for years, and performed his task with machine-like regularity. The "demnition grind" had become so much part of his nature that when turned out in the paddock 'tween shifts or during his "long shift off"— from Saturday morning till Monday afternoon— the old horse would doze at times, and suddenly start off as if in a dream, ambling round and round on an imaginary ring, till Kit rushed forth, and drove him back to his pasture by pelting him with sticks and clods of earth. King Billy was as intelligent and docile as he was industrious, and soon accepted Kit as his best friend, came to know the boy's footstep and the sound of his voice, and would greet him with clumsy but unmistakable demonstrations of goodwill whenever he approached. All of which was a pride and delight to Kit, and his work at the mine would have been a continual pleasure were it not for the unamiable qualities of "The Bunyip," complaints of whose behaviour were often made in the chock-and-log hut, and received by Aunt Jem with many expressions of enmity, and such demonstrations of a craving for vengeance as might have made Mr. Pope a little more reasonable in his conduct had he been there to see and hear. It was one of Aunt Jem's manly boasts that she could "use her hands" when occasion required, and strike a blow the weight of which she told in pounds and ounces with unwomanly pride; besides, she had something of "a record," and stories of her pugilistic efforts in her own defence had enlivened more than one mining camp in the past.

"I'll go along an' lay that man out one o' these fine days!" cried Aunt Jem after an unusually bitter complaint of Pope's cruelty, and she struck an attitude, and sparred at the hut door with her big, strong hands, looking really capable of fulfilling her threat.

"That 'd jest serve him right," said Kit, with thoughtful gravity. "Only," and he squared his small shoulders, "it'd make me look a baby before the men, havin' a woman fightin' fer me. Best let's wear him out."

Matters remained in this unsatisfactory state for several weeks, when at length Pope's desire to be rid of the boy was satisfied, but not without a disagreeable experience on his own part. "The Bunyip" was suffering the results of loss of sleep and of money at a card party at M'Cubbin's sly-grog shanty on the previous night, and his native unpleasantness was much aggravated in consequence, and he naturally sought to relieve his feelings on his whim boy, Kit being the only person near who was forced to put up with his nastiness. Throughout the morning he had vented all his choicest expletives on Kit's devoted head, and had harassed him at his work, without, however, producing any apparent effect, and now, galled beyond bearing by the boy's seeming cheerful imperturbability, he was bent upon taking satisfaction "out of his hide." Kit was well aware of the man's intention, and contrived to elude him for some time, but was captured at last.

"I'll teach ye t' give yer elders lip!" said Pope, shaking him by the neck.

"Never guv no lip," protested Kit breathlessly.

"Oh, didn't you but. Take that."

"An' you take that, you great cur!"

Pope received a heavy blow on the jaw that sent him sprawling off the whim-ring.

"Hit someone yer size— hit me!"

It was Aunt Jem; she stood in a scientific position, her sleeves rolled back, her powerful brown arms steaming from the wash-tub.

"Hit me, why don't yer?"

Pope staggered to his feet, mad with rage, and made a rush at his assailant, but another arm interfered, and put him back. Charley Coleman, who happened to be on the mine, and who had seen the rise of the quarrel, stepped in, and took Kit's cause upon his own broad shoulders, rather to Aunt Jem's disgust.

"Stand back, Pope," said the young man. "You deserved all you got. You have no right to knock the boy about."

Furious at the thought of being overthrown by a woman, and galled out of bearing by the laughter of the surfaceman, Pope swore a great oath and plunged at Coleman like a wild beast.

Kit saw the men meet, saw blood flow, and heard the heavy thuds of their quick blows, and then shut out the dreadful sight in the folds of his aunt's skirt. When he looked again, Pope lay on his back in the dust, his face badly cut and bruised. Three men held him, but he did not seem anxious to get up on his feet again. Charley was standing near, waiting; he was not marked, but all the amiability had gone from his handsome face, which was fierce and drawn with an ugly scowl.

The manager had now arrived upon the scene.

"What's all this?" he asked.

Half a dozen voices offered an explanation.

"You see, sir," said Charley when they had done, "Pope doesn't like the boy, and doesn't treat him fair. Suppose you change Kit on to my shift; I'd be glad to have him."

"Anythin' for a quiet life," growled Spence, scowling at "The Bunyip." "And see here, Pope, next time you feel like makin' a disturbance on this mine you'd best trot up to the office and draw your money."

The braceman did not answer, but slouched up to his place, wiping the blood from his mouth.

"I'll mark you for this, Coleman," he said to Charley a few minutes later, with a black frown. Charley laughed.

"Don't do anything foolish, old man," he said.

So Kit and Tim Canty changed shifts, much to the latter's disgust, and Kit worked for the future under "Professor," between him and whom a warm friendship now existed. Kit was grateful to Charley for many kindnesses, and Coleman liked the boy, and found pleasure in his characteristic whimsicalities and his joyous nature.

THE OLD IDENTITY claim was situated between two precipitous and heavily-timbered hills. The magnificent white gums on the side of Mount Mooney towered away above the whim in evergreen luxuriance, and across Brandy Creek, whose peculiar red waters rippled in the willow-like shade of the silver gums, Camel Hill arose in impassive grandeur and shut out the southern sky. On a clearing at the foot of Mount Mooney, about a quarter of a mile from the mine, stood the stringybark huts of the miners, and higher up the more pretentious weatherboard skillion of the manager looked painfully out of place and a sad blot on the primitive grandeur of the range.

In the beautiful summer days, when the gully was sweet with the fragrance of the gum blossom and the heavy perfume of the wild musk; when the parrots, the "keets," and gorgeously-plumaged blue mountains and rosellas chattered and whistled amongst the honey-laden bloom, Kit, like a true child of the bush, reflected its spirit of light and joy, and darted hither and thither, with the mercurial gaiety of health and youth, mimicking the calls and tunes of the birds with marvellous fidelity, or singing till the gorges echoed back his song in a bewildering chorus, But there were times during the long night shifts when the ghostly moonlight flooded the gully, and the mountain lowered above them dark and forbidding, with the black pall of bush upon it; when only the faint rumble of the small battery up the creek, or the cry of a lone mopoke far

up the range, broke the solemn stillness, and then the whim boy sat by his mate on the brace, awed into reverence, and called softly to the shadowy horse moving noiselessly on the bark-strewn ring below.

Charley's conquest over "The Bunyip" served to intensify the great admiration Kit had for him, and the feeling increased with acquaintance. The young braceman had read a good deal of lighter literature, and the stories he could tell and the knowledge he was able to impart indicated to Kit, whose acquaintance with "the three R's" was very superficial, an amount of learning that was positively stupendous.

Kit asserted Charley's superiority over all other men wibh the placid assurance of simple faith, and frequently expressed surprise that he didn't go down to Melbourne and own a big hotel. To own a big hotel was, to Kit's mind, the pinnacle of greatness and magnificence.

But there were times when the whim boy became strangely reserved, even diffident, towards his mate, when he would sit for hours silently and dreamily upon the cross-beam, swinging his bare, sun-browned feet, regarding Charley occasionally with a shy glance as he circled by. These fits of abstraction were so foreign to the boy's real nature that they puzzled the braceman not a little.

"What's the matter, Kit?" he asked one day, after an hour's silence. "Sick?"

"Naw," replied Kit, blushing a little. "I was jest thinkin'."

"About what?"

"Everythin' like. Say, 'Professor,' did you ever have a sweetheart?" The question was asked with a timorous reluctance so peculiar in Kit that Coleman laughed aloud.

"Well, I suppose I've had a dozen or so, all told."

"But I mean a reg'lar one— real M'Ginnis, you know!"

"No; I was never particularly serious!"

"Oh!" said Kit, and relapsed into meditation again.

"What a peculiar kid it is," was Charley Coleman's mental comment.

On Sunday nights it was necessary for the brace-man and whim boy due on the 12 o'clock shift for the coming week to be at work an hour or so earlier than the rest of the hands in order to bale the water out of the drive in readiness for the men going below. The Old Identity was a comparatively dry mine. Kit and Charley went on to do this duty one particular night for the third time since their association as mates. It was a beautiful, bright night, and the boy was in excellent spirits, but, to his surprise, found his mate little disposed to respond to his merriment. Coleman was looking pale and depressed and feeling, as he told Kit, "a bit off." The boy expressed his concern, and was silent in sympathy with his friend.

They had been at work about an hour; Kit was riding on the beam, directing his horse mechanically, and musing, with a thoughtful face. He and Charley were as yet the only people on the mine; it being still Sunday, the battery by the creek had not started crushing, and the night was unusually still. Not a sound broke the silence except the creaking of the king-post and the muffled tramp of the old horse. The candle in the lantern dangling from the poppet-legs over the brace burned with a pale, golden glow in the clear, white light of the moon, and the shadow of the whim cast upon the pipeclay below looked to the meditative Kit like a great-headed giant, tirelessly and vacuously throwing out his long arms and folding them again as the beam revolved. Suddenly the quiet was broken by the sound of angry voices near at hand. The boy sprang from his seat, and turning saw "The Bunyip" on the brace. Pope had been drinking; his face was an angry red and stamped with malignancy. He threatened Coleman, brandishing his gorilla-like arms, and cursing hoarsely.

"Keep off, madman!" cried Charley, "or one of us will be down the shaft."

"What d' yer think I'm here for, damn you?" spluttered the drunkard.

Pope struck at the young man, and they closed. They struggled for a brief moment, and then Coleman's legs went from under him on the wet surface, and the next instant he had disappeared, and Kit heard the splash as his body struck the water in the shaft below.

For a short time 'The Bunyip' stood staring, then he turned, and staggered down the tip, and went blundering through the thick undergrowth along the toot of the mount.

Kit was at the mouth of the shaft in a second, peering into the dark depths. He called twice, but no answer came back to him. Then an appreciation of the situation flashed upon him. If Charley were not killed by the fall, without help he must drown in the well. It remained for him to act. Whilst busying himself he called for help, but there was no man within hearing. The long, iron-rimmed canvas bucket lay empty in the shoot; Kit seized it, and threw it into the open shaft.

"Back up!" he called in a firm voice, and the old horse backed till the top of the bucket was level with the surface.

Snatching the lantern from its hook, the boy took his stand upon the rim of the baling bucket, holding the rope with one arm, and calling to the horse—

"Get up, Billy!"

The next instant Kit was travelling down the shaft, steadying himself in the descent by touching the dripping slabs and centres with one foot every now and again. His idea was to save his mate if possible. He knew that King Billy would continue round the ring till the up bucket appeared above the surface, and then would come to a stand, and remain perfectly still— would go to sleep

probably. The whim boy thought that if he could get hold of Charley in the water, by clinging to the rope, he might be able to support him until the night shift came on.

Down, down he went, the black slabs lining the shaft dancing up past his eyes in a seemingly endless procession, and the water raining upon him in great drops, stinging his cheeks and ears like stones. Splash! There came a rush of ill-smelling, brackish water into his ears and throat, and Kit was plunged into the well and carried down into the black depths. Even now the boy retained his presence of mind, and when he came to the surface again, gasping and kicking, no thought of his own danger entered his head— his object was still vividly before him. The rope was now stationary. He clutched it, and, drawing his head well out of the water, felt about the shaft with his feet, and, to his great joy, presently touched something that yielded to the light pressure. Reaching out, he grasped an arm and drew it towards him, and presently held the head of the braceman upon his shoulder. He was surprised to find it so easy to bear up such a big fellow.

Now it occurred to the boy that perhaps his efforts were in vain, and that in all probability Coleman had been battered to death against the timbers of the shaft ere he struck the water. He placed his ear against the cold lips of the unconscious man and listened, but could not detect the faintest respiration. He called Charley's name, and screamed with a sudden terror, feeling something warm flowing on his hand. But the momentary fear was followed by a feeling of childish contrition, and he touched the wet cheek near him with his lips.

Several times Kit cried out, thinking he heard foot-steps on top, but no answer came down the black shaft. Looking upwards, far, far away he saw a large star glittering in the sky, and the sight of it gave him hope; there was a sense of companionship in it. Time abides with us in our trouble. The men were a long time coming. Kit felt that he had been in the cold water half an hour at least when it really was not ten minutes since he was riding comfortably on the whim-beam. The head upon his shoulder dragged heavier and heavier as the moments crept by, and the small hand clutching the 5-in. rope ached with an intolerable pain.

In a flash, at the moment his candle was extinguished, Kit had seen that the water was only about an inch above the flat sheet on the plat in the drive. He knew that if he could only get on to the plat there would be a better chance of his holding out till the men came. He acted upon the idea at once. Driving himself with his feet from the opposite side of the shaft, he suddenly let go the rope and succeeded in clutching the sole-piece. He had some difficulty in dragging himself into the drive whilst still holding his mate, but he managed it. Once safe in the drive Kit made an effort to pull his mate to the plat, but found

himself too weak. Sitting with his back against the frame and his legs hanging in the water, the boy clasped Coleman under the arms, clutching his jumper at the back, and held on with the determination of a hero.

The drive was filled with a dense darkness; strange, low sounds echoed along its length. The water chilled Kit's limbs, and pains were darting in his back and up and down his arms— pains that presently settled into an abiding torture; but he clung to Coleman, and waited. Burns and Harvey were the facemen on the night shift. It seemed as if they would never come. Two or three times the whim boy tried to cry out, but his voice was very weak and whistled in his burning throat. A dread that perhaps the miners were off on the spree flashed upon his mind, and he muttered a little prayer, a very little prayer, disjointed and irrelevant in its wording, but potent with Him to whom only the heart speaks.

The boy's strength was leaving him, the pains in his back increased, and his arms felt as if being dragged from his shoulders. He spoke to his mate in piteous whispers, implored an answer, and wept; but his determination never failed nor flagged. At length he heard someone stirring on the brace, and his heart gave a great bound.

"Hello, below there!"

A hoarse gasp broke in Kit's throat— he could not answer. And now all his limbs were trembling violently, and the agony of the strain was intensified with every second. Why didn't they come down? What were they doing?

A long time seemed to elapse before he heard the bucket surge out of the well, and the water splashing down as it was borne quickly up the shaft. Kit made another effort, but his muscles failed to respond, and he could only cling to Charley's form with frozen, tortured hands as it slipped, inch by inch, down deeper into the black waters.

Now came Kit's greatest trial, the last terrible moments of waiting. He knew when the bucket reached the surface and when it started down again by the plunging of the other bailer into the water in the next compartment, which was not open to the drive, and the splashing of the falling water as it drew out again. But what long, wearing moments those were. How slowly the old horse crept round the whim-ring. Charley was sinking, sinking all the time, and Kit felt himself going down too, powerless to resist the weight that drew him, but ready to die rather than release his hold.

There came a flash of light, and Harvey's candle showed him the drawn face of the whim boy, chalk white against the blackness of the drive, with wide, gleaming eyes and tightly-set teeth.

Kit knew nothing after the apparition of the face-man until he recovered consciousness in his aunt's hut at midday. His limbs were aching, and there

was a strange bewilderment in his brain, but as that passed away he recalled the incidents of the adventure in the shaft, and wondered how Coleman had fared. He was about to call for Aunt Jem, when he heard the voice of Spence, the manager.

"Coleman's head's knocked about a bit, an' he's had a bad soakin', but he'll be round agen in a few days, right ez rain. How's the youngster, missus?"

"Sleepin' like a lamb," came the reply in Aunt Jem's strong voice. "He ain't none the worse that I can see." A happy smile played about Kit's lips when he heard the good news of "The Professor's" escape, and he turned his face to the wall, and soon slept again.

During Monday and the whole of the next day the miners from the Old Identity, and men working at the New Chum and other mines further up and down the gully, who had heard of the lad's extraordinary action, called to inquire after him, and to express their admiration to Aunt Jem. Most of them asked to be allowed to have a peep at Kit as he lay upon his bunk, looking very small for so great a hero, and rather white and shamefaced.

The trooper from the township and a party of miners were out scouring the bush in pursuit of "The Bunyip," who had not been seen since the Sunday night.

On Wednesday morning Charley Coleman limped to the door of the hut, where Aunt Jem was up to her elbows in the foaming suds, as usual. Charley's head was swathed in an unnecessarily large and very unworkmanlike bandage, the handiwork of an amateur surgeon, and he was still pale and weak.

"Feelin' O.K. agen, ole man?" cried Aunt Jem, in a hail-fellow tone of voice.

"Shickery here," answered Charley, touching his legs, "and I've got a head on me, but otherwise pretty correct, thanks. S'pose I can see the boy?"

Aunt Jem's head went down over the tub, and she churned up the water with unwonted energy.

"Yes," she said, "I reckon you can; he's there waitin'." She pointed within.

Charley entered the hut, and saw only a little girl sitting on a camp-stool by the wide fireplace. She stood up to meet him. She was decidedly a handsome little girl of about sixteen, he thought; rather pale, with short hair that curled crisply over her small head, and with large, shy eyes. The braceman gazed at her wonderingly, and not without some youthful diffidence. It seemed that he should have known the girl, and yet he did not remember having seen her before.

"Beg pardon, miss," said the braceman; "I've called to see Kit."

The extraordinary little girl clasped her hands over her face, and then buried both hands and face in the pillow on Aunt Jem's bunk. Presently she

peeped out with one eye at Charley standing awkwardly in the middle of the hut.

"I'm Kit," said a smothered voice from the depths of the pillow.

"What!" Charley strode to the side of the bunk, half-guessing the truth, and wild with astonishment. "What is the meaning of this, then?" He touched her skirt.

"Oh! 'Professor,' I was a girl all the time!"

"Kit a girl! Jerusalem!" Coleman dropped his hat. "My whim boy a girl!" He collapsed, overcome with amazement, and sat on the stool, dumbfounded, glaring at the back of Kitty's head, which alone was visible above the pillow.

After a minute or so Charley arose and turned the girl's face towards him.

"Let me see you, Kit."

But Kitty covered her burning cheeks and her eyes with her hands, and tears oozed through her fingers.

"I can't, Charley; I'm ashamed."

"Kit a girl!" repeated the young man in a low voice. "You are Kit, and you did all the men have told me— you went down the shaft, and rescued me from death? How was it possible?"

"I just went down and caught hold of you," murmured Kitty vaguely.

"I don't understand it all, Kit," Charley continued, taking her hand in his, "but you have saved my life, and you must be the bravest girl that ever lived. I can't say anything, but 'Thanks, thanks!' and that seems mean and little. I feel a fool, but I'm just full of gratitude, Kit."

"I'm glad I done it— so glad!"

Kitty was transformed; a few weeks earlier the idea of assuming boys' clothes and taking a job on the whim afforded her only delight; now she could not think of what she had done without a blush, and mention of it covered her with confusion. She had a suddenly-developed sense of propriety, of which the neat shoes and the stockings she now wore were an eloquent confession. There was coquetry, too, in the pretty ribbons at her throat and the flower in her hair. Nothing would ever again induce Kitty Bennet to ape the boy.

Aunt Jem was proud in her manly way of Kitty's bravery, but could not understand that the fact of her proving to be a girl should cause anything more than a passing surprise. No harm had been done by the masquerade; it was a good joke, played out, that was all. This sense of the matter induced her to leave Coleman to discover the truth for himself; to have prepared him for it would have been to spoil a humorous situation, and Aunt Jem was a bigoted humorist.

Pope was found, four days after Coleman's fall, lying at the foot of some high, precipitous rocks on the side of Camel Hill. He was quite dead, and this was held to be very considerate of him by the men of the Old Identity.

Charley and Kit have since married, but of late years Mrs. Charley has developed so keen a sense of propriety that the affair of the Old Identity is strictly tabooed in her family circle.

A Visit to Scrubby Gully

The Bulletin, 14 Dec 1895

THE MEN at the mine were anxious to have me visit our magnificent property. The battery and water-wheel were erected, there were 50 tons of stone in the hopper, and we only needed water and the blessing of Providence to start crushing out big weekly dividends. I know now that there has never been a time within the memory of man when Scrubby Gully did not want water, and that Scrubby Gully is the one place on earth to which a discriminating man would betake himself if he wished to avoid all the blessings of Providence for ever, but that is beside the matter.

I was carefully instructed by letter to take the train to Kanan, coach it to the Rabbit Trap, take horse from Whalan's to the Cross Roads, ask someone at Old Poley's on the hill to direct me to Sheep's Eye; from there strike West on foot, keeping Bugle Point on my right, and "Chin Whiskers" would meet me at the Crossing.

There was no accommodation at the mine for city visitors, but I was given to understand Mr. Larry Jeans would be happy to accommodate me at his homestead over the spur.

Casual references to Mr. Jeans in the correspondence gave me the impression that Jeans was an affluent gentleman of luxurious tastes and a hospitable disposition, and that a harmless eccentricity led him to follow agricultural and pastoral pursuits in the vicinity of Scrubby Gully instead of wasting his time in voluptuous ease in the city.

"Chin Whiskers" met me at The Crossing.

"Chin Whiskers" was a meditative giant who exhausted his mental and physical energies chewing tobacco, and who bore about his person interesting and obvious evidence of the length and the severity of the local drought— he was, in fact, the drought incarnate. The Crossing was a mere indication of a track across a yellow, rock-strewn indentation between two hills, which indentation, "Chin Whiskers" informed me, was "The Creek." That did not surprise me, because I knew that every second country township and district in Australia has a somewhat similar indentation which it always calls "The Creek." Sometimes "The Creek " has moist places in it, sometimes it is quite damp for almost a dozen miles, but more often it is as hard and dry as a brick-kiln. When the indentation is really wet along its whole length, it is invariably called "The River."

I found the mine; it was a simple, horizontal hole bored in a hill. The battery was there, and the waterwheel. The waterwheel stood disconsolate beside the dust-strewn creek, and looked as much at home as a waterwheel

might be expected to look in the centre of the sandy wastes of Sahara. The working shareholders were unaffectedly glad to see me. They were sapless and drought-stricken, but assured me, with great enthusiasm, that they lived in momentary expectation of a tremendous downfall. Leon had been mending the roof of his hut, he said, in readiness for the heavy rains which were due before morning. He examined the sky critically, and expressed a belief that I would be detained on Scrubby Gully a couple of weeks or so in consequence of the floods.

This spirit of unreasonable hopefulness and trust seemed to be shared by Cody, and Ellis, and MacMahon, I alone was dubious. The journey up had worn me out; the dry desolation all around and the flagrant unprofitableness of our spec, sickened me; but Jeans still remained— the prodigal Jeans, with his spacious homestead and profuse hospitality. I was heartfully grateful for Jeans. We met in due course. As I talked with Leen, a man came wearily down the hill, towing a meagre horse, which, in turn, was towing a log. This man delivered his log, unslung his animal, and approached us, heroically lugging behind him the miserable apology for a horse— a morbid brute manifestly without a hope or ambition left in life, and conveying mysteriously to the observer a knowledge of its fixed and unshakeable determination to lie down and die the moment its owner's attention was otherwise directed. But the proprietor seemed fully alive to the situation, and never allowed his thoughts to stray entirely from the horse, but was continually jerking its head up, and addressing towards it reproaches, expostulations and curses— curses that had lost all their vigor and dignity.

This man was Jeans, and if I had not seen his horse I would have said that Jeans was the most hopelessly heart-broken and utterly used-up animal breathing on the face of the earth. He was about 40, grey, hollow-cheeked, hollow-chested, bent, and apathetic, with the dreadful apathy that comes of wasted effort, vain toil, and blasted hopes. Jeans had a face that had forgotten how to smile and never scowled; a face that took no exercise, but remained set in the one wooden expression of joyless, passionless indifference to whatever fate could offer henceforth and forever. My last hopes exploded at the sight of him.

Mr. Larry Jeans said I was welcome to camp in the spare room, "up to" his place, and added dully that "proberly" his missus could scrape up grub enough for me "fer a day'r two." "Proberly" did not sound very encouraging, but I had no option, and, being dead-beat, accepted the hospitality offered, and followed Mr. Jeans. Larry laboriously hauled his melancholy horse over a couple of low stony rises, and then we tackled the scrag end of the range, across which led a vague track that wound in and out amongst a forest of great

rocks, and presented all the difficulties and dangers of mountaineering without its compensations. Jeans struggled on with dull patience, and in silence, saving when it was necessary to divert the old horse from his morbid thoughts, and when he briefly answered my questions. I gathered from him that the men at the mine had been expecting rain for four months.

"And what do you think of the chances?" I asked.

"Oh, me, I never expect nothin'. Sometimes things happen. I don't expect 'em, though,"

"Things happen— what, for instance?"

"Well, dry spells."

I elicited that pleuro happened, and rabbits, and fires, and "this here new-fangled fever." But whatever happened Jeans never fluctuated; he had struck an average of misery, and was bogged in the moral slough. It seemed as if his sensibilities above a certain capacity had been worn out by over-work and refused to feel more than a fixed degree of trouble, so that whatever might come on top of his present woes, be it fever, or fire, or death, the man remained in his normal condition of grim apathy and spiritless obedience to fate.

The "homestead" stood upon the flat, timbered country beyond the rise. It was just what Jeans's homestead might have been expected to be: a low structure of bark and slabs, with a slab chimney at one end, and a door in the middle between two canvas "windows." It stood in a small clearing; just beyond the house stood the skeleton of a shed upon which, it being sundown, roosted a few gaunt fowls; a lank cow with one horn was deeply meditating by the front door. There were signs of bold raids upon the stubborn bush, pathetic ventures, and great butts lay about in evidence of much weary, but unprofitable work. A dog-leg fence, starting at no particular point, straddled along in front of the house, and finished nowhere about a hundred yards off. Not a new fence, either, but an old one, with much dry grass matted amongst the logs— that was the pathos of it.

There had been a brave attempt at a garden, too; but the few fruit-trees that stood had been stripped of the bark, and the hens had made dust-baths in all the beds. In this dust an army of children were wallowing half-clad, bare-footed, dirt-encrusted children, but all hale and boisterous.

At the door we were met by Mrs. Larry Jeans, and after introducing me as "him from the city," the master labored away, dragging his shuffling horse, and leaving me in the centre of a wondering circle of youngsters of all sorts and sizes, from two dusty mites not yet properly balanced on their crooked little legs up to a shock-headed lubberly boy of 13 curiously embossed with large tan freckles, and a tall, gawky girl of the same age in preposterously short

skirts, whom my presence afflicted with a most painful bashfulness. A peculiarity about Jeans's children that struck me was the fact that they seemed to run in sets: there was a pair even for the sticky baby deftly hooked under its mother's left arm, judging by the petulant wailing to be heard within.

The Jeans homestead consisted of two compartments. I looked about in vain for the "spare room," and concluded it must be either the capacious fire-place or the skeleton shed on which the hens were roosting. The principal article of kitchen furniture was a long plank table built into the floor; between it and the wall was a bush-made form, also a fixture. A few crazy, three-legged stools, a safe manufactured from a zinc-lined case, and an odd assortment of crockery and tin cups, saucers and plates, piled on slab shelves in one corner, completed the list of "fixings."

Mrs. Larry Jeans was a short, bony, homely woman, very like her husband— strangely, pathetically like in face and demeanour, similarly bowed with labor, and with the same air of hopelessness and of accepting the toils and privations of their miserable existence as an inevitable lot. She was always working, and always had worked; her hands were hard and contorted in evidence of it, and her cheek was as brown and as dry as husks from laboring in the sun.

We had tea and bread and boiled onions and corned beef for tea that evening— a minimum of beef and a maximum of onions. The last onion-crop had been a comparative success somewhere within half a day's journey of Scrubby Gully.

Tea served to introduce more children; they dangled over the arms of the unhappy mother, hung to her skirts, sprawled about her feet, squabbled in the corners, and over-ran the house. Jeans helped to feed the brood in his slow, patient way, and after tea he helped to pack away the youngest in little bundles, here, there, and everywhere, where they slept peacefully, but in great apparent peril, whilst the bigger kids charged about the room and roared, and fought, and raised a very pandemonium of their own. Every now and again Mrs. Jeans would lift her tired head from her sewing or her insatiable twins, and say weakly, "Now, you Jinny, behave." Or Larry would remark dispassionately, "Hi, you, Billy!" But otherwise the youngsters raged unchecked, their broken-spirited parents seeming to regard the noise and worry of them as the lightest trial in a world of struggling and trouble.

I asked Jeans how many children he thought he had. He didn't seem certain, but after due deliberation said there might be thirteen in all. He had probably lost count, for I am certain I tallied fifteen— seven sets and one odd one.

When the washing-up was done, and half of the family was bedded down, Larry dragged a tangle of old harness from the other room, and sat for two hours painfully piecing it up with cord, and his wife sat opposite him, silent and blank of face, mending one set of rags with another. I perched upon a stool watching the pair, studying one face after the other, irritated at length by the sheep-like immobility of both, thinking it would be a relief if Jeans would suddenly break out and do something desperate, something to show that he had not, in spite of appearances, got beyond the possibility of sanguinary revolt; but he worked on steadily, uncomplainingly, till the boy with the unique freckles came hurrying in with the intelligence that the old horse was "havin' a fit'r somethin'." Jeans did not swear. He said "Is he but?" and put aside his harness, and went out, like a man for whom life has no surprises.

The selector was over an hour struggling with his hypochondriac horse, whilst I exchanged fragments of conversation with Mrs. Jeans, and went upon various mental excursions after that spare room. It appeared that the Jeanses had neighbors. There was another family settled seven miles up the gully, but Mrs. Jeans informed me that the Dicksons, being quiet and sort of downhearted, were not very good company, consequently she and Jeans rarely visited them. I was indulging in a mental prospect of the jubilation at a reunion of the down-hearted Dicksons and the gay and frivolous Jeanses when Larry returned from his struggle with the horse. He resumed his work upon the harness without any complaint.

His remark that "them skewball horses is alwis unreasonable" was not spoken in a carping spirit; it was given as conveying valuable information to a stranger.

At 11 o'clock my host "s'posed that p'r'aps maybe " I was ready to turn in. I was, and we went forth together in quest of the spare room. The room in question proved to be a hastily-constructed lean-to on the far corner of the house at the back. Inside one wall was six feet high, and the other was merely a tree-butt. My bunk was built against the butt, and between the bunk and the roof there were about 18 inches of space. That bunk had not been run up for a fat man. After establishing me in the spare room Jeans turned to go.

"Best bar the door with a log, case o' the cow," he said. "If she comes bumpin' round in the night, don't mind. She walks in her sleep moonlight nights."

It only needed this to convince me that I was usurping the customary domicile of the meditative cow. The room had been carefully furbished up, and deeply carpeted with scrub ferns, but the cow was not to be denied.

Weary as I was, I got little sleep that night. I had fallen off comfortably about half-an-hour after turning in, when I was awakened again by some

commotion in the house. Half-a-dozen of the children were blubbering, and I could hear the heavy tread of Larry; and the equally heavy tread of his wife, moving about the house. Presently both passed by the lean-to, and away in the direction of the range. For another half-hour or so there was silence, and then the one-horned cow came along and tried my door. Failing to open it, she tried the walls and the roof, but could not break her way in, so she camped under the lee of the structure, and lowed dismally at intervals till daybreak.

When I arose a scantily-attired small boy generously provided me with a pint pannikin three-parts full of water. The water was for my morning bath, and the small boy was careful to warn me not to throw it away when I was through with it. This youngster told me that "Dad, an' mum, an' Jimmy " had been out all night hunting Steve. Steve, I gathered, was the one enterprising child in the household, and was in the habit of going alone upon voyages of exploration along the range, where, being a very little fellow, he usually lost himself, and provided his parents with a night's entertainment searching for him in the barren gorges and about the boulder-strewn spurs of the range. How it happened that he was not missed till nearly midnight on this occasion I cannot say, unless the father and mother were really as ignorant of the extent and character of their family as they appeared to be.

Mrs. Jeans was the first to return, and she brought Steve with her. The dear child had not been lost, after all; incensed by some indignity that had been put upon him during the afternoon, he had "run away from home," he said, and slept all night in a wombat's hole about 200 yards from the house. There his mother found him, returning from her long, weary search. The incident did not appear to have affected her in any way ; she looked as tired and as heartsick as on the previous evening, but not more so.

"You know we lost one little one there"— she extended her hand towards the low, rambling repellent hills— "an' found him dead a week after."

Larry returned half-an-hour later, and his apathy, under the circumstances, was simply appalling.

We had fried onions and bread and tea for breakfast, and immediately the meal was over Larry, who I imagined would be going to bed for a few hours, appeared in front of the house leading his deplorable horse. He was bound for the mine, he said.

I put in that day exploring the tunnel, examining the immovable mill, hunting for specimens in the quartz-tip, and listening to Leen's cheerful weather prophesies; and Jeans and his soured quadruped dragged logs to the mine from a patch of timber about a mile off, which patch the men alluded to largely as The Gum Forest.

Returning to the homestead at sundown we found the children fighting in the dust, and the one-horned cow meditating at the door, as on the previous evening. I fancied I detected in the eye of the cow a look of pathetic reproach as I passed her. Tea that evening consisted mainly of roast onions. Jeans felt called upon to apologise because the boys had been unable to trap a rabbit for my benefit.

"Now'n agen, after a rainy spell, we're 'most afraid the rabbits is a-goin' to eat us, an' then when we'd like a rabbit-stoo there ain't a rabbit to be found within 20 mile," said the settler impassively. "When there is rabbits, there ain't onions," he added as a further contribution to the curiosities of natural history.

The second night at Scrubby Gully was painfully like the first: Mrs. Jeans stitched, Mr. Jeans labored over his tangle of harness, and the brood rolled and tumbled about the room, raising much dust and creating a deafening noise, to which Larry and Mary, his wife, gave little heed. When a section of the family had been parcelled up and put to sleep, I was tempted to ask Jeans why he continued to live in that unhallowed, out-of-the-way corner, and to waste his energies upon a parched and blasted holding instead of settling somewhere within reach of a market and beyond the blight of tangible and visible despair that hung over Scrubby Gully and its vicinity.

"Dunno," said Jeans, without interest, " 'pears t' me t' be pretty much as bad other places. Evans is the same, so's Calder."

I did not know either Evans or Calder, but I pitied both from the bottom of my heart. Jeans admitted that he had given up hope of getting the timber off his land, though he "suspected" he might be able to handle it somehow "when the boys grew up." He further admitted that he didn't know "as the land was good for anythin' much" when it was cleared; but his pessimism was proof against all my arguments, and I went sadly to bunk, leaving the man and his wife working with slow, animal perseverance, apparently unconscious of the fact that they had not slept a wink for over thirty hours.

The cow raided my room shortly after midnight. She managed to break down the door this time, but as her intentions were peaceful, and as it was preferable rather to have her for a room-mate than to be kept awake by her pathetic complaints, I made no attempt to evict her, and we both passed an easy night.

I was up early next morning, but Mr. and Mrs. Jeans were before me. They were standing together down by the aimless dog-leg fence, and the hypochondriacal horse lay between them. I walked across, suspecting further "unreasonableness " on the part of the horse. The animal was dead.

"Old man, how'll you manage to haul those logs in now?" As Mrs. Jeans said this, I fancied I saw flicker in her face for a moment a look of spiritual

agony, a hint of revolt that might manifest itself in tears and bitter complainings, but it passed in the instant.

Jeans merely shook his head, and answered something indicative of the complete destruction of his faith in "them skewbald horses."

We had bread and onions for breakfast.

When I last saw Jeans, as I was leaving Scrubby that day, he was coming down the hill from the direction of the gum forest, struggling in the blinding heat, with a rope over his shoulder, towing a nine-foot sluice log.

We had a letter from Jeans yesterday; he says the working shareholders are hurrying to get the sluice fixed over the wheel, and he (Jeans) anticipates a heavy downfall of rain during the night.

The Breaking-in of Daniel Palmer

(As by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 1 March 1917

"IF YOU DO, mark this, my lad, you'll not show your nose inside my house again."

"Very well, I'll bestow my nose elsewhere."

"Neither you nor yours. You go outside your class to marry; very well, exist outside your class."

"You forget, Daniel Palmer, you are merely my father. You are not, as you too often seem to think, Divine Providence. It is not for you to lay down the. law with regard to my future."

"Get out!"

"I am getting out, and I promise you I'll go as bare as the law will allow. I owe you my existence— for which I offer you no thanks. I'll owe you nothing else."

"Six months of married life with that— that girl will teach you the value of what you are closing."

"Even if it does you'll not have the satisfaction of hearing of it. But before I go you shall hear my present opinion of you. You are a petty tyrant, a vulgarian, for all your money a cheap vulgarian. The only really bearable qualities you ever possessed were practically forced upon you by my mother, and she, you might remember, was a miner's daughter, a little lower in the social scale, which you accept as a sort of heavenly establishment than the girl I mean to marry. I want to remind you, too, for your own good, that after her marriage to you mother did washing for the miners. One thing is certain— my wife will not do that."

Palmer, senior, took up a heavy ruler from his desk. His face was white with rage. "You had better go before I do you an injury," he said.

"I'll go when I'm ready," replied Palmer, junior, "and that will not be till I am through telling you what I think of you. All my life you have allowed yourself the liberty of telling me what you thought of me, although, apart from the dubious business of trafficking in shares, you never had an idea that was worth throwing at a cat. You have for months past indulged yourself in insults upon the girl I love— you who have no worthy knowledge of any living thing apart from the points of a greyhound. You take it upon yourself to select a wife for me, with no desire but to add another dirty fortune to the dirty fortune you already possess. Well, you have my answer— you can go to the deuce, and take your money with you."

"Go!" said Daniel Palmer.

Jimmie Palmer stepped out of the door. "Good-bye, and bad luck to you," he said.

JIMMIE went out into the street, an orphan from choice. The house he looked back upon was quite the finest in a superior suburb, He had lived in it fifteen of his twenty-five years. His mother had died in it. He had enjoyed in that home practically everything money can buy, and since his mother's death had missed in it everything money cannot buy.

Daniel Palmer was a hard-doer. By persistent hard-doing he had triumphed. He was one of the very few men who had prospered by gold-mining in Australia, and no man living had a keener instinct for Stock Exchange tactics. It was notorious that, however things went, Daniel Palmer invariably came out right.

Jimmie took tram to the city, and hung about till Carder and Kingcliff's establishment exuded its army of employees, and met Patty Bonson at the door. Patty was a cool-looking, clean-looking, fresh-faced, dark-haired, violet-eyed girl of about twenty.

No reasonable man could have raised objection to Patty as she stood, looking as bright and trim as a new pin after eight hours' hard typewriting in a hot office— no reasonable man, that is, who was not a rich man called upon to consider the young lady as a daughter-in-law elect. Patty was obviously healthy, she was certainly strong, she was indubitably decent, and she had good looks of the kind that is not startling, but which stand.

Jimmie Palmer thought her glorious, and Jimmie was right. From his point of view she was glorious, and to even matters Patty perceived Jimmie to be glorious, too. Everything about Jimmie was just right. He was the only really lovable fellow in the world

The two took a tram to the top of Collins-street, and then walked through the Treasury Gardens. Patty had a room in East Melbourne.

On a seat in the gardens Jimmie explained. "I told you was inevitable, dearest," he said.

"Have you explained to your father that I loved you before I knew you were the son of a rich man?" asked the girl.

Jimmie shook his head. "No use," he said. "He has set his mind on my marrying Esther Price, because, having more money than he knows what to do with, and observing that old Price has more than he knows what to do with, he has resolved determinedly to saddle me with the responsibility of both."

"It's an awful lot of money," said Patty, ruefully. "In taking you I am separating you from your father, from your father's money, from Esther Price, and from her father's money. It's a big deal."

"But you don't hesitate'"

Patty Bonson, her two hands in his, looked into his face with a business-like criticism, pursed her lips, and said: "No-o. I'll risk it."

Jimmie laughed, and kissed her. "You know how I stand. I've got to work, and I haven't worked. My only incentive is a realisation of the fact that you are the one thing in the world before all others worth having, and since you must be worked for I will work for you like— like the very deuce."

"One thing is certain, we cannot he parted," Patty said.

"That is as certain as life itself."

"Then we must act upon my plan. We must go on to that bit of land of mine at Parrakeet. There are about 30 acres cleared. The rest— about 200 acres— is heavily timbered, but a demand for the firewood has set in, and it may be turned to profitable account. I am a farmer's daughter— I know farming. The future for you, Jimmie Palmer, is as an onion grower. Parrakeet onions are unequalled. Is it to be love and onions?"

She laughed an assured laugh, kissing his chin.

"Delectable combination," he answered, and hugged till something cracked.

"Another busk gone," said Patty soberly.

HERE ENDETH the first lesson. Chapter two discovers Jimmie Palmer as the active onion farmer, with six years of experience behind him, a different man physically, larger, browner, harder— a more solid and substantial citizen all round, a husband and a father, with a large expanse of onions in good order and condition greening at the hillside, and a busy little mill at the Parrakeet Station cutting alleged box blocks for the metropolitan market.

Jimmie was happy, Patty was happy, and little Patsy Palmer exhibited perfect felicity. Jimmie it was who insisted on calling the firstborn Patsy. "It's the nearest we can get to Patty, and Patty is the best thing on earth."

Jimmie Palmer had not mourned the loss of a rich father— he had never bewailed it. Looking at him, burnt like a brick from a hot and heavy day in the big timber, Patty had often wondered that no regrets for the old, easy life had ever escaped from his lips but there was nothing to wonder at in this, there being no regrets to express. The man was happier than ever he had been in his life, he felt himself a better animal, he rejoiced in the new strength that had come to him.

Daniel Palmer had not been thought much of. It would have added to his bitterness to know how little the parting had been felt by his boy. But there had never been much apparent love between the two.

BESIDE JIMMIE, Mrs. Jimmie, and the four-year-old boy, there was now old Bob Steedman, who was almost one of the family. Bob had come to them, seeking work, footsore and sick.

"I don't want any particular wage," he said. "Give me a few bob, and let me potter round. I'll be worth my tucker all right."

But Jimmie named a fair wage, and Old Bob began particularly well by treading the life out of a snake that had come up on the verandah, and seemed to threaten little Patsy.

"You're our man as long as you like to stay now, Bob," said Mrs. Jimmie.

So Old Bob had stayed. He carted the logs down to the station, he milked, he worked in the fruit and vegetable gardens, he did a bit of hoeing, a bit of fencing, but more than anything else he was Patsy's guardian and attendant. An extraordinary affection sprang up between the kiddie and the old man

"It's curious," said Jimmie, standing by his wife's side one Sunday morning. Patty was watching Old Bob and the boy through a window. "You'd think the old chap's heart was rooted in that kid."

Patty nodded. "It is," she said. "It often brings a lump in my throat. He's like a man who has never had a real human love in his life."

But Old Bob Steedman did not stay. When he had been with them about ten weeks he went to Jimmie one morning and said: "I reckon I'll have to be movin' on, boss."

"You don't mean that you're leaving us, Bob ?" said Jimmie in surprise. "I'll go another couple of bob a day to keep you. What's the matter, anyhow?"

"Nothin's the matter—nothin' at all, on'y I must be movin'."

They tried hard to keep Bob, but he went his way. Jimmie missed him, and Patty missed him, but more than all little Patsy felt the loss.

But a few days later all other matters were put out of Jimmie's head for the time being by the arrival of a letter from his father. Daniel Palmer wrote :

"I expected to hear from you long ago. But apparently you do not care if your father lives or dies. I put a private detective on the job to dig you out. He tells me you are a working farmer— you have a son. Well, I have no son, it seems. I am a lonely man. I want you back. Will you come back? Both sides should forgive and forget. I find I need my son more than he needs me. I am prepared to pay the ext. a price. I admit I was wrong. I had no right to push my wishes to such an extreme. I was in the wrong in everything I said concerning

the young lady you had chosen for your wife. Will you come? All I have may be yours."

"It doesn't read a bit like father," said Jimmie.

"But will you go?" asked Patty, anxiously.

"I say no," Jimmie replied. "What do you say?"

Patty shook her head. "We are quite happy. But I am sorry for your father. Poor old man— it is hard on him!"

"He would be hard on us. He has been hard all his life. If we sacrificed what we have, and placed ourselves in a position of dependence to him the old troubles would come once more, and I'd have to break away again."

Jimmie answered his father: "We are very comfortable and happy. I do not think I would be justified in giving up a life that suits me for one I discarded because I hated it. But I am willing to let bygones pass right out of mind. I have no ill-feeling in the world. We both said a great deal more than we meant when we last met."

There came one more letter from Palmer. "If you will not come and see me, may I come and see you ? My detective will be my guide." That was the gist of it.

Jimmie showed the note to his wife. "Of course he must come," Patty said.

"You are sure it is wise?"

"I am sure he is your father. I am sure we must be decent to him. I know I will do everything in my power to make him feel at home here."

"Very well. I shall do the dutiful son act. Prepare for the prodigal father. I wonder who his private detective is?"

"Old Bob Steedman," said Patty.

"Do you think that? It's likely. But look at the stay he made."

THE CONJECTURE was borne out by the sudden reappearance of Old Bob two days later. He had picked up little Patsy in the garden, and walked into the kitchen with the boy in his arms.

For a moment he stood before Patty and Jimmie, clinging to the boy, overcome with emotion.

"You wouldn't come to me," he said tremulously, "so I've come to you."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jimmie amazed.

"What do I mean? Look closer, Jimmie. You heard of my motor accident two years ago? It shifted my features a bit, left this big scar and altered the line of my nose. Then you always knew me as a full-bearded man. I shaved clean, and carefully altered my voice to deceive you. For ten weeks I lived in your house, and you did not know me."

"Father!" Jimmie ventured half doubtingly.

Old Bob bent his head. "I'm beat," he said. "The longing to have you back beat me four years ago. Then I came here, and her kindness beat me. The little fellow's love beat me again. Never was a man more thoroughly licked."

Patty placed a chair for Daniel Palmer, pressed him into it, and kissed his cheek.

"Welcome home, father," she said.

_____

A Child of Nature

The Bulletin, 28 Dec 1889

A FEW years ago the peaceful solitude of a sequestered locality near the north coast of Tasmania was abruptly violated by the sudden eruption of a small but extremely lively mining township. A couple of enterprising youths pottering about the surface a few months earlier in pursuit of nothing more valuable than wallabies or "devils" became deeply interested in the unexpected discovery of a very promising-looking outcrop of quartz. The direct result of this interesting circumstance was an immediate and enthusiastic trend of public feeling towards that retired locality, and a speedy pressure of population along the line of reef. A startling transformation ensued; with wonderful alacrity "pubs." and poppet-legs sprang upon the scene, the forest trees fell back, and huts, and tents, and paling stores took their places; the rattle of trucks, the clang of knockers, the heavy beat of batteries, and the united clamour of a dozen whistles buried their echoes in the surrounding bush; and beer, and rum, and politics, and policemen abounded, in conjunction with other enervating evidences of civilization.

Among the early arrivals on Lefroy was a long, bony, weather-beaten man with a large and varied experience of goldfields, culled in his wanderings hither and thither across Australia from one diggings to another. Mr. Barney Brown, in common with most nomads of his class, was extremely resentful of authority, and much disliked managers and captains of shifts, preferring the freedom of action and liberty of speech that are the privileges of the man who is his own boss. These independent sentiments led him to turn his attention to the shallow alluvial along the creek, which hitherto had been little heeded. Having procured a miner's right, and chummed in with a congenial soul, Barney marked out a claim in a promising locality, and before sundown had the pleasure of bottoming on wash 18 inches thick and giving pennyweight prospects. The panning-off of the first dish was eagerly supervised by several unattached diggers, and the immediate result was a rush on the postmaster for "rights," and a promiscuous pegging-out of claims. With a soft, pipe-clay "bottom," a foot and a half of rich stuff, easily shifted, and an unlimited supply of Cascade beer in an adjacent "pub.," the mates took things extremely easy, and cheerfully surveyed the certainty of a little pile when their holding should peg out.

Mr. Brown was thirty-eight years of age, and, as previously intimated, long and loose; he had pale ginger hair and whiskers, and a mild air of self-deprecation and pensive bashfulness, which, however, was very delusive, and tended to decoy facetious strangers to their own undoing, as he was prepared

to maintain his standing against "anything that walked on end," and to resent an infringement of his rights by the prompt and judicious application of a pair of fists of enormous size and fortified with horny encrustations like horse-warts; and the placid urbanity with which he undertook to knock the incautious party out of his boots, and fulfilled the obligation, was a matter of the deepest interest to the men of Lefroy. But Mr. Brown's most pronounced feature was his implacable distrust of unmarried women. A spiteful treatise on the girl of the period, written by some acrimonious philosopher, combined with an extremely unpleasant legal experience with a red-haired young female who had become convinced that he ought to marry, despite his belief to the contrary, and who established her opinion in a court of law, obtaining considerable of his savings as a recompense for the loss of his name, had served to inspire him with a wholesome dread of the sex early in his career, and observation and deduction only intensified his sense of the malignity of Woman. He entertained a hazy notion that every single girl with whom he came in contact had intentions the reverse of honourable, that she harboured a deep-laid scheme either to inveigle him into a state of bondage or rob him by legal process, so he regarded the sex with an eye of doubt, and held himself severely aloof.

Mr. Brown's hut-mates did not share his unseemly prejudice; they appreciated the young woman as an admirable institution, and beheld her with adoration, and gave way to such weaknesses as white shirts and hair-oil in pursuit of her. Barney strove eloquently to convert them, and feelingly indicated the error of their ways, and foretold breach of promise cases and conjugal infelicity; but they heeded him not, and he held his way alone. He felt that in Lefroy he had reasons to be especially watchful of the common enemy, his bright prospects and the abounding zeal of the local damsels necessitating every precaution in protection of the rights of man. Divers susceptible young females cast large languishing eyes upon the unprepossessing Brown, and, remembering the rapidity with which his capital in the little wooden bank attached to a local grocery was swelling, strove, by dint of gorgeous raiment and captivating smiles, to overcome his stoical reserve; but Barney gave them every discouragement, and always forsook them for the society of the bar or the billiard-room at the earliest opportunity.

One Saturday afternoon, Barney and two chums, armed to the teeth with supplies, ammunition, and guns, departed into the bush, intending to travel a few miles back and spend the Sunday in kangaroo and duck shooting. They had excellent sport, and were homeward bound, well laden with the spoil of the chase, late on the Sunday afternoon, when Barney, who was in the lead, had his attention attracted by a moving body that disappeared behind a tree

immediately after catching his eye. Supposing it to be a wallaby, and intent on having another shot, Mr. Brown dropped his load and advanced warily to the encounter. When well within distance, he took advantage of the first glimpse of the animal to shoot. Horror! a human being rolled into view, and immediately sprang to its feet. Barney was almost paralyzed with terror. The figure was that of a girl of about nineteen— the wildest-looking girl and the tallest he had seen. She was bare-headed and bare-footed, and clad in a rag of a jacket and an abbreviated skirt that was rapidly yielding to the ravages of time. For a few moments the uncanny creature, wild-eyed and trembling, surveyed her assailant, then turned and fled with the speed of a deer. About a hundred yards off she stopped again and looked back like a curious animal, but, when Barney moved to advance, she turned and rushed away, regardless of his cries. To follow would have been useless— she was soon lost to view amongst the saplings. On the tree and on the grass where the girl had stood there were traces of blood.

"I reckon I'll be jugged for this lot!" groaned Barney.

His mates had no opinion to offer, they had only capacity for intense amazement. They were eight miles from the township and had never heard of a dweller in those wilds. The only feasible solution of the phenomenon that presented itself was embodied in the supposition that the bush was haunted by a stray female who had escaped in her early childhood and been missing ever since.

The story was received with derisive incredulity at Lefroy, but on the Monday afternoon following the strict veracity of Mr. Brown and his chums was established to the satisfaction of the inhabitants, and at the same time the mystery of their adventure was much abated. Twice a week a large, hairy savage used to come crawling out of the leafy solitudes, laboriously hauling on a rope to which was attached a screwed and bony quadruped which had the consummate audacity to pretend to be a horse, and to which in turn was attached an antiquated shay. This bucolic curiosity used to tow his out-of-date animal round the town, peddling butter, eggs, and vegetables. He was big-boned, skinny, and of uncertain age, having apparently been sun-dried at a late stage of his existence, or preserved for immortality by the action of smoke or some other curative process; he was solemnly taciturn and uninviting, and nobody troubled him with questions. Nobody seemed to know anything about him; when he had completed his circuit, he shuffled off amongst the trees and darkness enveloped him.

On the afternoon mentioned Mr. Brown was greatly concerned on observing this strange specimen desert his conveyance on the track and bear down upon him with every demonstration of excitement; he roared with

bovine ferocity, and brandished a whip, which our hero was distressed to observe was loaded. He and the astonished digger clashed and clinched at the mouth of the shaft, there was a brief struggle, a wild upheaval of pipeclay, a dull thud, and when the dust rolled by, Mr. Brown was revealed astride his fallen foe, who still foamed and roared in inarticulate rage.

Barney's first thought was to send for whisky, and when the potent drug arrived, he, with the assistance of a couple of friends, administered a large dose to the intemperate hawker by force of arms. This treatment was repeated several times, the patient taking to his medicine very kindly when he caught its flavour, and when it had calmed his angry passions he graciously explained that he had heard Barney was the man who shot his daughter, and he had intended, in the heat of his feelings, to exact summary vengeance, but now he was prepared to accept explanations. Satisfactory explanations were forthcoming, and the pedlar, who introduced himself as Abram Tooey, under the exhilarating influence of the grateful liquor, developed a spirit of festive geniality little to be expected in one so ancient, and departed, after inviting the boys out to his farm, leading his beast of burden in a reckless and erratic manner, and enthusiastically carolling a bacchanalian ditty long out of favour.

Mr. Brown and his friends were filled with an exceeding great curiosity regarding the agricultural recluse and his wild, untutored daughter. A man from George Town was found who knew that old Tooey had been settled on a few hundred acres somewhere down near the sea for over fifteen years, and that before the outbreak of the diggings he used to journey into George Town at stated intervals for supplies; but as to his family, he knew nothing about any daughter— never heard or supposed he had any. This only further excited Barney's inquisitiveness, and he determined to visit the eccentric Tooey and have another interview with the wild woman. A desire to ascertain if the girl had been much hurt, Abram's invitation, and a bottle of whisky, he thought, would be excuses enough. He had no apprehensions about visiting an unconventional young lady who ran bare-footed in such a skirt, showed manifest dread of his sex, and had been reared beyond the degrading influence of fashion-plates and the ways and wiles of civilized woman.

True to his determination, Barney, with his mate, Croaker, set out in search of the Tooey homestead on the next Sunday. They followed the track of the old shay, and after a walk of about two hours and a half discerned the slab establishment they were seeking. As they drew near they were attracted by the spectacle of Miss Tooey sitting on a log fence, sunning herself, but that young lady no sooner caught sight of their advancing figures than she rolled promiscuously off her perch, and cut across the paddock, showing wonderful action and phenomenal speed; and they saw her a few minutes later surveying

them with great curiosity from fancied security in the fork of a tree. Mr. Tooey did not manifest any great delight at the sight of his visitors, and asked them in with a look of sulky suspicion; but a glimpse of the whisky-bottle improved his temper, and a few nips served to impart a genial conviviality and make him rather communicative.

The residence was a miserable hovel, furnished with a suite hand-made by an amateur and fashioned from saplings principally. A smoked old woman of most uncouth appearance arose in speechless amazement from a three-legged stool as they entered, and drifted furtively from the room. This was Mrs. Tooey, as her lord indicated with a nod and a growl. When the whisky had paved the way, the diggers ventured a few interrogations. They were gratified to hear that "Mur Jane wasn't hit bad"— merely a trifle of half-a-dozen pellets through the fleshy part of the arm.

"Ain't she a sort of retirin' young woman?" ventured Croaker.

"D—d if I've noticed much," replied her interesting parent slowly. Then, with the air of a man imparting an important truth, he added: "She's a wonder t' eat."

"She skipped from us 's if we was goin' t'shoot agen 's we come along," continued Croaker. "Seems to me she's bashful."

"Maybe, p'raps, she is a bit backard," said Mr. Tooey, rattling his pannikin as a delicate intimation that it was empty. "She hasn't seen a young fellow since she was five year old, an' I suppose she's got a notion they're given to shootin' that way."

Here Abram afforded his guests a sketch of his career, from which they gathered that for 15 years his wife and daughter had been drifting into savagery in that wretched hole, not having seen half-a-dozon strange faces in the whole of the time.

"Towns ain't no places for girls," said Mr. Tooey in conclusion, "where they're allus wantin' boots an' dimunds an' tooth-powders. Girls comes dear in towns."

This sentiment Barney seemed prepared to endorse, but Croaker denounced it with great vigour, asserting that it was an injustice to keep a girl from communion with her kind, and advising Abram to let his daughter visit Lefroy and obtain some polish.

"I don't see as Mur Jane wants polish," observed Mr. Tooey, with some paternal pride; "she'll cut scrub with the best of 'em, I bet, an' there ain't her equal at milkin'."

These things were all very well, said Croaker, but it was against nature to see a girl running away from a young man as if he was a cannibal with a large

appetite. A girl in her natural state should display a proper leaning towards young men, and rejoice in them.

Mr. Tooey was in a pliable frame of mind, and it required little argument to induce him to bring his daughter in— just to convince her that young men were not dangerous, or liable to shoot at any moment, and to break her in to them, like. Abram went out, they heard him calling "Mur Jane!" and presently he returned, dragging his lank, awkward daughter after him, and he placed her, bashful and trembling, before her visitors, her long, unkempt red hair falling about a very uninteresting face, and her large eyes full of guileless shyness. Barney ventured an apology and an inquiry after her wounded arm, but elicited no response, and Mary Jane, as soon as released, darted behind the door, and surveyed the visitors wonderingly through a crack for a short time, after which she watched her opportunity to escape again into the paddock, and when the young men were leaving she followed them for half a mile at a respectful distance, and then watched them out of sight from the boughs of a peppermint tree.

Mr. Brown was peculiarly interested in "Mur Jane." It was a fascinating experience to him, this contact with a young woman who beheld him with awe and fled from him in fear and trembling. He visited the Tooey homestead again. He went often, and in time the timorous daughter of the house became somewhat reconciled to the innovation, and no longer fled at his approach, but would sit in the room, looking extremely ungainly on the low bush stool, surveying the visitor with steadfast attention, and giving way to giggling paroxysms of bashful confusion whenever he caught her eye or addressed towards her the most trivial remark. The spectacle of the child of nature posed there in various acute angles, breathlessly regarding him as if he were something out of a menagerie, was a novel one, and the situation was extremely gratifying to his feelings as a man and a lord of creation. Hitherto he had found the female element demonstrative and inclined to "boss the job;" pert little misses in short frocks always overawed him with their aggressive conceit and airy nonchalance; in the presence of "young ladies," despite his six feet of muscular manhood, he dwindled into insignificance, and felt meek and constrained, whilst they prattled cheerfully and maintained a superior mental calm. With "Mur Jane" the position was reversed; she plainly acknowledged him a greater being, and did humble homage to his majesty. Thus his dignity as a man was restored, and he fully appreciated the sense of authority he enjoyed in her company. Besides, Miss Tooey, being untutored in the deep deceits that communion with her kind alone could engender, was not likely to attach undue importance to his visits or concoct matrimonial schemes or deep designs for damages for breach of promise. Truth to tell, Barney— despite his innate

bashfulness— harboured more than an average fondness for the other sex in the secret recesses of his being, and his dread of connubial bondage was only apparently implacable. Meanwhile, his comparative ease in the presence of Miss Tooey rested partly on his inability to accept that large, uncouth young lady, with her native timorousness, tanned face, wild hair, and palpable muscles, as of the same order as those dainty, designing, self-sufficient damsels who flourish in towns and hamlets.

A friendship cemented by whisky grew up between Messrs. Tooey and Brown. Abram's gloomy taciturnity almost faded away before the warmth and congeniality of Barney's "Old Scotch," and Mr. Brown's Sunday afternoon visits came to be regarded as a welcome break in the dull monotony of "tending" cows and going to bed, then getting up and "tending" cows again. Very soon "Mur Jane" displayed a burning desire to appear to better advantage before the visitor. This intuitive weakness first took form in the shape of a large, battered brass locket which the unsophisticated creature hung about her neck on a piece of braid; subsequently a monstrosity of millinery, a bonnet of fearful ugliness and great of antiquity, was unearthed from the dust of ages; a moth-eaten skirt, which was a relic of Mr. Tooey's late lamented maternal grandparent, and might have had some pretension to style a century ago, was next turned to account; a faded ribbon, a large artificial flower of an unknown species, and a lot of other ancient finery followed, all of which grandeur Miss Tooey paraded with undisguised rapture and innocent artlessness, to the great distress of her parent, who upbraided her extravagance and warned her to be careful of "that 'ere hat," which, he averred, her mother was married in, and cost four and eightpence— "besides the linin'." Barney beheld Mary Jane's assumption of style with an unfavourable eye; he regarded the outrageous bonnet particularly as a wicked frivolity, and as an evidence that Miss Tooey was animated by vanities entirely unaccountable in a young lady reared in the wilderness beyond the insidious influence of her sex. At about this time, too, Mary Jane, without abating her giggling and wriggling, and her timorous diffidence, began to assume an air of having a vested interest in the visitor, which assumption of proprietorship gave rise to painful conjecture in the mind of Mr. Brown, and caused him to have serious doubts and misgivings about the advisability of continuing his visits to the Tooey homestead. Whilst yet doubting he was one Sunday morning assisted to a decision by the conduct of his hut-mates. These facetious gentlemen had long amused themselves with ironical conjectures regarding Brown's intentions in pursuing the rude, untutored Tooey, and remarks more or less sarcastic anent his pronounced antipathy to matrimony. On the Sunday morning in question, assuming unconsciousness of the subject of their observations, they indulged in sotto

voce soliloquies and interesting speculations regarding hypothetical nuptials in which Mr. Brown and Miss Mary Jane Tooey, eldest and only daughter of Abram Tooey, Esq., of Piper, Tasmania, figured conspicuously in conjunction with an imaginary parson. The bride's trousseau was minutely if inelegantly described, and Home and Victorian papers were earnestly requested to "please copy." Croaker, in a deep mental abstraction, was heard to observe that it was understood the happy man intended augmenting his collection with a three-legged duck and a two-headed wombat and opening a menagerie of living curiosities. Barney could not stand much of this badinage; he uplifted himself in his bunk, swore at his mates collectively and in turn and visited Tooey's no more.

A few weeks went by and Abram passed no remarks; he made his usually bi-weekly visits, dragging after him his bow-legged and cross-eyed horse and back-dated shay, remained as saturnine as of yore, and gave no indications of having noticed Barney's neglect. One fine morning, however, the people of Lefroy were astonished to see Mr. Tooey emerging from the trees hauling his horse more desperately than was his wont, whilst the shay swayed dangerously under the additional burden of a long, fantastically-dressed female disguised in a scoop-shaped bonnet. Near Brown's claim the apparition dismounted, and Barney, who was on top pulling wash, was distressed on recognising "Mur Jane" in the awful tile her mother had handed down to posterity and the worm-eaten skirt that had been in the family nearly a century, and displaying the battered brass locket and the artificial flower to the best advantage. He was much more concerned to see her advance hesitatingly towards him, coyly chewing the faded ribbon and grinning her old grin of shy distress. She mounted the tip and stood there, looking supremely absurd, and giggling vacantly in response to his salutations, whilst he felt that a sudden attack of something fatal would be a relief from the strain he was undergoing. Old Tooey had gone on his round and left "Mur Jane" to keep Barney company, and all the men "on top" had taken up commanding positions to enjoy the interview, and the men from below were swarming to the surface like startled ants, in evident anticipation of entertainment. Barney maintained his stand for five minutes, then Miss Tooey's painful diffidence in a public place, her bonnet, and those dumb but appreciative spectators, became too many for him, and he deserted the windlass and fled ignominiously off the field.

After that Miss Tooey often visited the township with her parched sire, and, while he pushed his business, she sought out Mr. Brown, and blighted him with her bonnet and her abashed giggle. She descended on him at unexpected moments, and stared aimlessly at him, and followed him purposelessly, till he was laughed and chaffed to the verge of insanity, and fought two men every

day in desperate endeavours to relieve his feelings. Mary Jane looked him up two or three times during the week, and visited the hut on Sundays. She would seek him in the bars and billiard-rooms and other public places, and afflict him with her pensive baby stare and her maidenly confusion, till the homage that had once been a source of gratification to him became the bane of his existence.

At length an expedient occurred to Mr. Brown. He decided to remain below, and would have slept below had "Mur Jane" rendered that course necessary. On Sunday the sight of Miss Tooey's aggravating smile was the signal for him to bolt for the claim, and he would sit away in a drive till sundown, playing Yankee-grab with himself, or earnestly speculating on the outrageousness of women in every walk of life. Of course this brought more ridicule on his devoted head, but it secured his object, and very soon after Miss Tooey's visits ceased.

A short time later Barney was looking quite cheerful once more, and resting placidly under the assurance that he had seen the last of Mary Jane, and was not likely to be again haunted by her ungainly person or troubled by obtrusive attentions, when one day, as he and his mates were sitting at dinner, a digger who had been up to Launceston bounced in with an air of great importance and a mission that would admit of no delay.

"Say, Brown," gasped the intruder, "hev you seen Tooey's girl lately?"

Barney arose, sadly, slowly, but with a determined purpose; he crossed over the hut, and running the knuckle end of his large fist along the digger's jaw with a suggestive gesture he said:

"Now, Spooner, that game's stale— it's worked out and hung up, an' if there's anythin' more said I'm goin' to start a fight."

"No larks, Barney; 'pon me soul I was jest askin' you. Ain't ye, though?" continued the excited Spooner in apologetic tones.

"Naw. Don't want to."

"I have."

"Don't care a hang."

"By thunder, you do though. She's up town— I saw her. Up town in a big bustle and a fashionable hat that high, takin' out proceedin's fer a breach of promise."

Barney's fork stopped half-way to his lips (he had resumed his seat), his mouth remained open for a moment, then he made a desperate gulp at the atmosphere, swallowed nothing with great difficulty, and whispered earnestly:

"Against who did you say, Spooner?"

"Agin you."

That was enough. Barney wanted no more dinner; he laid down his knife and fork, took up his hat, and went out. Presently he returned, and thrust his pale face in at the door.

"You're sure it's a breach of promise and agin me, Spooner, are ye?" he queried.

Spooner was sure, and Barney retreated again. He went to the local bank and drew his money, then he sought the hut again and rolled up his swag without a word. That done, he remarked tersely:

"I'm off, boys, tip us yer fist."

"What! goin' right away?" gasped Croaker.

"My eye. Goin' to catch the boat at the Heads and get right out of this. So long!"

They tried to persuade him there was stuff enough in his claim to see him through the suit, and that "Mur Jane" had no case, but he was determined. "I tried it once before," he said. "Breaches of promise is h——."

And he went.

When All's Fair

(As by Dy. Edwardson)

Punch (Melbourne) 26 Nov 1914

MISS MILLS HAD MONEY. Apart altogether from her financial advantages, Miss Mills was quite a desirable young person, not a beauty in the ordinary sphere of modest social existence, but possessed of attractions that would amount to charming allurements in a popular actress and absolute loveliness in a princess. Beauty after all, is relative. You may have noticed how little of it serves to win admiration in the case of an eminent lady.

But Miss Mills was only the daughter of an undistinguished owner of brick kilns. She did not mix in any society worth mentioning, and, although fairly well-to-do, she was not rich enough to have her simple good looks magnified into superlative loveliness in the illustrated weeklies.

The young lady was staying at Windleigh with papa. Papa Mills was a shortish, stout, squarely built, ruddy Yorkshireman who might have passed for an excellent advertisement for his own bricks. This is not uncomplimentary in a society where it is common enough to find men who are not "square" and who cannot conscientiously be called "bricks."

'"Windleigh" was Miss Austin Foster's elegant abiding place for superior persons. Miss Austin Foster would have had three consecutive fits, and an action for slander if you had called "Windleigh" a boarding house. Yet I suppose it really was a boarding house, seeing that people boarded there and paid Miss Austin Foster for the privilege.

Miss Foster's hospitable walls stood in a suburb so remote as to be regarded as quite rural. There is this distinction in living in a remote suburb, it implies that your income is at least sufficient to raise you superior to the necessity of being frugal in the matter of railway fares. Nobody in Rose Bay went into business before nine in the morning, and every ratepayer put forth some small pretensions to being somebody.

Miss Millicent Mills had only two grievances against her father; one was in the fact that he would, persist in calling her "Milly." For himself he said he struggled to be fat so that his enemies might not have the pleasure of calling him "Bone Mills." But that really has nothing to do with our story.

Millicent, although quite a nice girl, could not forgive papa for being in bricks. It is really an excellent calling that of the brick-maker, who is first cousin to the potter, and the potters are sometimes quite considerable people. Look at Andreoli, for instance, and Valissy. One reason why Miss Mills insisted on migrating from Brunswick to Rose Bay was in the hope that they might be able to break with the brickfield.

"Now for heaven's sake don't talk bricks, papa," said Millicent. I'm weary of bricks."

"But, my dear girl, nothing is more interesting than bricks. I derive all my interest from them— 33 per cent, little daughter. Don't despise bricks. You cannot overlook our common origin. Bricks and men come from, the same clay. See Genesis." Stephen Mills chuckled over his stock joke.

"That's all very well, but I don't want bricks thrown at me all my life. I had enough of that at school where the little cats who hated me insisted you stood all day long at a bench, making clay bricks in a cigar-box. You are rich, your kilns are in the hands of a company, you need no longer go near the wretched things; for heavens sake forget you were once known as 'Bricky Mills,' and be just a man of leisure."

Old Mills was always willing to do much to humour Milly, his sole remaining relation, so bricks were never mentioned at "Windleigh" and the other guests accepted Stephen Mills as a man who had made his pile somewhere or somehow— on the land probably— and was now well fixed and quite desirable as an acquaintance despite occasional grammatical defects and a habit of putting his bread in his soup.

After three months residence at "Windleigh," Miss Millicent Mills had two earnest admirers, Mr. George Short, who was a slim architect, and loved her for herself alone, and Mr. Thomas Oswald who was a stockbroker, "slim" too but in the South African sense, and loved her for many things, including her neat, cosy little figure, the sweet white plumpness of her small hands, the velvety brown of her nice eyes, the red bronze of her hair, the kindness of her smile and the market value of her fathers interest in "Machine Bricks," the company into which Stephen Mills had been transmuted.

We are too much men of the world and too impatient of conventional humbug to believe that Thomas Oswald is necessarily the villain of the piece because he is a stockbroker or a without-doubt imposter because his liking for Millicent was associated with a business-like knowledge of the paternal income.

Mr George Short was an architect, knew something about bricks too, and was aware of Stephen Mills's connection with Machine Bricks, but discovering that both father and daughter shied at bricks, he was too much of a gentleman to dwell upon building material in discourse with them. Yet it is safe to assume that he, too, had formed a fairly accurate estimate of the arithmetical aspect of the Mills income and the size of the accumulated wealth of S. Mills, Esq.

But of Mr. Short, too, I am quite willing to admit that his regard for Miss Millicent was perfectly genuine. Really, you know, it is not a fact that true love

is only compatible with absolute ignorance of the financial status of the beloved.

Millicent liked Mr. Thomas Oswald because of his style, the neatness of his dress, the niceness of his manners, and his artistic taste. Mr. Short's artistic taste was manifested chiefly in his warm appreciation of the nice little watercolours painted by Miss Mills according to the recipe of an undistinguished artist with whom she had spent eight quarters at five guineas per.

Millicent liked Mr. Thomas Oswald because he was good looking, and brown, and athletic, and fond of everything that helped to make life bearable— dancing, horse-racing, dinners, theatres, picnics,— any old thing that was "fun" appealed to Tom Oswald.

Between the two Miss Mills was rather enjoying her stay at Rose Bay. Mr. Short took her to picture shows, repertory theatre performances, class concerts, grand opera, and similar elevating and refining entertainments. He also discussed literature, art and the house beautiful in an interesting way.

Tom Oswald took her to comic opera, ordinary gross theatrical entertainments, football matches, race meetings, and sometimes to dinners, with an aunt of his own or patient Stephen Mills playing propriety.

"Of course I see we're up against each other, Short," said Oswald one day in the train.

"As how?" asked Short with some stiffness.

"As rivals for the favours, fancy and fortunes of Miss Millicent Mills, heiress presumptive of Machine Bricks."

"You don't trouble to put it very nicely Oswald."

"I don't put it nastily, but I do, put it clearly. You get me right away, and you know, old boy, you do like to duck and dodge a point like this. We're rivals, that's a cert, and I cordially wish you ignominious failure. All this without prejudice, of course."

"Oh, most certainly."

"I've got nothing against you, but I do want Millicent, and if at all possible I'm going to have her."

"I want her. I, too, am going to have her, if it can be done."

"That's an honest statement of the case between us. But what I really wanted to tell you is that neither of us is going to have an easy row to hoe. The fact is, old boy, we're making her altogether too comfortable as she is. You're giving her culture, and all the kickshaws of the higher life, so to speak, and I'm supplying the solids, the matter-of-fact pleasures and refreshments of the spirit. It strikes me she likes the situation too well to spoil it by cutting one of us out for the sake of the other."

"What do you suggest?"

"Well, this can't go on for ever, can it? Suppose we toss for it. One to stand out for a month or so, and give the other a chance."

"Certainly not! I don't purpose risking the happiness of my life on the toss of a coin."

Oswald sighed, and dropped the double-headed penny hack in his pocket.

"Have you any suggestion to make?" he said wearily.

"Nothing beyond this— that we both strive honestly for Miss Mills's affections," said Short. "May the best man win," he added.

"Amen!" said Oswald vehemently. "If I was sure the best man would win I'd he content; but I cannot close my eyes to the fact that you have a chance."

The pursuit continued for another two months, and it was plain Oswald's fears were well grounded. Miss Mills was deriving so much satisfaction from two suitors that she could not be persuaded to abandon both in favour of one husband.

"If I accept, George," Millicent told her father, "I shan't have Tom to take me for those lovely sails on the bay; and if I marry Tom I shan't have George's intellectual conversation, and I'd miss his refining influence awfully."

"You wouldn't let me go in for politics, my dear," said Mills, "otherwise I might have brought in a reform of the marriage laws to suit your peculiar case."

"Yet I suppose I shall have to decide one of these days," said Millicent, disregarding the paternal flippancy. "I can't keep them both for ever. I wish something would happen to help me out."

"Toss for them, Milly. Heads, Short; tails, Oswald."

"Father, don't be stupid. I'm really serious. It's— it's a bother!"

"Shall I kick one of them out? That might clear the atmosphere."

"Certainly not. You'd kick George. You know very well you would not dare to kick Tom."

But an incident of the following afternoon served to put Miss Mills in a position in which she might reasonably have been expected to feel a marked preference. She was walking alone along the fresh white sand. On her left rose the abrupt shore, clad with ti-tree; on her right shimmered the sun-kissed waters of Rose Bay. Miss Mills carried a took in one hand, a sunshade in the other. Above the hand that held the book shone the diamonds and rubies of two beautiful bracelets; on the hand that held the sunshade gleamed the stones of three rings, worth £150 from the most pernicious "fence."

The villain stepped from cover of the ti-tree, and confronted Miss Mills. He was not a very formidable villain— five-foot seven, perhaps, somewhat bony, unwashed, unkempt, ugly.

"Sorry t' interrupt yer walk, lydie," he said, "but I'm broke, an' I'm desprit. Gimme somethin'."

Millicent stepped back; she closed her sunshade, and gripped it. "I'll give you nothing," she said.

"Then I'll blinded well take it— see." He advanced. "I like the look iv them ' jools iv yours," he said, and grabbed her arm.

Millicent broke her sunshade over the blackguard's head, but he only grinned. "Pity t' spile yer gamp, Miss," he said. Then an uglier look came into his face. "Gimme them rings, 'r I'll choke yeh!" he said.

Millicent fought but the man's hands were at her throat. At this critical moment George Short arrived. He punched the beat neatly behind the ear, sending him down. When the villain arose Mr. Short took him by the shoulders, and with a swine; and a deft, kick sent him head over tip, into the sea.

While George devoted, himself to the now almost-hysterical young lady, the beat crept from the water, and took to his heels, speeding along the sand.

So poor Tom Oswald found events when he came upon the Scene. Mr. Oswald was utterly out of it. He realised the position in an instant. Something must be done to keep him in the running.

Perhaps the best chance for him was in the capture of the beat.

Tom Oswald was a pedestrian who had competed, not without honour, in Victorian ten-mile championships. He ran the beat down in less than a mile, took him by the neck, and held him as if he had bean a wet kitten.

"Be still," he said, "or I'll shake the ears off you. This means two years for you, Willie, I think."

The beat began to whine in a breathless way. "I was starvin', gov'ner. 'Selp me, fair starving. For Gorsake, give er bloke a show!"

Oswald dragged his prisoner into the shadow of a great rock, and sat down. His face had suddenly become very thoughtful.

"Look here," he said presently, "perhaps there's a way out for you, and it's just possible you can earn a fiver into the bargain." Tom pulled a note from his pocket, a fiver, No. B 007 965, and cracked it between his hands.

"Yer kiddin me, said the beat, with nervous doubt.

"Not at all. If you can tell a tale all may go well with you, Willie."

Oswald remained for over half-an-hour in the shadow of the rock, talking with Willie the Weary One. George had delivered Millicent into the hands of her father, had been flooded with the gratitude of father and daughter, and had been gone fifteen minutes when Tom dragged the malefactor into a summer house in the grounds of Miss Austin Foster's establishment. He sent for Mr. and Miss Mills.

"I want you to identify this man, Miss Mills," he said. "I've had a tough struggle to get him here, but here he is."

"He's the man who attacked me," said Millicent. "He daren't deny it."

"I don't lydie, I don't," wailed Willie. But I was druv to it. 'Selp me, lydie, I was tempted. He knows." The beat nodded at Tom.

"I brought you to see this fellow before taking him to the police," said Oswald, "because I wanted you to hear the story lie tells, Mr. Mills. You, too, Miss Mills. I can't believe it myself ; but it seemed best to have your judgment, since it is your affair and not mine."

"Out with, it," said Mills.

"I was tempted," wailed Willie once more. "The gent what come up an' rescued the lydie, he paid me t' do it. He gimme a five pound note t' attack her, so ez he cud win her gratitood be rushin' in an' savin' her. 'Twas all arranged. I never meant the lydie no 'arm. I wouldn't 'urt a 'air iv her 'ead, I wouldn't; but I was down an' out. I was starvin', and the gent gimme a five-pound note t' do it."

Mills looked at his daughter. Millicent was flushed and indignant.

"As a matter of fact." said the father. "I don't think Short is quite up to my idea of the sort of reckless hero who pitches grown men about," He turned to the tramp. "Have you got that note about you ?"

"Yessir. Here it is, sir. On'y, fer Gorsake, don't send a pore man t' gaol wot was tempted!"

The beat produced a five-pound note.

"Seems all right," said Mills. "Better let this blackguard go. The other one, too," he added, addressing Millicent.

George Short never quite understood the sudden coolness of Mr. and Miss Mills towards him after his heroic rescue— but Oswald understood it perfectly. The present Mrs. Tom Oswald was Miss Millicent Mills. She inherited the fortune of old "Bricky" Mills, of Machine Bricks.

By the way, the number of the five-pound note the tramp produced was B 007 965.

" 'Selp me," says the beat, narrating his curious adventure to his pals, "I'm willing t' bet a bit I'm the on'y bloke here that was caught fer 'ighway rob'ry, an' was not on'y let off, but was paid a fiver fer doin' it."

———————

The Hapless Campers

(As by Silas Snell)

Punch (Melbourne) 15 Jan 1914

THERE WERE three of them— Minnie, May, and Esther. Minnie was a retoucher at a metropolitan photographer's. May was with Hustle and Gumm, in the millinery department, and Esther jiggled a typewriter on her own; that is to say, she had a little den of a room in a city building, with a brass plate on the door, and did jobbing work for small lawyers, ambitious amateur authors, dramatists, and others.

Naturally, Esther put on literary airs. Nearly all freelance typewriters do, and carried round volumes of Shaw, and Maeterlinck, and Strindberg, on the trains. Minnie, being in the game, so to speak, cultivated an artistic atmosphere. The artistic girl is a trifle slipshod, and her hat has something the appearance of a serious accident; but you could not disguise Minnie's prettiness even in a market basket trimmed with a sprig of onions. May's forte was style. May's hats had always the Parisian touch, and May could dress better on less than any girl I have ever loved.

Excuse these preliminaries; they are necessary to give you a decent interest in the three grace who condescend to be my heroines for the occasion. The city life of Minnie, May, and Esther was eminently respectable, consequently flat. It was only when the dear girls determined to go camping for Christmas that they became available for literary purposes.

May knew somebody who would lend her a tent; Minnie knew a lovely place in the hills beyond Hitchem; and Esther had a magnificent theory about a wild, free life for three girls of character and courage.

My girls all had admirers (May had several), but none they could trust. This expedition was to be solely on their own. The barbarian man was barred.

"The idea that men are essential when girls want amusement is preposterous tommyrot!" said Esther. "We three can have a very good time without them."

May agreed. Minnie was sure of it. So to the hills beyond Hitchem they went. At Hitchem they hired a freckled hoodlum to cart them and their traps and ware to Minnie's selected Eden, and pitch their tent there.

The hoodlum was engaged to bring further supplies of bread and milk— and other life's necessities. He was the sole male permitted within the precincts, and every girl knows that hoodlums don't count, especially the species of hoodlum that frescoes its exterior with freckles like halfpennies, and has tussocky hair of a pale, sun-dried ginger tint.

For a whole day, Minnie, May and Esther, the "Bachelor Girls," as they had dubbed themselves, were entirely happy. It was such sport doing one's own

cooking in the open air at a burning log, and there was a creek bosky with old man ferns, and overhung with giant gums in a deep, clear pool, of which one could bathe without further risk than might be apprehended from eels and blackfish.

Esther read "The Man of Destiny" with striking elocutionary and dramatic effects: Minnie painted a watercolour sketch of the camp, introducing a herd of kangaroo into the background for aboriginal effect; and May twanged a banjo and sang ragtime. It was just lovely.

It was about five in the afternoon. May had just ceased throwing all her musical talent into "See dat ragtime couple ober dere," when the least expected thing in the world happened— a man!

He was about thirty; he carried a cute Panama in his hand; he was dressed in the approved flannel costume of the amateur camper, and he wore an ingratiating smile.

"Thank you," he said, addressing May, with enforced and re-enforced sweetness. "We have enjoyed that immensely"— he indicated two other male faces grinning through the saplings— "and felt that at least our grateful compliments were due to the musician."

What could be done in such circumstances? For half-a-minute the three girls sat silent, debating the matter in their minds, while the intruder fanned himself with his hat to assist his air of sangfroid, and the other two faces still grinned through the saplings.

As the situation was getting strained the intruder spoke again.

"May I he permitted to introduce myself?" he asked.

"Certainly not," said' Esther with exemplary firmness.

"Nor my friends, Dick and Harry?"

"You will greatly oblige us by going away," said Minnie.

"At once," added May.

"My friends are utterly respectable, and I am threatened with notoriety as the good boy of the family."

"This is of no interest to us," said Esther curtly.

"None in the world," said May with asperity.

"I'm afraid you are impudent," said Minnie, almost with scorn.

"Not at all, ladies. We shall retire instantly; but I merely wished to say we are fellow campers, not two hundred yards off round the rocks there, and to offer you our services should any need arise."

"Thank you, but we can do very well."

"It certainly seems like it"— he scattered a look round the camp— "but one never knows, and it might add to your feeling of security to realise that there

are within hail three worthy, well-meaning and very athletic young men, who are entirely at your service."

"We hoped to be quite alone," said Minnie. "The news you impart does not add to our satisfaction at all."

"Not in the least," said Esther.

" We came here hoping to be alone, too," said the smiling stranger.

"You might have gone a little farther."

"Excuse me. we came first. We have been here three days, and the charms of solitude have somewhat worn off. We are beginning to realise that music hath charms, and misery loves company, and the truth of many other copybook maxims."

"You will excuse us, if we still delight in solitude," said Minnie.

"Complete solitude," said May.

"You add to our sorrow. But, please, don't forget your neighbours found the corner if help should be needed. Good evening."

He went away, and the smiling faces were withdrawn from the saplings. For a minute the bachelor girls sat in silence. Then Esther smiled.

"There's no escaping them," she said.

"I think he was rather nice on the whole," said Minnie.

"The one with the auburn hair was best looking," said May. "How rarely you see men with true auburn hair."

"But we can't possibly encourage them."

"Of course not. How unfortunate that we should have dropped right on them."

"The hoodlum must have known."

"Wait till the blotched object comes within the stroke of my tongue."

"All the same, there is no reason why we should mind," said Minnie. "We can ignore our neighbours. It will not be hard to freeze them off if they presume again, and as for our needing their services, that, of course, is absurd. We arc not such utterly helpless wretches as to need a man's help in any circumstances, I can think of."

"Especially with this." May held up her pea-rifle. May was something of a rifle woman at a toy range, and had shot the rabbit whose grilled legs were to provide a course of their delightful *al fresco* dinner.

At night the girls were not quite so comfortable and confident. Beds made of fern fronds by amateurs who have no idea about the proper lay of the frond and no notion of the principles of anatomy as applied to bed-making on the solid earth, are not as grateful and comforting as leather beds on spring mattresses in a well-conducted suburban "board and residence."

And the bush by night does not remotely resemble the bush by day. It develops a dark and lowering aspect; it crowds about the stranger, and ho.nds down over him, reaching out threatening shadowy hands; it has many voices, none of them quite pleasing, and it stirs with an unexpected kind of life, a creepy, crawly, mysterious life, distressingly suggestive to the typical suburban mind.

To be sure, neither Minnie, nor May, nor Esther betrayed any apprehension; that is to say, they did not cry nor faint; but they sat close together, and their voices became low and constrained, and each looked over her left shoulder with what might have been mistaken for a sort of nervous expectation more often than would have been expected in a person wholly at her ease. At Esther's suggestion they decided to keep the candle burning all night.

"In case of spiders," said Esther.

"I never could slap a mosquito in the dark," said May.

However, that night passed without an adventure, even with a grasshopper; and at first light they all fell asleep with some confidence. It was nine before May lit the fire, although the policy of rising with the lark had been definitely decided upon before they left Melbourne.

Ten minutes later the intruder of the previous evening appeared. He was carrying large bucket of water.

"Forgive this reappearance," he said, "but noticed you were drinking the creek water. Don't. There are sheep running in the country above this, and the hydatid is a horror to be avoided. This water is from a spring in the rocks."

"You are very good," said Minnie a little frigidly.

"No better than Dick and Harry. I am Tom. You might remember our names. They are not difficult— Tom, Dick and Harry.

The other two— the one with the auburn hair and the youth with the dark-brown eyes— had arrived. Harry was carrying a bundle of firewood, Dick a string of black-fish.

"The fish were caught this morning, Tom. They are the sweetest frying fish or earth above or the waters beneath."

"Thank you," said May and Minnie and Esther in a sort of chill chorus.

"And when we are twenty yards away you will say, 'Such insolence!' " said Tom.

He went off, followed by Dick and Harry. "Such Insolence!" said Minnie.

"But the fish are nice," said May.

"And it was thoughtful to warn us about the water."

"Hydatids are horrible," Minnie agreed.

Still, the young men were not to be encouraged. Heaven knew who and what they were. Girls could not be too careful. Each had a story or two of weird acquaintances made by really nice girls at camping places and seaside resorts. However, it had to be conceded, in fairness to Tom, Dick and Harry that they did lot push themselves. During the next two days they offered their services three or four times. Tom brought water from the spring twice a day. Dick never failed to leave a supply of firewood; Harry offered tributes of fish and game. But if the girls had had the courage to admit it, the greatest service of all was the singing of the neighbours by night. Hearing the violin, and catching the words of a song, the girls were comforted and reassured.

It was the fifth night. The day had been very sultry; it had finished in a glower of smoke that blackened the sky and rent the sun to bed a burning ball of crimson. At about ten-short, strong gusts of wind ran along the slope, shaking the bush strangely, and stirring weird a strident voices in the trees. Then something burst in the distant range, as if creation had split and vomited storm and confusion, and the rain came pelting, and the wind blew it into sheets that smote the face of Nature as with the strokes of a great flail.

In their tent, clad in white nighties, clinging together, round-eyed and pale with terror, the bachelor girls awaited the final catastrophe.

"It will die soon. Such a storm cannot possibly last," said Minnie through chattering teeth.

It did not die down— it renewed its energies, and presently a great roaring wind came tearing down the range, like an army of giant devils at the double, sweeping all before it. It took the girls' tent up like a sheet of paper, and sent it hurtling over the tree-tops, off into the night. Bedding went with it, clothing, dishes, campware, everything was whirled off into black space.

Minnie found herself running before the wind like thistle-down, twisting and twirling, utterly helpless to direct her course. Twice she was thrown against trees her nightgown was torn to fringe at the edges; she was breathless, beaten, and almost dead with fear when a strand of supple-jack caught her feet, and she was thrown face-forward into some loose, warm, substance.

She had the sense to lie still, and the storm passed over her prostrate body. Here she knew she was safest, and she remained prone in the ashes of a recent fire till the storm sobbed down in the distance.

When day broke Minnie was sitting on a log, a most woeful and desolate creature, clad in a white nightgown very much the worse for one night's wear.

She was alone— she did not know where. Alone in the deep bush, and practically without garments. It was a terrible situation.

Meanwhile, what of May and Esther? For two hours she had been feeling her way among the sodden undergrowth, calling her friends' names, piteously but unavailingly. New she sat, fearful, desolate and hopeless, with no energy left, wondering what further horrors Fate had in store for her.

Suddenly a cry broke from her lips— a glad cry. Her eye had lit upon something that promised relief. And the something— what was it? Ladies, a pair of trousers— a miserable, bedraggled pair of grey tweed trousers, with braces attached, caught in a neighbouring bush.

Twelve seconds later Minnie was feeling a new woman, and looking a good deal like one, too. She was wearing those grey, tweed trousers. Now, if she had to die like a babe in the wood, she would go to her death fairly garbed, at any rate.

Minnie resumed the search for her companions. She did not know which way to go, and she went any old way, calling as she went.

The morning had broken fine and warm, but water and mud were everywhere, and the search seemed hopeless in that great desolation of trees. But luck was wish the seeker. Towards ten o'clock a faint voice answered her, and in the hollow of a tree she found May crouching, an even more pitiful object than herself.

May had only her nightdress, and not all of that. She was not easily persuaded to come from her hiding place and join Minnie in the hunt.

"You've got something decent to wear, at any rate," she whimpered.

"Decent!" commented Minnie bitterly, looking down at her nether habiliments. "I'm glad you think so. If you don't come, and hunt for something better, you will be found like that— by men."

May screamed. The two went on together, and an hour later they came upon Esther seeking them. Esther had had luck, too. She had found a pair of check trousers.

"I think they are that fellow Dick's," she sighed.

The bachelor girls were bushed, and about as miserable as three girls could be; but they did not despair. The search for their camping ground was maintained.

"Who knows," said Esther, "there might be a skirt there?"

Oh, for a skirt! Two in the afternoon came, and neither skirt nor camping ground was in view, but a success had been scored, nevertheless. On the lower branch of a gum hung a pair of black trousers. Below, Esther looked up at them, with the longing of the fox for the grapes.

Every effort to recover those beloved pants had failed. There was nothing else for it— Esther must climb. Her friends assisted her; but even with the

most generous assistance it is not a pleasant and easy task to climb a tree in one's nightgown.

Esther succeeded. She reached the limb— she climbed precariously along it. She seized the pants. The precious garments were hers.

Then they heard a shout. A call of human voices close at hand.

"Oh, heaven !" exclaimed Minnie, "someone's coming."

Esther fell from the tree. There was no time to do anything else. She fell with the trousers in her clutch, but she fell on soft earth, and dashed for the cover of a butt. In an incredibly short space of time she had made her way into the black trousers.

"Thank goodness!" said May, "they are girls."

Coming towards them, over fallen logs and through undergrowth, were three strange figures in skirts. Three bareheaded, barefaced, ungainly and wild-looking objects, but unmistakably skirted, and all was well.

A few seconds later the two parties confronted each other. For a few more seconds they stared, and then, despite their sufferings, their inconveniences and their consciousness of their many miseries they laughed.

Probably the bush had never before echoed such laughter. Presently all six had to sit down to it, and when one had a little recovered he or she had only to look at the others to suffer a fresh outburst.

Laughter was never more called for. The three newcomers were not girls. They were Tom, Dick and Harry, who had drawn over their tattered pyjamas such clothing as they could gather from the storm-swept bush, and that clothing, as the low-comedian Fate would have it, was the girls' skirts.

Tom, Dick and Harry had suffered exactly the same calamity as the bachelor girls, and now the parties were met in circumstances that rendered maidenly reserve utterly impossible.

Eventually by making a fair exchange the six succeeded in putting on a moderately presentable appearance, preliminary to the return to civilisation.

Tom, Dick and Harry do not go camping now. Their wives don't like it. Can you wonder, after the experience they had at Hitchem in 1904?

_____

The Long Shift Off

(As by Billy T.)

Punch (Melbourne) 2 Nov 1916

MINERS have what they call the long shift off. It extends from Saturday morning till Monday evening. That, however, was not Bill Lisle's long shift off. Several forces combined to bring about Bill's long shift off.

In the first place, the State Government had passed a law compelling all publicans to close their bars at 6 p.m.

Later, the Federal Government, fearing an outbreak of frivolity on the Saturday (Referendum Day) commanded that hotels be closed and hermetically sealed throughout Saturday.

Already there was in existence a strict law forbidding the sale of intoxicants on Sunday.

We begin to realise the significance of Bill Lisle's long shift off.

Friday was Bill's pay day, and for years Bill had got more or less tight on Friday night. It seemed to be essential to Bill's happiness and bodily comfort this custom of inking-up on Friday nights.

On Friday, 27th October, Bill went home after work as usual, that is to say, he went home containing from a gallon to a gallon and a half of crude beer.

But Bill Lisle was not tight— far from. it. It was not Bill's custom to get tight right from the jump. The one and a-half gallons was only in the nature of a preliminary decanter.

The 1 gallon 2 quarts, had to be added to and enlarged to the extent of at least another 1½ gallons, before Bill could be said to be full within the meaning of the Act and in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Metropolitan Board of Health.

At home Bill gave his wife her fair share of his earnings, had his tea, then cleaned up, and went out for the usual stocktaking. The Friday night spree was followed by a Saturday afternoon and evening spree; and when Bill went home Saturday night he carried the white man's burden: to wit. enough fermented liquor for Sunday.

We have almost explained the long shift off. After going out again, Bill returned to his home on Friday night at half-past eight

Mrs. Bill almost screamed. "Somethin's happened!" she said.

Bill sat in the chair by the fireplace, and stared gloomily into the chimney.

"You home at this time on Friday night," cried Mrs. Lisle miserably. "What have you done?"

"I ain't done nothin'," said Bill.

"You're, sober," said Mrs. Lisle emphatically. "Don't tell me— I know. You're sober!"

Bill nodded his head. He could not trust himself to speak.

Mrs. Lisle's apron went up to her eyes. She wiped a tear.

"Sober!" she said. "It's an awful shock. For ten years you ain't come home sober on Friday night. For ten years you haven't missed knockin' me about a bit at twenty minutes to midnight. What's come over you? You're sick."

Bill shook his head again. "I'm not," he said; "but they've shut the pubs. I forgot the pubs was to be shut at six; and when I went out I couldn't get in nowhere. I tried 'em all. At first I thought it was a kind iv joke. Then I got a bit frightened, I saw they meant it. They did mean it. All the pubs were shut tight."

Bill sank his head in his arms.

"Well, I'm' blessed," said Mrs. Bell. "So I'm goin' to have you sober on a Friday. It'll mix up my whole week for me. But I'm rather glad, p'raps I won't have a black eye for tomorrow now."

"I 'spect you won't," said Bill, miserably. "Don't blame me. I'll make up for it on Saturday."

On Saturday at half-past one Bill arrived home from his daily toil like a man chased by spooks. Mrs. Lisle stared in blank amazement.

"Sober agen!" she said.

"Yes, sober agen. 'N' I've got to be sober all day. The pubs is shut for the miserable Referendum. I can't get a drop if I die for it. 'N' there ain't a glass for all to-morrow— not a bubble."

Mrs. Lisle murmured, "Good lor'!" In her heart she was delighted.

"It's like 'avin' a teetotaler in the 'ouse," she told Mrs. Smith next door. "He ain't booted me once, he ain't thrown nothin' at the children, he ain't even smashed a winder. Bless yer 'eart, I feel like a toff."

Never had Bill failed to raise a row on Saturday evening, beat his wife, and maul the children; but to do that he had to be very drunk, and here he was hopelessly sober.

Bill sat by the fire, and glowered. Mrs. Bill rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Towards six on Saturday afternoon Lisle's yearnings got at him, and Bill began to "say things." Mrs. Bill listened with growing apprehension.

"Lor', Bill," she said, "if teetotallers go on like that I'd rather 'ave a man wot takes his drop."

Bill continued to say what he thought, and what Bill thought of those infamous hounds who would deprive a poor man of his beer would have curdled the inwards of Premier Peacock, and set Prime Minister Hughes running for the hills.

Mr. Lisle foamed at the mouth in his fury.

"I wish I 'ad Billy Hughes here now," he said, snatching a brick from the hob. "I'd shot him. I'd deal with him!" The brick went straight through the kitchen window.

"Oh, garn, Bill!" said Mrs. Bill, "where's the sense iv you bein' a temperance man if yer goin' to do that?"

"You shut up," snarled Bill. "You shut up. I won't stand talk from no one." He cuffed her. "I'm teetotal, 'n' it don't suit me !" He kicked her.

"I dunno," said Mrs. Lisle to Mrs. Smith later. " I think these temp'rance blokes ain't what they're cracked up to be. Bill's broke most of the furniture throwin' it at Hughes, 'n' he's lamed Neddie, thinkin' he was Peacock. There may he somethin' in drink after all."

But if Bill sober had been bad on Saturday, on Sunday he was unbearable. His unsatisfied longings made a ravening lion of him. He beat Mrs. Lisle if she only breathed in his vicinity. In his bad temper he threw all the breakfast things into the fireplace.

"You know I'd let you have it if there was a drop in the 'ouse," said Mrs. Bill. "I used to want a Reckerbite fer a 'usband, but I don't no more. This 'ere sobriety's a bit iv a fraud. You hit 'arder when you're sober, 'n' you're a straighter shot with a plate, 'n', wot's more, you can run better. The kids can't dodge you wen you're sober."

By three in the afternoon all the family was hidden away from Bill Lisle, and Bill was still expressing his opinion of Peacock and Hughes, and breaking things to emphasise his words.

At eight in the evening Bill went out. At eleven a constable dropped in to tell Mrs. Bill that Bill had been arrested for breaking into a hotel cellar, and helping himself to bottled beer.

"I'm not surprised," wailed Mrs. Bill. "You never know what these teetotalers will do."

It was held that Bill's case was not ordinary housebreaking, and he was let off with a fine.

Some prominent temperance men— Brother Snowball, for instance— should go along and explain matters to Mrs. Bill, for her opinion as expressed to Mrs. Smith is this:

"Bill's bin a teetotaler once. Never agin, even if I 'ave to keep a barrel in the 'ouse to prevent it. Dead sorry I am for every poor woman what's got a teetotal 'usband."

That Nice Mr Tait

Punch (Melbourne) 12 Dec 1911

A STRANGER had arrived at Gobong on the previous evening. He was now in possession of one of the old paling huts near the Red Dam. Smoke drifted from the mud-chimney to convince the few poor remaining inhabitants of the shattered hamlet that they were labouring under no delusion.

"He's a curious sorter bloke," said Martin. "Don't seem pertickler civil, does he?" Martin had drawn himself to the top-rail of the fence; Simon Scobie was squatted on his heels, with his shoulder-blades to a post; Brophy was extended languorously upon a sheet of bark; Dixon sat on an old tub, surveying his job. Dibbs and Henderson and Sandy Saunders sprawled lazily along the smithy-wall. Beyond their small patch of shade the white morning sunlight shone hotly upon everything. The plain lay simmering under a thin mirage that glittered like the ghost of a tropic sea.

"I called on him 'bout an hour ago in the way o' business," continued Martin. " 'Fine mornin, mister,' I sez. Sez he, offhand like, 'I don't care a hang about your met'rologic opinion, my man. Go to the devil!' "

"Go on! did he?" ejaculated Henderson.

"Well, look at him when he landed off the waggon, an' walked into my bar," said Scobie. " 'Are you thinkin' o' stayin' long at Gobong?' says I. 'Mind your own infernal business,' says he, 'an' that's servin' me with a stiff whisky.' "

"I'd 'a' lifted him wan by the eye widout more argyment." said Brophy, bitterly.

"Then when he'd drunk his whisky, slingin' off at the liquor, says he: 'That's the stuff that depopulated Gobong. How dare you sell me harness polish for clean whisky, you scaly ruffian?' he says."

"I would 'a' landed him wan more for manners," said Brophy, emphatically. " What's he after, anyhow?"

Dixon had private information that led him to believe the stranger was representing the syndicate owning the diamond-drill, and his presence indicated that work was to be resumed almost immediately. Saunders thought it highly probable that the man was a land-speculator, who intended buying town blocks. Dibbs was of opinion that this was the mysterious investor who for years past had been on the point of establishing a big steam sawmill in the blue-gum country two miles back.

Speculation was cut short by the sudden appearance of the stranger. He came from the direction of the hotel, and was in a highly irascible temper.

"Hi, you," he said, beckoning the publican with open insolence, "is it asking too much to expect you to attend to your confounded hot-house bar?"

"I beg pardon," said Simon Scobie, rising hastily. "I thought the missus—" He hurried off, and the stranger followed in a leisurely manner.

The others remained silent for a few moments after his departure, looking at each other with grave faces. Even Brophy was impressed. The man who assumed such an attitude towards Gobong must have a good deal behind him. He was a man to be respected, or at least propitiated.

"S'pose we have a drink," ventured Dixon, turning a speculative eye upon the job, as if calculating its value in beer. The response was acquiescent, sudden, and unanimous.

The party entered the bar of The Shearers' Rest with some diffidence. Saunders even removed his hat. The stranger was standing at the counter, drinking whisky and water. He was a man of about forty-eight, a couple of inches over middle height, with a square, active, lean figure, from the bony lines of which his clothes hung neatly. His face was clean-shaven and pale, as faces went at Gobong, scrubby, dark brows overhung keen, contemptuous eyes, the nose was straight and fine, the mouth portentous, the firm pressure of the lips turning them outwards into a grim pout. But the firmness of the face weakened into petulance; it suggested an aristocratic type, vulgarised by little passions. The man's clothes were good, the clothes of a city-dweller, careful in his choice of tailors, but the dust of Gobong was upon him, and there were evidences of neglect obviously not habitual to the man.

Dixon and his friends edged into the corner of the bar-counter furthest from the stranger, and remained there huddled like sheep, silent, but curious, and presently the other turned upon them, surveying them minutely, with increasing dislike. Then the man faced Scobie again, and said slowly and distinctly:

"Can't a man come into your shanty, and drink your pestilent whisky, without being mooned at as if lie were a freak?"

"Mine's a long beer!" said Dixon, quickly, without emotion, but as an assertion of his right of place.

The party suddenly assumed unconsciousness of the stranger's presence, and after Dixon had satisfied Scobie that the new job would cover all expenses, the others ordered "long beers" too, which they drank very slowly, and in an ominous silence.

The stranger did not attempt to disguise the irritation with which the atmosphere of the bar afflicted him, and presently snatched up his glass, and uttering an ejaculation of impatience, retreated to a stool near the door. To show their fine indifference, the men of Gobong fell into an airy discussion of favourite topics, but with an abiding consciousness of the presence of the man, and a sense of antagonism filled the bar.

After about ten minutes the newcomer sprang to his feet again and approached the publican.

"Give me some whisky in a bottle," he said. "The conversation of these men would ruin the nervous system of a cart-horse."

He took his whisky and marched out, and Dixon and his company watched the doorway for a moment after his departure, with some show of apprehension.

"Well, I'm blowed!" sighed Henderson, much relieved.

"An' I didn't fetch him a smack iv the fist," Brophy said, with touching regret.

"His name's Tait— Raymond Tait," Scobie spoke with the air of a man offering valuable information.

"But what's his game?"

"Oh, you jest leave him to me. I'll get it all out of him."

But Simon Scobie got nothing out of Mr. Raymond Tait; the reason of his visit to Gobong remained a mystery, and in the course of a few weeks the new resident had inspired the resentment of every man and woman in the place, and was the terror of the township.

Tait was almost childishly malicious, and made no effort whatever to veil his contempt for all those with whom he came in contact. He favoured the people, individually and in the mass, with an eloquent flow of gratuitous abuse, and Henderson was the only man who made any show of resisting his audacious domination. The others were subdued, partly by the awe Tait's fearless and masterful truculence inspired and partly by the lurking suspicion that he would prove, after all, to be a man of consequence, with a special mission, by which those people who had not earned his more particular dislike might expect to profit when the time came.

Meanwhile, Raymond Tait continued to live alone. He "batched" in the paling hut that had been Carrot Brown's. The hut was raised on piles about eighteen inches above the ground— shallow floods taking frequent possession of Gobong in the wet months there were many holes in the floor and more in the walls, but he attempted to mend none, and he "batched" in the most slovenly manner. His bunk was a mere tangle of blankets; he fed in a perfunctory way, and drank Scobie's whisky morning, noon, and night, and all the time he grew shabbier, dustier, and more vagabondish; the daily shave being the only orderly custom of his better days to which he remained faithful.

Tait's abuse of his fellow-citizens was the expression of a soured heart, but its bitterness was not without a grim and sardonic humour, which latter, however, was wasted upon its victims. The man found the joy of a cynical imp

in irritating the simple souls surrounding him, but his delight was never manifested in the faintest semblance of a grin.

He would sit for hours in Scobie's bar, indulging at intervals in scurrilous criticism of Scobie's customers, their minds and their manners. Sometimes the remarks were addressed to the publican, with an insinuation that they were strictly confidential, although well within the hearing of the subjects. At other times the criticism assumed the form of an eloquent soliloquy. Rarely did Tait address the men directly. No longer had Dixon, Henderson, Dibbs, Saunders and the others any sense of comfort in the bar of the Shearers' Rest, no longer was there any real ease or security at the popular leaning places, Tait's manner of overlooking the little gatherings being quite sufficient to put all under a painful constraint, and give the big men the air of bad little boys before the judgment-seat of an angry master. His favourite position in the bar was on a big cask near the door, apart from the others. Perched aloof, he wore the habitual expression of a man whose boots were pinching him, and had always a glass of whisky within reach.

"A peculiar thing I've noticed about this township of yours, Scobie," he said, "is the fact that every soul worth a curse left it long ago. You haven't remarked that. I didn't expect it of you, for the simple reason that you are an ass. Give me some more drink. Your whisky is bad, and so is your company. They are congenial spirits."

Then, being served and refreshed again, he continued in a mood of bitter reflection, addressing the wall:

"It's a pity Dante didn't know Gobong; he would have made it infamous as a dry corner of his Inferno, where the men drive you mad by staring mutely at you like demented sheep."

Breaking into ferocity, and turning to Scobie, he cried: "Blast it all, landlord, if you will persist in turning your bar into an asylum for idiots, why don't you provide separate accommodation for gentlemen?"

His manner of leaving the bar varied little. He never failed to convey the idea that lie was driven out by the unbearable stupidity of Simon Scobie's guests or their uncouth behaviour.

"In heaven's name let me go," he said, a few minutes later; "the imbecility of Gobong is contagious. Ten minutes more, and I shall be fraternising with these rabbits!"

Tait was not always understood in Gobong, but the men were satisfied at least that he meant no compliments. Brophy was ever first to break the dubious silence that followed the enemy's escape.

"I'll be batin' that man," he said, with the air of one foretelling calamities; "I'll be dalin' wid him yet!"

But Thomas Henderson was the one man who broke into open revolt. A long-suffering man was Henderson, but Raymond Tait stung him into action.

Henderson, who was a bit of a politician, was explaining to the corner at full length the influence of the new Forests Preservation Act on the future of Gobong, when Tait's clear, metallic voice cut in angrily:

"Landlord, is there no means of stopping the drone of that barbarous Scot? He buzzes in my head like a blowfly. In humanity's name, gag him, kill him, swill him with drink, and charge it to me!"

Henderson whirled on his heel, his sandy whiskers fairly bristled, his round red nose glittered in the lamplight; all the Scotch in him came to the surface.

" An' who the de'il 're you to stay a mon's ixpression o' hie's honest opeenion?" he snorted, reverting to his brogue in his just wrath. "I'll ha' ye know Tom Henderson can pay fer his ain drink; an' if he canna, he'll owe for it, like a Briton, an' no' be beholdin' to the likes o' you."

"Henderson is a herring-fed, parritch-blooded, scurvy savage," hissed Tait in cold anger, addressing the world at large and keeping his eyes studiously off the angry Scot. "He's a chuckle-headed, blather-skiting, feckless creature, who has drowned his little soul in the beer he is too mean to pay for. He's the direct descendant of the dirtiest Scot that has left his smudge on history, and is a disgrace to his forebear at that."

"He can gi' you a blow o' the neb!" cried Henderson, falling into fury, wildly throwing aside his vest and hat. and dancing about in an awkward fighting attitude. "He can gi' you a good blow o' the neb, for a' that!"

But the others, who should have rejoiced to see Gobong assert itself against the intruder, fell upon Tom, and restrained him, although he struggled nobly. While this was going on Tait was continuing his biting invective, spitting insulting adjectives with the venom of a snake, apparently quite indifferent to Henderson's threatened attack.

After that Henderson came in for much more than his share of Tait's abuse. The fact that the Scot showed his irritation gave additional zest to the devilment in which the newcomer indulged himself, and in most of his bar-room speeches and moralisings there was a covert reference to his enemy, which Tom was cute enough to detect, and under which he writhed, muttering darkly in his wrath. Sometimes the allusion was more direct, and then Henderson broke into open revolt again, and struggled fiercely to get at the traducer, while Dixon, Saunders and Dibbs hung on to him, and endeavoured to soothe him with soft words.

"The last man on Gobong will be a starveling Scot," said Tait, one evening, about a week after Henderson's first outbreak; "and he is only staying for the profit he hopes to make out of the bones of the other miserables."

Henderson shifted uneasily, scowling under his bushy brows. Conversation in the men's corner lost interest, and Tait continued from his eminence:

"I can picture the lank ghoul prowling about with his bag, raking up the ribs of his friends, and sourly estimating the value of the combined skulls as raw material for the bone-miller. Heaven knows, their most amazing thickness should give the barbarian a sordid joy."

The others were somewhat dubious as to the drift of all this, but Tom Henderson understood well enough, and his sensitive nose glowed redly, a certain indication of rising choler. After a minute's silence, Tait continued his soliloquy, thoughtfully, but with rancour:

"They are all as stupid as cows; they have no more moral sense than Coolgardie blacks, and they don't wash themselves as civilised people should, but one's gorge rises at the idea of this indecent Caledonian battening on their bones. And how ugly the creature is! It lowers like a sulking monkey."

Tom eluded his friends this time, and dashing at Tait, with a bovine roar, struck him heavily in the face, rolling him off the barrel, heels over head. Very fierce was Tom Henderson, and an awe-inspiring object, dancing round his prostrate foe, throwing his limbs about, and shouting diabolical threats in his native dialect.

But he was presently captured by his friends, and Raymond Tait resumed his seat, and sat glaring at the wall, his face whiter than usual, and a thin flow of blood staining one cheek, while Tom struggled with Saunders, and Dibbs, and Scobie, a few feet away, and raved of sudden death.

"The scoundrel!" piped Tom. "I e'en ha' his blude. Let me be. I'll crack his sconce on the wall."

They dragged Tom away, and Tait continued his vicious soliloquy.

After this Mr. Raymond Tait forgot his other antipathies, sinking them in an intense hatred of Thomas Henderson, and Henderson, having tasted blood, was always hot for battle. He had only to see Tait in the distance to bristle like an angry hog. Several times the lone township was awakened in the early hours, or disturbed in the late ones, by the shouts of the combatants, and rushed out to find Henderson and Tait locked in a vehement embrace, rolling each other over the stones.

Raymond Tait, retired gentleman, had no chance with Tom Henderson, ex-miner, in a physical contest, and Tom had none with Tait in a verbal battle. But Tom no longer permitted the disagreement to be merely colloquial for any length of time. His disposition was to rush Tait on the first provocation. This policy maddened Raymond. Released from his enemy, he would spit and splutter like an enraged monkey.

One day at noon the foes were discovered fighting on the road. Henderson had Tait down in the dirt, jabbing his face into the fine, yellow dust, half suffocating, and ejaculating with every thrust:

"Noo will ye give in? Noo will ye give in?" They rescued Tait again, and while they held him, Tait showered deadly insults upon him, detaining his father and his mother, reviling his country and classing him with all the unclean beasts and carrion-birds known to zoology.

"I'll kill him wi' me own hands," squealed Henderson. "I'll murder him wi' me fist."

With whisky they soothed Tom for the time being, but one morning, a few days later, when Gobong was shaken out of its bunks at about three o'clock by a shocking explosion, the dazed people instinctively associated the crash with the Tait-Henderson imbroglio. Half-dressed, wondering, and blundering, the people rushed towards Tait's hut.

A miracle had occurred. Tait's hut was no longer there. Where the hut had stood was a deep excavation, to the moist earth of which a little smoke was clinging. Raymond Tait was gone.

But when daylight came fearful evidence of his fate was discovered. Saunders found a man's leg in a tree; Scobie found a hand.

A time of fearful and feverish interest followed at Gobong.

Police came out from Benalla; a great detective from Melbourne spent half a day at the township, and then arrested Tom Henderson. Poor Tom was practically tried, judged, and executed before appearing in court. The papers were short of stirring news, and they made the most of the Gobong Tragedy. When they had discovered all they could and had placed it before the public in the most edifying shape, the general conclusion was that Tom Henderson should be hung as soon as a rope could be secured. The verdict in the police court ease was murder. Tom was committed.

At the next criminal sessions, Tom was tried. Much was made of the great enmity between accused and deceased. Half a dozen witnesses had heard Tom threaten to murder Tait. Then came the detective's evidence. The explosion had been effected with a dynamite plug. Henderson was the only man on Gobong who had dynamite. A half-burnt train of gunpowder was traced from Tom's hut to Tait's hut. Henderson was the only man on Gobong who had blasting powder. The case was clear enough to hang an angel, and Tom did not claim to be an angel; he only claimed that he was guiltless, that he knew nothing of the affair.

Relatives of Tait's appeared at the trial. Tait had been a thorn in their sides for years. Before going to Gobong he had been guilty of a serious embezzlement. His guilt was covered up and he was made an allowance on the

strict condition that he went to the country, and remained there. This accounted for his appearance at Gobong.

To everybody's surprise and most people's disgust, the jury disagreed. There was a second trial some months later, when the sensation had passed, and again the jury disagreed. The Crown was hurt and indignant. The Crown thought Henderson should have been hanged and out of the way long ago.

While the advisability of arranging a third trial was being debated, the Attorney-General received a letter from an Australian in Brazil. The letter explained that an accompanying letter had been sent to him from Australia, with a request that he would put the proper stamps on the envelope and post it. Knowing his friend Tait's eccentric character, he had hastened to do so.

The letter was of extraordinary interest. It ran:

Gobong, June 2, 1868.
The Attorney-General, Victoria:
Dear Sir

I trust that by the time this letter reaches you Thomas Henderson will be well and truly hanged. It is a matter of some regret that I cannot be present at the hanging. I should not have written you, but when a man an excellent joke, he hates to take it down to the grave with him.

I wish to state that, weary of the world, and eager to give this pestilential Scot Henderson as bad an ending as he deserved, I deliberately blew myself into kingdom come. The dynamite, detonator, powder and fuse for this final blow-out of mine, I stole from the hut of the scrofulous Caledonian hereinbefore mentioned. I laid the train from the direction of his door with malice aforethought, and send this letter in the most roundabout way I can think of, in the fond hope that it will not reach you till Henderson has been suspended for the maximum legal time on the end of a rope.

Yours faithfully,
Raymond Tait.

Having satisfied themselves as to the authenticity, the Crown authorities magnanimously decided to liberate Thomas Henderson, to the great disgust of Raymond Tait's spirit.

I have no doubt.

A Corner in Oils

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 19 Oct 1918

OBSERVE HIM. He would knock a man on the head for a five-pound note, but wouldn't do a day's honest work for twenty. Mr. George Horace Wallen looked the man over with an interest the absorption of which was almost child-like. He would have liked to linger in a doorway and gaze his fill on the phenomenon. George Horace Wallen had never killed a man himself; he had never had any particular need to; but there had been moments in his life when he felt that the capacity to do this thing, not only without remorse of conscience, but with a certain artistic relish, would have been a source of peculiar gratification to him.

Raymond Twicer was known to the elite of the criminal professions as Twicer the Bite. An inch or so over middle height, he was slimly built, with neat, long hands and small feet. His face was ivory pale, he had light eyes, the colorlessness of which created in the beholder a peculiar uneasy suggestion of cats. His chin was long and pointed, he had a small nose, scarcely more assertive than that of a babe, and ears so tiny you had to search for them, curled away under his thin, straight, dust-colored hair.

"Bless my soul!" said George Horace Wallen. "You don't mean to say he has actually, eh, done away with people—real people?"

"He is credited with at least a score," said Dell. "But nobody knows for certain. The fellow is reticent, has no vestige of the egregious conceit of the ordinary artist. Crowther, for instance, is said to be indebted to Twicer for the removal of his aunt. She was rich, but reluctant. The Bite never speaks of it.''

Dell linked his arm in Wallen's and hauled him along, the well-known art patron dragging back like an unwilling child, gaping at this prodigy through his great, round spectacles, much as a rabid ethnologist might have gloated upon an entirely new specimen of the species.

George Horace Wallen was not the man you would suspect of entertaining any fugitive sympathy with casual assassins, being a short-legged, tubby gentleman, with large, mild eyes like those of a pet goat, benevolent side whiskers snow-white against his chubby cheeks, and a fine, old Mosaic nose. Mr. Wallen was reputed rich; at any rate he could afford to indulge in an expensive hobby, and was a rabid collector of pieces of virtu, pictures, and other specimens of the plastic arts.

The virtuoso was even now on his way to an exhibition of paintings at the rooms of the Impecunious Institute, managed by the members of the Association of Impecunious Australian Artists. Andrew Dell was his lawyer, a

gentleman utterly guiltless of artistic instincts of any kind, for which he fervently thanked heaven, and a strict methodistical upbringing.

Dell frequently acted as Mr. Wallen's agent, making purchases for that gentleman when the latter had some good and sufficient reason for maintaining secrecy in his dealings.

Out of sight of that delightful master craftsman. Twicer the Bite, George Horace Wallen's interest returned precipitately to the important work in hand. It was he who hauled the lawyer up the elaborately tortuous stairway of the Impecunious Institute, dragged him into the gallery where hung the somewhat listless pictures of the younger shoal of Australian painters for the gratification of a few limp spinsters, who seemed to be there because there was nothing else in life a body could do, and who drifted about, catalogue in hand, seeking to have their righteous indignation aroused by the more objectionable features of the painter's art as practised by a ribald generation.

"That's nice," ventured Dell, holding back before a violent vision of a lean lady fishing for crabs with her great toe off Point Cook.

"Garr!" snorted Wallen; "Walter Devoy's dish clouts. Don't look at 'em, they'll spoil your eye. Fantastical rubbish painted with a stick. Bannerman is mad about them, thinks this Decoy boy a genius. Rub a cat with three primaries, and let her loose after mice on twelve yards of canvas, and she'll produce you such works of genius by the dozen. I've tried it, Dell; I've tried it. Bannerman is buying up this Decoy stuff as fast as he can lay hands on 'em. Bannerman's a fool. Look at the prices. Twenty guineas for that spatter of anti-friction called 'Wallflowers.' Bannerman will be in the soup. Look this 'Daydreams'— fifteen guineas, and tripe nine pence the pound in any of the suburbs! Posh! Bannerman a connoisseur! I tell you, man, he doesn't know a work of art from a string of smoked bolognas."

"Here we are!" Wallen pinched Dell's sleeve and drew the lawyer closer; his voice fell to a whisper. "Hush! This is the boy, Jo Norman." The virtuoso looked right and left, with the air of an operatic conspirator, and pointed a trembling finger at a canvas representing two Watteau shepherdesses pushing a plump, undraped lady in a perambulator through a sylvan glade. "Beautiful! Glorious!"

"Hum, ye-as." Dell pursed his lips, and looked dubious. "Nicely lit up but a trifle— eh, eh— that is to say. Well, where the deuce are they going with the poor woman?"

Wallen snorted. "Shut up, you," he said. "As an art lover, you are still in the cave-dweller stage. All you have to do is but 'em, buy 'em, buy 'em. Buy this one, and that and that. They're simply marvelous. The boy is gifted like Velasquez. Man, I tell you in a thousand years educated humanity will be

talking of these pictures with a reverence you haven't the grace to extend to Providence. You are a measly Scotch lawyer, Dell, with no more sense of beauty than a wombat; but you have your uses. Buy these pictures for me. One, two three, four five— ten. Buy the lot. I must have them. Bannerman's eyes may be opened, but I wouldn't have his costar's collection of tobacco tabs relieved with a genuine Jo Norman for anything in the world."

Dell marked the pictures on his catalogue with a tick. "That one, too?" There was reproof in his tone.

He pointed to an undraped Eve holding familiar converse with a checkered serpent dappled with sunlight.

"I'm not consulting my spiritual adviser, Dell," said the little man with the white whiskers. "A lawyer with the Presbyterian bias is a mistake.

"Buy the lot, Dell. Buy one or two yourself. Get your clerks to work. And beat down the prices, man— beat them down. The paintings are cheap as dirt as it is, but knock off the odd shillings, turn guineas into pounds sterling. These infernal artists grow so apish. If they get all they ask they wax fat and kick. Get a couple or your friends to buy a pair, but keep my name out of it. Let this blackguardly painter devil know George Horace Wallen is buying his pictures en masse, and there'll be no holding him— he'll be opening his mouth as wide as the Hay Market gates. Get 'em, Dell, and get 'em cheap. For what else did I engage a braw, wee lawyer far' the wilds o' Glaze?"

George Wallen had begun as a picture lover; he had developed into a mere collector. It was a passion, a vice, like alcohol, or morphed, or the afternoon tea habit. He bought pictures that pleased him for the lust of possession, and stowed them away in all sorts of holes and corners. The philatelist's craving for a rare stamp was a pensive and rational desire compared with the yearning that consumed Wallen in the presence of a certain type of painting.

Wallet's latest craze was a comparatively sane one. Young Norman's oils were distinctly clever; they had a marked individuality; they were bright, saucy, exquisitely drawn, deftly painted. The young artist had an astonishing precocity. It was well within the bounds of reason that his works would survive to be the wonder and delight of a generation knowing him to be dead, and incapable of presuming on its generous appreciation.

The virtuoso went straight from the exhibition to Bannerman's rooms. Bannerman was in business; he ran a sort of new curiosity shop, where you could buy all the modern improvements on all the old masters in every department, from quite fresh Japanese prints to rejuvenated Michael Angelo's. Bannerman, a long, lean, dry, brown man, entirely bald saving for two thin arabesques of the original hair in dead centre just above his forehead, like a misplaced Norse moustache, craned over his counter, and peered at Wallen.

"Well," he said, "been up at the show, wasting your money on the wild Watteau of Woebegone?"

George Horace pursed his lips, and shook his head. "No," he said; "I have all the Jo Norman's I want. He grows too productive. The fellow will paint himself right out."

"Ah," said Bannerman, dubiously, stowing his glasses in ambush up under his cranial tuft, "we all lie a bit. I have bought three Decoy's. Great lad that. I've got a room full of his stuff, all cheap, all good. A splendid investment. That boy is coming into his own presently, and then I shall ask just what I like for those paintings and find dozens eager to give it."

"Rubbish!" said Wallen, warmly; "the fellow's a daub. He ought to be doing refined mural decorations for ice cream carts. He does those things in strings. If there ever is a market for him he'll supply it if he has to put on two additional mechanical arms, and smudge in four of his puzzling pictures simultaneously."

Bannerman grinned a dry, sour grin.

"Walter Decoy will not be there to do it," he said. "I can tell you this. You would not buy him if he was selling in truepenny bundles. He won't be there when he comes into his own." Bannerman lowered his voice, his eyes grew cunning. "He'll be dead. He has consumption. He comes into my shop here, coughing like a whole hospital for incurables. He has consumption. He has confided in me. His father died of it, his mother died of it. He will die of it. I have his positive assurance. He may last a year, and then when he has gone, up springs the demand for him, and old Bill Bannerman steps in to supply it at a three hundred per cent increase all round.''

Wallen left his friend's shop, feeling a great disgust for the man. Bannerman dealt in pictures, as he did in old pipes and the whiskers of ancient Tibetan priests, for purposes of gain, but there was no need to be so sordid about it. George hated the idea of this parched ghoul trading on poor little Decoy's disease.

"At least I wouldn't do a low thing like that," said Wallen, in cordial self-appreciation. "If I did, I certainly wouldn't mention it to Bannerman."

George Horace Wallen went on with his subterranean buying of Jo Norman's paintings, hugging in secret his almost insane satisfaction at the thought that when at length a generation arose that wanted Jo Norman paintings, and wanted them badly, it would find the lovely things practically cornered in the justly celebrated Wallen collection.

But Norman continued to turn out his lively oils, and the time came when Wallen was haunted with a craven feeling of impending failure. It began to appear that his corner could not hold. If the painter could be stopped by any

means all might be well. But what would hold the fellow off? How can you keep a rabid painter from painting?

"I'll die before the infernal scamp, and he'll go on turning out pictures, better pictures, perhaps. Mine will be of no particular value. My reputation may even be discredited. I may be spoken of as a simple creature of indifferent judgment, who was content with the comparatively infantile spattering of an unripe genius. This must be seen into. This must be stopped."

George Horace Wallen dwelt upon the matter nervously, apprehensively, only to receive fresh occasion for alarm every month or so, as the papers grew warmer in the plaudits bestowed, upon young Norman, and printed new announcements of further superb products of Jo's prolific brush.

George had a sudden resolution. "I'll go and see the fellow," he said. "I'll pay him a visit in his mountain fastness. It may be worth while to secure an option on his crop. I might even get a chance to cut off his Dexter finger or something.''

Wallen had no difficulty in securing an invitation. As a rich and assiduous buyer, every artist in Australia recognized George Horace as a man to be cultivated. He received a hearty welcome from the young artist, whom he found stowed away in a quaint chalet on the mountain side at Woebegone, living in an atmosphere of gum trees and tin fish, his bachelor household in tumultuous disorder, and littered from end to end with evidence of the occupant's craft.

The virtuoso saw Jo Norman, a slim-limbed youth of perhaps twenty-five, pale of face, and with a most deceptive air as of one suffering from some interesting congenital trouble aggravated by damp beds and malnutrition.

"Not strong!" said Wallen to himself, rubbing his hands with a certain glee. "Not at all strong. Weak chest, I should say. A touch of pneumonia, and, puff, out he goes!"

He heard Norman cough with gentle satisfaction. It helped to restore his confidence. "Lung trouble, perhaps," he mused. "He won't last."

George Horace noted, too, that the house was damp. There was fungus under the linoleum. He was careful not to mention it to the artist. "Useless to protract the poor fellow's existence. Why should he suffer?" Wallen felt a virtuous thrill, looking at the matter in this light.

The artist showed his guest paintings that caused the latter to open his eyes so wide with wonder that he never quite closed them again to his dying day.

"Of course, I've turned out leagues of inferior stuff," Norman said. "I've sold it, too. What does it matter? People wanted it. It's their own look out if they have a butcher's appreciation of tripe. A man has to learn, has to feel his

way. Practice makes perfect. I think I have arrived where I was going at last, and now I am going to paint pictures. That 'King Henry Canoodling' is a fair sample."

"It's a masterpiece!" said Wallen, miserably; "I'll give you thirty pounds for it."

"Never on earth," said Norman. "The price is one hundred."

"Pounds?" ventured the patron, gingerly.

"Guineas! My prices have taken a jump, a running high jump. For the future people are not going to buy Norman paintings because they are cheaper than wall-paper. Probably that King Hen is the cheapest thing I shall sell from now on."

"It's mine!" said Wallen, somewhat hastily. "But you must not go too fast, young man. You have rivals, you know. There's that lad Decoy, for instance. Oh, a clever lad— and cheap. He sells. People may turn from you. Go slow, go slow."

"Wally Decoy?" Jo Norman laughed easily. "Yes, he's clever; but he's only painting rubbish for one mad buyer in the city there."

"Bannerman?" said George Horace. Jo Norman nodded. "Devoy's got the old boy on a string. Goes in to him made up like a case of galloping consumption, and coughs all over the place, kidding he's in the final stage of a deadly malady, and Bannerman buys his pot-boilers by the gross, believing Wally will soon peg out, and that the public will want to buy Devoy's at fifty quid a time."

"And this Devoy— he really isn't sick at all?" asked Wallen, in sheer amazement.

"Sick? He's as healthy as I am. He'll never die. Eats like a circus bear, strong as a bull-camel. You couldn't kill that fellow with a maul. I've had a shot at it."

George Horace Wallen was shocked. His friend Bannerman was the victim of a shameful imposition. It was scandalous that a confiding, well-disposed man of business should be traded upon by a young scoundrel through his most generous emotions. But Wallen did not tell Bannerman. He was too busy brooding over his own case, for one thing. He, too, was the victim of misplaced confidence. Posterity, instead of applauding him as the most far-seeing art patron of his time, the Macaenas of Jo Norman, would gibe at him as a mere dilettante, if it heard of him at all, which was doubtful.

These considerations wrought a great change in Wallen; he lost his amiability, he became moody, sullen, vicious. Then came into his mind with a rush the grim idea, the great scheme. He thought of Bannerman and Devoy. Bannerman wanted his painter to die for no motive but vulgar gain; he (Wallen) had a similar wish, but a high, a noble motive. Meanwhile Jo Norman

was painting like a mill. It must be stopped. Wallen had only one recourse, he called in Twicer the Bite.

"Yes," said The Bite, when the client had explained his case. "I'll kill the fellow for a reasonable consideration. My fee for artists is low. Say two hundred guineas. That's higher than usual rates, but this boy is some class. Two hundred guineas, and ten guineas per day travelling expenses."

"Too much!" cried Wallen in real distress. "Too much, too much."

Twicer the Bite took up his hat, and walked to the door. "Good day," he said. "Aren't the roses beautiful just now?"

"Stop!" yelled Wallen.

"I allow of no criticism of my terms," said Twicer. "If you want a cheap, nasty murder you can get a kind of slaughterman for, say, a ten pound note."

"But this is such a weak little fellow," said George Horace Wallen. "He's half dead already."

"They hang you for that sort just as readily as for Herculean specimens. I must be going. I have an engagement to amputate a clergyman's mother-in-law at eight this evening."

"All right, all right, all right," growled Wallen. "When can you have it done?"

"That I cannot say, until I have studied the local conditions."

"What will it be— cold steel, poison, lead?"

"Just as circumstances dictate. I may remind you that that is my business. In any case they are all the same price."

"You'll identify him easily, a slight-built, pale-faced youngster. His place is conveniently situated for a little affair of this kind. You have an easy job."

"Possibly; but I got my nickname for this." Twicer exposed a deep scar in his neck, startlingly suggestive of a full set of human teeth. "That's where I was fastened on by a shrimp of a fellow I was removing to the order of snide insurance society, a bit of a Scotch lawyer. He nearly ate me before I got through with him. You never can tell."

"You want fifty pounds cash?"

"Fifty in advance, thirty for exes., and your I.O.U. for one hundred and fifty guineas in each instance."

Twicer the Bite was away three days. When he returned he found George Horace Wallen reading *The Herald* with intense interest.

"Well," said the Bite; "is it all there?"

"Yes, yes, it's all here. You've done it." Mr Wallen looked with sudden suspicion. "If you did do it. The paper says he was killed by a dry limb falling from a tree under which he was working. It might have been an accident after all."

"Your I.O.U. for one hundred and fifty guineas," said Twicer, coolly. "Cash up. I do not discuss my professional methods with clients. If I had not gone to Woobegong that limb would not have fallen on the unfortunate young artist. That is sufficient for you. Big notes, please."

Wallen paid up. Twicer the Bite wished him a jaunty "Good day," and departed. An hour later George Horace Wallen, suffused with elation, went forth to call on Bannerman. He went as a conqueror. He had in his possession practically the whole of the output of the justly celebrated painter, Jo Norman, unhappily cut off in the flower of his youth and the height of his productiveness, and now humanity, awakening to the true significance of this superb genius, must turn to him, George Horace Wallen, for the mere privilege of gazing upon the work of the greatest painter Australia and the generation had produced.

When he entered the shop, he found Bannerman with a paper in his hand, capering like a mad Indian, and uttering a curious pagan chant expressive of unbounded rapture. At the sight of Wallen, the business man drew up short, and eyed the virtuoso keenly.

"Well," said Wallen. "What would you give now for, say, a haphazard dozen of Jo Norman's oils?"

"Twenty per cent, over and above the cost of frames and canvas," Bannerman replied. "Is it possible you haven't seen the last edition? It's a case of mistaken identity, my friend. Mistaken identity. Norman is not killed. The victim was another young artist staying at the chalet." Bannerman threw Wallen the paper, and resumed his ridiculous song and dance.

Wallen read, and a cold despair swelled in his chest like an accumulating snowball, choking him. He uttered an inarticulate cry, and fell to the floor in a kidney fit.

Twicer the Bite had made a ridiculous mistake. The artist killed by him was one Walter Devoy!

Tinker Hankin's Savings Bank

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 3 May 1919

IT WAS NIGHT SHIFT at the New Moon, and there was no moon. Tinker Hankin braceman, swung the truck from the cage out on to the smooth platelet peering under his horn-like brows for the mark. It was there, a small "o" drawn with a scrap of white reef on the end of the first truck.

With his spanner Tinker Hankin yanked the wheels deftly on to the rails; then he ran the truck out into the darkness.

Hankin did not take this particular truck of mullock right out to the mechanical tilt at the end of the tip as usual, but twisted it across the rails at a point about thirty yards from the brace, and hastily, with an effort of sheer strength, spilled the contents where a depression in the big mullock heap offered a sort of receptacle.

Ever since operations had been started on the comparatively rich gutter in No. 3, Tinker Hankin, when on night and afternoon shift, had sought with shrewd little green eyes for that "o" covertly scribbled on the trucks, and every such truck as came up the shaft he tipped at the same place in the same way.

The New Moon had three big tips radiating from the brace like the barbs of an ancient spur. The others had been used to their limit, and the third was now a huge pile that ran almost to the eastern extent of the company's lease. Already preparations were being made to raise the New Moon brace in order to allow of some further scores of thousands of tons being dumped on the old heaps.

Meanwhile Tinker, with the greedy fever of a miser in his veins, emptied truck after truck of the "special" mullock into his cunningly conceived savings bank, and no matter how many such marked trucks came up in the course of a shift he cursed Croft below for his stupendous folly in not providing more.

In the savings bank Bob Croft, too, had a proprietary interest. He was a full partner with Tinker Hankin, and as a faceman in the drive it was his duty to sneak into occasional trucks a shovel or two of the good wash they were handling in No. 3, or perhaps only a slug of the bright, clean, bullet-like gold peculiar to the Excelsior lead.

This course was literally forced upon ambitious men desirous of improving their worldly condition, and hopeful of ending their days in a simple, profitable "pub.," or an easy, affluent little grocery business. Since mining companies had taken to the nefarious practice of setting human watchdogs at the mouths of their shafts to minutely search the clothing, the persons, and the crib billies of the men from below, it was impossible to get away with an occasional few

weights of "the precious" for personal uses in the old ways without running deadly risk of twelve months' hard.

"Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn!" Tinker quoted unctuously in extenuation of their ingenious device for outdoing the unfortunate parsimony of the Moon's directors.

"She can't be expected to go on a-workin' these many years more," said Tinker when he first put the project to Brother Bob Croft. "The workin' out of No 3 will jest about wind her up, I reckon. Then when all's done, and the mine stripped and deserted, we two start fossickin' over the old tailin's with a sluice and a cradle maybe, and in the course of time put a triflin' tunnel into the mullock heap after a few trucks of slurry spilled there which we 'ave an idea might yield a 'arf ounce or so. That's if anyone asks."

Tinker looked shrewdly at Bob. Bob blinked rapidly, as he always did when about to speak, for Bob Croft stuttered, and articulation was impossible to him without this preliminary rapid winking, an unfortunate impediment which enabled the other party to the conversation to anticipate him every time.

"That's when we begin to draw our bank, Robert," said Tinker hastily.

Bob blinked again, more rapidly than before.

"We might easily draw a thousand pounds or two," Tinker continued. "It all depends on ourselves: what we put in we get out."

Bob, who had continued vigorous winking, edged a word in. "Th-th-that's thievin'," said he.

Tinker Hankin was hurt. Once more he recited the parable of the ox and the corn.

"Further," said he, "the laborer is worthy of his hire. The gold is the Lord's. The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord! No man dare say the richness of the earth and the wealth thereof is his'n, and the Lord hath said that man shall live by the sweat of his brow. Who sweateth in this mine, Bobbie Croft, tell me that?" Bobbie's winking implied that he was eager to provide an answer, but Brother Hankin did not wait.

"Is it fat Dan'l Mather, legal manager?" he asked. "Is it Johnnie Bottle-Legs Cornish? Is it that there bell-toppered sinner and drinker William Henry Piggott? Is it any of them ungodly director fellers? No, Bobbie Croft, it's you and me as does the sweatin', and what our sweat wins, our hands should hold, if I know anythin' of the true intentions of the Lord."

AFTER many arguments and the quoting of much Scripture Croft yielded, and on the following night the first deposit to the credit of Hankin and Croft was paid into the firm's bank in the New Moon tip. The deposits were made with regularity whenever Hankin was assured the cover of darkness.

In daylight Tinker's folly in exerting himself unnecessarily would certainly have excited suspicion, but as it was only one man in all Yam seemed to have the faintest idea that anything was afoot between Bob and the braceman, and that was Jim Heeley, Bob's shift mate. Whatever was in Heeley's mind in the years that followed he said nothing.

The Moon brace was raised five feet, and in the course of time Hankin and Croft's savings were buried under a substantial layer of mullock, as safe as the bank as Tinker assured his partner.

Eventually the New Moon directors decided that the mine had yielded the last dividend that could be expected of it, and resolved to cease operations. In due time, elaborate pumping and winding plant was sold and removed; the puddlers were dismantled; engine-houses, offices, and boilers were disposed of; and the high, gaunt-looking poppet-legs standing among the tips alone remained.

TINKER Hankin and Bob Croft watched the slow demolition of the old mine with feverish concern, and when the road seemed clear Tinker it was who still imposed restraint and preached caution.

"It don't do to appear too big a glutton, Robert," said he. "You" and me can wait a day. We know where she is, don't we. And we ain't exactly wantin' bread. Them savin's is for our old age, and there ain't no safer place for them than where they're hidin' under tons of good mullock. Besides, I've more'n a suspicion that Irishman, Heeley, has an eye on us."

Yam had faded considerably with the closing down of the New Moon, but Tinker and Croft remained, preferring rather to walk three miles to their new jobs at the Blucher, in Tween Bridges, than to give up their old homes in Yam.

Often they eat together on Sundays and in the evenings, saying nothing, looking towards the New Moon legs, their hearts fondly anticipating the easy days to come when eventually they should decide to "draw on the bank."

THEN, all in a moment, as it seemed, Tinker Hankin disappeared.

Tinker (whose old wife had died a year earlier) had left his skillion home by the Wild Goose dam, just as he had lived in it, but not a hint anywhere to explain his departure or account for his fate. The dam was dragged, half a dozen old shafts in the district were carefully investigated, but no trace of Hankin was found.

Bob Croft, in a state of dire trepidation, had rushed to the Moon tip. It was unmolested, and when four weeks passed and still there came no word of Tinker, a great exultation took hold of him. The bank was his alone now, and

he started on the task of possessing himself of its treasure without further delay.

Bob Croft set up a sluice, and a cradle, but wasted little time on preliminaries. However, others had tried over Moon tailings at one time or another, with no success, and small interest was taken in Bob's movements, although one or two old miners did go out of their way to offer him counsel, telling him candidly and kindly what sort of an ass he was.

Croft tunnelled into the mullock from the south side, where Tinker had told him their deposit lay. He worked hard, and, as time passed, continued his task with reckless energy.

A terrible disappointment befell the poor man— none of the mullock here yielded more than a show of gold! Where Bob had a right to look for rich prospects in his dish he found only the color.

The man grew reckless. He searched like a frantic terrier, neglecting reasonable care in the timbering of the drive in his wild hunt. And now a peculiar horror was working to put Bob from his task a stench so dreadful that he could hardly live in it, but which he fought as a saint might have fought Satan in some righteous cause.

It was on a Sunday afternoon that Bob Croft made his hideous discovery, for he had become a Sabbath-breaker in the frenzy that was upon him.

He was digging into the mullock, when suddenly the broken face of his drive started to run in on him, and there among the loose dirt, grinning at him. in the sickly candle light, was the ghastly grey face of a dead man!

For perhaps a second Croft stared back into the fearful countenance gaping at him from the reef, and then be screamed like a child, and, turning, fled blindly from the tunnel, and ran across the common, yelling as he ran.

TINKER HANKIN had lied to Croft when he said their little bank deposit was on the south side of the tip. It was on the north side. Secretly by night, covered by the third big tip, and the entrance of his drive cunningly screened with piled junks of reef, Tinker had been drawing on the firm's deposit, carrying the rich dirt away in sacks, and hiding it in the house at the bottom of his garden where his goats once lodged, puddling it in tubs, cradling it with minutest care, recovering every grain of its gold.

But Tinker, too over-anxious to be through with the work of embezzlement and reach some retreat where Croft might never find him, had been careless about timbering the chamber he made in the tip, and eventually the mullock had come down.

The face Bob Croft saw mouthing at him from the loose reef was that of one who had been dead a month, the doctor said. It was the face of his fellow conspirator and brother in sin, Tinker Hankin!

Bob was cunningly reticent at the inquest. He did not know, he could not guess, why Hankin had fossicked the tip in secret. For his own part he had attempted to work it because he remembered that slurry from the careless cleaning up of the No. 3 drive had once been tipped there, and he had hoped to get a little gold out of that.

There was a verdict of accidental death, and presently Croft shifted into Tinker Hankin's abandoned home, and commenced his long, tireless, secret search.

He lived anyhow, begging, stealing, fossicking in the creek, or in the gravel under where the New Moon puddlers had stood, a furtive, blear-eyed, little, prematurely-old man, his one object in life the finding of Tinker Hankin's ill-gotten gold. Tinker had recovered the gold from the New Moon tip, he had hidden it somewhere about his home. Where?

Bob hunted over every inch of the house, about every stone of the big chimney, and around and under the hobs. He even broke the bricks, remembering Carne, who cunningly hollowed out a brick to make a hiding place for amalgam he stole from the Red Star battery.

ONE DAY when Jim Heeley was sitting by Bob Croft's back fence, smoking and wasting a sunny day in its shade, his dog Slink broke in, and went sniffing about the garden. Presently the scent under an old dead plum tree promised developments and Slink started to dig. The deeper Slink dug the more enticing the scent became. He worked with absurd energy, and lazily Heeley watched him, grinning at the fatuity of dogs.

But presently when Slink disinterred a small canvas bag that seemed to afford him a good deal of gratification, Heeley sat up and began to take notice. He whistled softly, and Slink brought the prize dutifully to his master's feet. Heeley took up the bag and went away with greater celerity than he had displayed in a year.

Tim Heeley bought Wyley's general store at Tween Bridges, engaged a staff of one, and prospered in idleness. How he had contrived to do it was a theme of endless wonder and speculation to all the old hands left at Yam, Tween Bridges, and adjacent places. Anybody visiting Yam even as late as ten years after was taken to see the township's only remaining lion, old Bob Croft, the weazened identity bent double over his endless task of digging and sifting in the soil of his garden, the garden that had been Tinker Hankin's, and which he

had turned up to a depth of six feet and sifted again and again to no purpose, but always with an idiot hope.

Tim Heeley had been to see Bob at his task more than once, and his comment was always the same.

"The ould sinner," he said. "I wonder would he be thinkin' Tinker Hankin buried the fam'ly di'monds in his dirty back yar-r-d?"

_____

Miss Clifton's Device

(As by Ward Edson)

Grenville Standard (Linton, Vic) 17 Dec 1904

JESSIE CLIFTON saw and admired; Peter Ernshaw beheld and was enraptured. Both came, saw and conquered, but neither imagined for a moment that he or she had scored a victory.

Peter Ernshaw was a man's man, an athletic type, who took great joy in feats of strength and games of skill, and loved the approbation of men, but thought little of the approval of women. Besides, as a young metallurgist in receipt of a weekly wage from the Come-by-Chance Gold Mining Company, in which John Clifton. Esq., was supposed to be a very considerable Shareholder. Peter might have been considered audacious in lifting his eves to Miss Clifton, however proper and welcome his attention to the more lowly daughters of the district would have seemed.

Perhaps Miss Clifton saw the matter in this light, which would account for her air of complete aloofness when Peter was in her immediate vicinity. On the other hand, perhaps she did not, and possibly her aloofness was merely an intuitive coyness designed by Mother Nature as a lure.

It is difficult to say whether the lure was effective or not.

Peter noted Miss Clifton's aloofness, and it seemed to him like the aloofness of glacial peaks, and made her hopelessly inaccessible, but it stimulated in his bosom a humble devotion, dog-like, and no doubt perfectly ridiculous in the minds of sane, sober, commonsense people who are not in love.

Peter was tall and broad, he had an arm tike an iron bar and a chest like a burglar-proof safe; he could lift more than any other man in the district, and as a wrestler, runner, boxer and hurler of the caber he left all local competitors far behind. Jessie was under middle height and slim— her enemies called her scraggy, but that was pure malice. She was pretty, with beautiful, soft, dark hair, and large, soulful eyes in a somewhat pale face. And this little wisp of a woman held Peter Ernshaw enthralled. He might have broken her with a hand, but she had enslaved him with an eye, and the big man was bowed in lowliness at the tiny feet of the dainty girl.

Here I sneak in metaphor, of course. In point of fact Peter had not courage enough to do anything half so adventurous as to kneel adoringly anywhere within range of Jessie's conquering orb. To be sure Jessie's fragility was largely deceptive. She was one of the happy few who never knew a day's illness, she had an appetite two sizes too large for her, and there was quite a formidable will at the back of that little red, curved, deep-cornered mouth of hers.

Pete and Jessie saw each other often. The "society people" of Bargoo were kind enough to regard him as a "professional gentleman," and although his hands were horned with hard graft in the battery-house of the Come-by-Chance he was led to suppose that he was welcome to all those little social privileges denied to the "working-man."

Mine managers were in "society" at Bargoo, shift houses were not. Battery managers and metallurgists were welcomed on the same footing, and Pete's welcome was a little warmer than usual because he was young, unmarried, clever, and such a fine fellow.

Ernshaw only valued these privileges inasmuch as they gave him opportunities of peeping at Jessie Clifton, hearing her speak, and sometimes actually touching her hand: but there was no danger of his wearing out his welcome, as the society of the young men of Bargoo and Birrabingalonga who took an interest in athletics was much more congenial to him.

So it happened that Pete Ernshaw had been in Bargoo for nine months, and had been in love with Jessie Clifton for seven months; and in dark secrecy, to herself only, and in fear and trembling. Jessie had admitted for thirty weeks past that the reticent and seemingly indifferent young scientist was her true lord and master: and yet these two remained comparative strangers. If they met in the open Jessie bowed formally, and Pete raised his hat deferentially, and they passed on. Such are the tricks Love plays; such are the doubts, suspicions, terrors and weaknesses he implants within us.

Pete thought, of Jessie as a cold, proud little woman to whom he was a person of absolutely no importance whatever, excepting that perhaps it worked her a little as part of her social duties to have to acknowledge his existence. Jessie thought of Peter as a reserved young man absorbed in his work and his athletic diversions; a magnificent sort of Grecian, to whom girls were an absurd vanity. Secretly she admired this attitude, but instinctively, in the interests of her sex, she felt that, it must he resented. If he were superior. he must he given to understand that she was superior, too.

One barrier which Pete thought formidable had really no existence in fact. Clifton was not the rich man he was supposed to be; he was one who had had losses, and economies were being practised in the Clifton household that sent up Jessie's value as a housekeeper a hundredfold. Jessie was the kind of girl familiarly known as "a brick" and consequently was a good catch but there was no money in the way of Pete's happiness if he had only known it.

How long this state of things might have survived Heaven only knows, but something like a resolution was effected by a glance. It was in the little brick church at Bargoo. The Sunday morning was hot, the sermon was long, and the Rev. Digbee droned in his utterance like a bad phonograph. Jessie was

impiously bored— she drifted into a state of lassitude, and allowed her attention to wander from the Rev. Digbee's droning to the sparkling kaleidoscopic reflection thrown on the pews by the stained windows; from that to the people. She had half-turned in her seat when she encountered the eyes. At first they were only eyes, two large, dark, staring eyes, with a strange mournfulness in them like the eyes of a brooding water dog. They met hers; she looked into them, for how long she did not know. Suddenly her whole soul became turbulent within her. She was conscious of a sympathetic tenderness in her own glance, and then she turned quickly in her seat again, and during the rest of the service her heart swarmed with emotions as a hive swarms with bees.

Of course the eyes were his eyes. She had seen his face. The drowsiness of the church had thrown him into a state of dreamy lassitude and he had centred his devotions on her, and lost consciousness of the fact that he was giving his whole secret away in the face of a congregation. Fortunately, the congregation was too sleepy to note it, and Jessie alone had seen. That look broke down Jessie Clifton's pride, it gave her a strange happiness, although the side of a lover's nature that provides the doubts was still active. It now became Jessie's task to break down the barriers of coldness and diffidence that divided them.

She did not accept the duty deliberately, but instinctively. She was deeply in love now. The adoration in his eyes was a justification.

Pete's idea of the whole matter was entirely different. He was angry with himself.

"Staring at the girl like a luny cow," he said to himself savagely. "Of course, she'll credit it to my clownish insolence."

Here Pete went through the difficult process of kicking himself.

Matters did not progress very well. Jessie found her task a difficult one. It was not easy to try to cure a diffident man without a trace of egotism. A little honest egotism on Pete's part would have settled the whole business in a week.

AT THIS CRISIS Tom Crowe, the bluff manager of the Come-by-Chance, gave Jessie further hope. He was an old friend, and privileged.

"Look here, Jessie," he said, one afternoon, "why do you stand young Ernshaw off the way you do?"

"I'm sure I don't know that I am different towards Mr. Ernshaw than others," answered Jessie, quickly, turning to hide the flow of colour warming her neck and cheeks.

"Oh, but you are. Your attitude towards him implies that he's an outsider, or a dangerous character, or an undesirable of some sort. Now, you can't have overlooked the glaring fact that there isn't a young man here or hereabout who can hold a candle to him. He's a good fellow, with a big, big D."

"I won't admit that there's any necessity to tell me this."

"There is, my dear. I like him. I like you. I'd like to do you both a good turn, and I couldn't do you a better than by making you good friends. Jessie, he's head over ears in love with you."

"Mr. Crowe!"

"It's a positive fact."

"Has he made you his confidant?" Jessie's heart was beating violently. Outwardly she was calm, even jocular.

"No, he has not, but I have eyes in my head, and I see that you are the only person in the world who can unman Peter Ernshaw."

This conversation, although it encouraged Jessie, made her object rather more difficult. She could not bid for Pete's friendship now without letting a third party see that she wished something dearer. It was a very difficult situation, the more so as Peter did not seem to see or understand Jessie's heroic, but somewhat diffident, advances.

Another month passed, and seeming chance brought about the desired end. Pete had built a boat, and he rowed on the long Duck Foot lagoon every morning.

It happened on one particular morning that Jessie was walking under the willows fringing the lagoon while Pete was rowing on the water, each quite keenly alive to the other's nearness, though apparently unconscious. Presently Pete heard angry voices, and saw Miss Clifton confronted by a man of the sundowner type, whose threatening gestures caused Ernshaw to put more back into his rowing than he had done for many a day.

He drove the boat through the shallow and almost on to dry land, and when he came to Jessie's assistance the man had her by the arm, and her face was hot with indignation.

"Miss Clifton," rasped Pete, "is this—"

He read permission in her eves, and then things happened to that unfortunate sundowner. Pete did not know what he did to that man, but he felt that it would have been a sheer joy to half kill him. After a sudden fierce drubbing the tramp was thrown bodily into the lagoon. As he came to the bank (the water was deep where he stood) Pete dragged him out again.

Jessie had watched the chastisement of the stranger with much greater terror than his attack upon herself had provoked. She had never seen a man in such a temper as Ernshaw exhibited, and the other seemed like a straw in his

hands. When Pete dragged the man from he water Jessie threw herself between them, clinging to Ernshaw's arm.

"Don't kill him," she cried in an agony. "Let him go now. Please— please do let him go."

Peter looked down at her. Suddenly he realised how small and frail she was. Her eyes were full of tears. They now turned piteously up to him.

He dropped the sundowner and stepped back.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Clifton," he said. "I have frightened you Yon can go," he added, turning to the stranger.

The man slunk off without a word in the direction of the main road.

"Please forgive me, I entirely lost control of myself," said Pete anxiously.

"You did it for me," said Jessie, with feeling. "I owe you a great obligation; why should I be asked to forgive?"

"You owe me nothing," he said. "I must admit there was a savage rapture in manhandling that fellow."

There were tears on her cheeks, and he was afraid she was going to faint.

"I— I have had a great fright," she said.

He was all tenderness and devotion, his diffidence was gone.

"Let me help you," he said. To help her he had to place an arm about her. It was not till they came into the township that she was able to walk alone. After that they felt there could be no distance between them ever again. Mr. Clifton's gratitude was deep, Mrs. Clifton's deep and tearful, Jessie's tender and adoring.

Suddenly Pete became a constant visitor at Clifton's; instantly he had developed into an ardent suitor. He was as pressing and persistent now as he had been backward and diffident before, and when he told Jessie what Jessie knew very well already, she told him he was a foolish boy despite his cleverness not to have seen that she was in love with him all along.

THEY MARRIED, and there is a sequel. Pete received a valuable appointment in another state two years later, and about a month after he and his wife and child had settled in his new home a man called on him asking for a billet.

"You might ez well give us a job, mister," said the man, with a grin, "I once did you a good turn."

"Why, I don't remember having seen you before."

"No? And yet, perhaps, if you hadn't licked me that day on the lagoon at Bargoo you mightn't have won your wife."

"You scamp," cried Pete. "You dare—"

He grabbed the man by the neck.

"Here, here, hold hard, mister," cried the stranger, "hasn't your missus told you? She gave me five pounds to pretend to molest her that day by the lagoon."

Ten minutes later Jessie verified the statement with mingled tears and laughter.

"You see, I'd tried so hard to win you over that I was driven to desperation," she said.

But the man did not get a billet, he got another five pounds and a second-class ticket to Sydney.

"I can't afford to have my benefactors working under me," Peter said.

_____

Beau Ben's Last Appearance

(As by Ward Edson)
Punch (Melbourne) 7 May 1903

THE CONVERSATION had turned on a recent bushranging story in Punch.

"A woman instinctively loves a scamp," said the official, emphatically. The other gentlemen raised their eyebrows, in shocked deprecation. They had wives of their own.

"It's true," persisted the official, stubbornly. "I've met with scores of cases in point. There never was a rogue who couldn't find half a score of women to sympathise with him at a moment's notice. The story we were talking about might be true of every bushranger Australia has had. Look at Ben Hill."

The others settled themselves. The official's stories were usually good. The official delighted in telling them, too.

This is his story of Ben Hill.

Mr. Benjamin Hill was a polite blackguard and an expert gold-stealer. He had stuck up a few banks, robbed a gold escort, and cleaned out a party of miners who had accumulated a pile of gold dust at Bendigo; and he was the gentlest scoundrel imaginable. He carried on his depredations for years in the late fifties without injuring man, woman or child, and robbed you like a perfect gentleman. He might have produced a "book called "Etiquette for Housebreakers," but he didn't— he was too busy with his many enterprises.

Ben was wanted, of course— wanted all over the place, wanted with all the eagerness that a big price on his head could inspire in the avaricious— but Ben was a mystery. He disappeared most discreetly after every venture, reappearing without any warning to work off another bold coup, and wisely fade into temporary oblivion again. What became of Beau Ben between his raids nobody could say, but everybody had a try, and the wildest conjectures were put about by imaginative minds.

"Beau" was the nickname given to Ben by the gentlemen diggers, and the rest accepted it without troubling themselves as to its meaning. It was alliterative— that was enough. All that was known of Beau Ben was that he was a man of about five feet nine, slim, quick as a panther, and almost as strong. His hair and short beard were coal black, but he was fresh-coloured and his eyes blue, and he spoke with the pleasantest flavour of a brogue. He was an Irish gentleman, it was said, who had been brought to his present evil courses by misfortune and fraud. But this was all conjecture.

No doubt Ben Hill took to villainy naturally, as ants take to honey; anyhow, he seemed perfectly happy in his iniquity. It was a smiling face he thrust-into Cadwallader's tent at Black Boy the night he cleaned out the First Spec, partners.

"Pleased to meet you, boys," he said. "Cadwallader, I have never had the misfortune to shoot a man in the way of business, but if you shtir that right arum of yours an inch, I shall have to begin here and now." Cadwallader and his mate were playing cards, and Cadwallader's hand had gone instinctively towards his revolver.

"Price," said Ben Hill, "you have a bag of gold dust in that black billy; kindly pass it to me before I count five, or there'll be a wake on this field in which you will not play a speakin' part."

The bag was passed over. Ben had a very convincing way with him.

"Now," he said, "I can see your shadows through the tent, and the man who moves within five minutes will move to another— and I trust a better— world. Good-night, Cadwallader! Good-night, Mr. Price!"

One afternoon Mrs. Spencer Bligh, wife of old Pennywise Bligh, of Cootra Run, was out driving a pair of spirited ponies across the back paddock, with the intention of visiting a next-door neighbour some twelve miles off. Mrs. Spencer Bligh had been warned not to trust those ponies, the same containing as much pure devil as could well be packed into such small hides; but Mrs. Bligh was more spirited than heir ponies, despite her fifty-six years, and she would drive no other horses. Result: a terrible bolt in sparsely-timbered country, and the sudden and opportune appearance of a tall, clean-shaven, fair-haired, handsome stranger of forty, riding a superb chestnut, who rode beside the maddened ponies, and by a clever and daring feat of horsemanship secured the reins, and prevented the smash which a few minutes before had seemed inevitable.

Further result: the establishment of Mr. Alfred. Goudie, the tall, fair-haired, handsome stranger, at the Cootra homestead in the capacity of honoured guest. It turned out that Mr. Goudie was a rich Englishman of good family, travelling Australia in quest of adventure and to escape the awful ennui that had afflicted him as a social pet and the natural prey of match-making mammas in London society.

Goudie was delighted to accept Bligh's invitation to make Cootra his home for some time. It afforded him an opportunity. of taking a pleasant rest after much knocking about, whilst enjoying further colonial experience. In return for the hospitality extended to him, Alfred Goudie contrived to make himself most agreeable to the people about Cootra, and Miss Esther Spencer, Mrs. Bligh's twenty year old niece, was the only one who refused to acknowledge his charm.

Alfred, who was accustomed to finding pretty girls very willing to be pleased with him, found Esther cold and unresponsive.

"It's all his English impudence," said Esther, with early Australian prejudices. "He comes here with his melodramatic actions and his superior airs, and expects to make a general conquest. I am not so easily deceived."

This was most ungenerous of Miss Esther, and as Esther was not naturally, of an ungenerous disposition the wise might have suspected something behind her present attitude.

It was not for want of trying that the handsome Englishman failed to impress Miss Spencer. He was untiring in his attentions to her. He rode with her, walked with her, talked with her, and was evidently rather seriously smitten; but Esther, whilst treating her aunt's guest with proper respect, assumed towards him a proud manner that was quite foreign to her friends.

Goudie did not appear cast down; on the contrary, he gave no sign of discovering anything uncongenial in the girl's attitude towards him, and was a cordial and cheerful companion. He made no effort to hide his admiration, and what his lips did not utter his eyes told bluntly enough. The Englishman was a pleasant companion; he rode well, talked well, danced well, and did each with an air of happy heartiness that conquered all— excepting only the one he most desired to conquer.

One afternoon Goudie returned from a ride with Esther Spencer, with a red wheal across his face, such as might have resulted from the cut of the riding whip Esther carried in her hand. The girl was flushed and evidently deeply disturbed, although she tried hard to hide the fact. Goudie explained that, through riding carelessly, he had received a blow across the face from the branch of a tree, and had been thrown from his horse. Before the others he apologised to Miss Spencer for the fright he had given her, declaring— quite needlessly it seemed in the circumstances— that he would lay down his life to serve her.

Esther left him without a word, and after that they rode no more together, and the girl made no attempt to disguise her efforts to avoid the guest.

There was a sort of party at Cootra about a week later. The homestead swarmed with guests, and the house was full of light and gaiety.

Alfred Goudie excelled himself. His strength and horsemanship and his willingness to meet proffered friendship half-way made him a favourite with the men; his good looks, his tact and his reputation as a rich man conquered the women. Goudie was the lion of the night.

It was after ten o'clock. Goudie was lounging in the drawing room, chatting with Mrs. Bligh and a number of guests. Esther was seated in a corner with an amorous young squatter, and the strains of a waltz filled the house.

Suddenly a trooper in uniform appeared in the doorway, pointing a revolver straight at the head of Mr. Alfred Goudie.

For half-a-minute not a word was spoken. The guests stared, open-mouthed, from the trooper to Goudie. The latter's hand had gone instinctively to his side, but he had no weapon, and sat erect, staring the policeman straight in the face.

"Ben Hill, you are my prisoner!" said the trooper.

"Ben Hill," cried Mrs. Bligh; "but this—"

"That is Ben Hill, ma'am, Beau Ben, the gold-robber," said the trooper, emphatically.

"Don't be disturbed on my account, Mrs. Bligh," interposed Goudie, quietly, "the man is mistaken, or mad. I'll—"

"Not a foot from there, Hill, or I'll shoot you down like a dingo:" '

Goudie had risen to his feet, and motioned as if to leave the room. The trooper's face hardened, and sudden death stared out of his eyes.

"I'll trouble you, gentlemen, to help to bind this man," the policeman continued. One of the station hands, who had been standing behind the trooper, advanced with a rope, and one or two men stepped forward.

"After all," said Cheeseman, "if it's a mistake it'll soon be put right, and this won't hurt you, Goudie."

"I submit," replied Goudie. "Tie me tight: Ben Hill's a slippery customer, I hear." He laughed lightly. " 'Pon my soul, this is a high compliment," he said.

Esther was standing near, staring at Goudie, pale to the lips; she detected a fictitious ring in the gaiety he had assumed. Only a minute was given to thought, and then she turned and left the room by the French window leading on to the wide balcony. When she returned, Goudie stood the centre of a throng, his hands were securely tied behind him, and be was conversing lightly with the guests.

The trooper was busy explaining to "Pennywise" Bligh that a man employed on the run had recognised Goudie as Ben Hill, who, he said, always wore a wig and false beard when engaged upon his various crimes.

Goudie felt a knife cutting through the rope that bound his hands, and heard Esther's voice whisper at his ear:

"Your horse is saddled and standing by the big tank. I have turned the trooper's horse away. Make a dash for the verandah, and ride for the gully."

The next instant Goudie had swept the quests aside, and made a dash for the French window. The trooper uttered a curse, fired one shot rather wildly. and then rushed after his prisoner. He was confronted at the window, by Esther Spencer, who threw her arms about him and clung to him desperately. When the trooper broke loose his bird had flown.

The trooper had thrown Esther aside so violently that she was stunned by the fall. When she came to she would only say: "He saved my aunt's life, risking

his own to do it. My aunt has been more than a loving mother to me. I could not see him dragged away to his death without an effort to save him, no matter what he was."

If Miss Spencer ever heard further of Beau Ben nobody else knew of it. Nobody else was ever quite satisfied that Goudie and Ben Hill were identical, and that fact saved Esther from much trouble at the hands of the law; but it is known that Ben Hill disappeared from the records of Australian crime at this time, and there seems to be little doubt Ben committed his depredations disguised behind a black beard and under a wig.

Of course, it was asserted that Esther had fallen desperately in love with the bushranger and there may be truth in that, for, though she had many chances, she never married.

_____

The Enigmatic Emeralds

(As by Ward Edson)
Punch (Melbourne) 16 March 1916

WHAT EVERYBODY predicted had happened at last— Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's emeralds had been stolen.

Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's emeralds were almost an institution. First night audiences would miss them as much as big Mrs. Agnes Inglefield herself, and a great deal more than little Mr. Agnes Inglefield. Mr. Agnes Inglefield had probably never noticed the emeralds. He was a little, purblind, comatose sort of man, so absent-minded that he was continually forgetting himself.

Mrs. Inglefield, on the other hand, was a large, exceedingly stout, very wideawake lady, who never in any circumstances forgot herself, or allowed other people to forget her. She was at least fifty-eight by this. Her profuse dark hair, by reason of its singular uniformity, and the fact that it fitted her with the precision of a man's hard hat, had long sustained the reputation of being a confirmed wig. Mrs. Inglefield raddled her cheeks most unsuccessfully, and was a great, kindly-hearted fool of a woman, who loved to dress herself in spangled materials and expensive emeralds. She looked like a starlit night.

The most conspicuous of Mrs. Inglefield's many ornaments was the emerald necklace. Melbourne was quite familiar with these emeralds. It had seen them shedding a green lustre over Mrs. Inglefield's spacious and benevolent bosom as her brougham crept through the city streets, conveying her to the theatre, a ball, or some social function: it had picked them out scores and scores of times, gleaming in the dim-light down in a seat in the front circle row during the performance of many plays.

Mrs. Inglefield was an inveterate first-nighter, but though extremely rich, she clung to her old-fashioned, comfortable brougham, disdaining the smart motor cars of her acquaintances as dangerous to life and limb. Her acquaintances said she hated the motor head-lights, since they might almost outshine her beloved emeralds.

People had told Mrs. Inglefield her emeralds would be stolen, but Mrs. Inglefield had replied, "I have emeralds to ornament me, not to illuminate the interior of a vault."

Now the emerald's were gone.

It happened so very simply. A block of traffic caused by the escapades of a very drunken and hilarious citizen lying on his back before the wheels of a vice-regal motor car had served to hold up Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's brougham for a few moments. During one of these moments a hand thrust through the open window of the carriage had torn the emeralds from Mrs. Inglefield's neck.

Detective Kewt was given the Inglefield emerald case to handle.

"MIGHT as well set a man to hunt for a white cat in the snows of Siberia," he told his friend, Austin Porteous, sitting on the counter in the latter's little curiosity shop.

The cherubic-looking antiquarian smiled gently. He was turning over a large cameo, examining the substantial gold setting in elaborate basket work.

Detective Kewt sighed. "The thief may have been watching his chance. Mrs. Inglefield has worn this eighteen hundred pounds' worth of emeralds persistently for years."

Porteous nodded. "I know them," he said. "They are worth more. There are in the necklace four particularly fine stones."

"So some smart criminal may have been dogging his chance. Nimble Hegan is in town."

"Hegan? Yes; it would be worth your while to find out what Hegan was doing with himself at eight minutes past eleven, on Saturday night."

"I have," replied Kewt with a sigh that was almost a groan. "He was leaning on a hotel corner in Bourke-street, talking to a police constable."

Porteous looked up, a bird-like sharpness in the black eves that contrasted so quaintly with his old doll's face. "A deliberate alibi, perhaps. It suggests a confederate."

"I've thought of that, too. Perhaps if you went and saw Mrs. Inglefield, you could get something out of her that would be of value. I couldn't."

"Very well, I'll do what I can."

Tracking criminals was one of the hobbies of Mr. Austin Porteous. His other hobby was collecting ancient articles of art and virtue, and selling them at a suitable profit to cranky amateurs.

Mr. Porteous, saw Mrs. Inglefield; he peered into her mind through his large, horn-rimmed spectacles; he peered into the case from the only discoverable point of view, and then admitted that there was nothing in it for the scientific investigator.

"That's about the total make-up," Kewt acknowledged. "I'll get me to the pawnbrokers."

BUT three days later Kewt reappeared at the little, out-of-the-way shop of Mr. Austin Porteous. Mr. Kewt was accompanied by a slim, brown, cadaverous man in a suit of clothes that might have been the second-best of a not- too-prosperous tramp.

Kewt, holding a position between his companion and the door, took a small tissue-paper pared from his pocket, opened it, and handed Austin Porteous a big emerald necklace.

"Mrs. Inglefield's emeralds," said the antiquarian. "I congratulate you,. Kewt. Where did you nab the man?"

"I didn't," Kewt replied. "He nabbed me. Let me introduce Mr. Horace Skews. Mr. Skews, Mr. Porteous."

"Most happy," said Skews, with a marked English accent, at the same time extending a hand which Mr. Porteous was pleased to note was clean, as well as slim and unstained by labour.

"Mr. Skews brought me the emeralds two hours ago," said Kewt. "He says he found them."

"Indeed," said Porteous dryly.

"Yes," continued the detective; "found them two weeks ago."

Austin Porteous was alert in a moment. "Two weeks ago? They were only stolen last Saturday!"

"I found those emeralds two weeks ago yesterday," said Skews, "and they-must have been in the place in which I found them since the previous night at eleven."

"Why?" asked Porteous.

"Because they were in my bed; and I retire at eleven."

"Tell him," said Detective Kewt, "tell him all."

"Certainly," said Skews. "You must know, Mr. Porteous, I am something of a pariah. My appearance, my costume, my hat have probably told you that I am not at this moment one of the monied class. I have been of the useless rich, but at present I haven't the proverbial bean. I have been sleeping, sir, in a cement barrel— You look incredulous. You think it improbable a man of my dimensions could sleep in a cement barrel. I admit the whole of me does not sleep in the cement barrel, but as much of me as I can get into the barrel does. The cement barrel is in a block at the back of Osgood's big ironmongery. The block contains much of Osgood's property that is of no particular or immediate value, chiefly barrels.

"On the night of 5th January— that is, Wednesdays fortnight— I stole to the corner of the lot where my cement barrel is. Inside the cement barrel were a quantity of old straw and, several back numbers of the *Age*. My bedclothes, Mr. Porteous. I pulled these things out, made myself comfortable with my legs in the barrel and my head on a small zinc-lined case, and went to sleep. I awoke about seven o'clock on Thursday fortnight, and the first thing my eyes fell upon, lying in the straw of my bed, was the emerald necklace. That is all."

"Not all," said Porteous ; "not all, my dear sir, since it was a fortnight ago, and you turn up with the necklace-to-day."

"I left the rest to the imagination of a man of obvious intelligence," said Skews' suavely. "An emerald necklace, certainly genuine, was an article of

immense value to a man in my unfortunate position. So I thought at first. I found later it was useless, because a man in my position could not venture to dispose of jewels worth perhaps £2,000. I kept my find, searching the papers meanwhile for some word of the necklace. None came till last Monday morning, when I read of the theft of Mrs. Inglefield's emeralds.

"And there's the story, and there are the stones," said the detective.

"Dear, dear me! A most curious situation. She was robbed of the stones on Saturday, our friend here finds them on a waste lot several days earlier, and restores them to-day. It looks, Mr. Skews, as if your story wouldn't wash."

"It does, indeed, Mr. Porteous, but happily I can prove I was in a city doss-house from ten o'clock on Saturday night till nine o'clock on Sunday morning."

"That seems to be the truth," said Kewt.

"Bless my soul!" mused Porteous. He was peering into the emeralds with a small magnifying glass. "Most extraordinary story. But miracles don't happen, you know, Mr. Kewt."'

"Not in the Criminal Investigation Department," said Kewt.

"Perhaps we can reconcile Mr. Skews's story with fact, without the need of a miracle." Suddenly Mr. Porteous's droll tone was dropped. He became very alert. "I'm interested," he said. "I'm most interested." He peered into every turn and twist of the necklace. "A devilishly delightful case, Kewt. I should certainly like to follow it up."

MR. AUSTIN PORTEOUS did follow the case up. He went to Mrs. Agnes Inglefield again, and learned of a purely irrelevant young man, one John Weston, a nephew of Mrs. Inglefield's, who had a place in Inglefield's firm, and had practically lived with the Inglefields. This young man had disappeared, ten days before the theft of the emeralds.

"Dear me!" said Porteous, "and you don't know where he has gone?"

"We have no idea ; but he is a wild boy— he left his parents' home several times. We have no fears on his account. Oh, his accounts were all correct. There was no reason of that sort. We have every confidence in him."

Austin Porteous left, carrying John Weston's portrait with him. He next went to the police court. There he heard of a case of assault on the police that happened in the vicinity of the waste block at the back of Osgood's big ironmongery store at about ten o'clock, on the night of Wednesday, 5th January. The policeman assaulted had come upon the two men fighting furiously in the locality mentioned. He attempted to arrest them, and they turned on him, and in the hot struggle that ensued the constable was rather severely injured. However, help arrived, and the men were secured. They gave

the names of James Queen and Henry Brown, and were now serving a six - months sentence.

Mr. Porteous obtained permission to call upon Messrs, Queen and Brown in their respective cells. He was not surprised to find that Henry Brown bore a startling resemblance to the missing nephew, John Weston.

THAT EVENING Austin Porteous was in a position to clear up the mystery of the Inglefield emeralds that were stolen before they were lost. He did so in presence of Mrs. Agnes Inglefield, Mr. Agnes Inglefield (still sleepy and self-absorbed), Detective William Kewt and Mr. Skews.

"It is like all seemingly extraordinary cases," said Porteous, "a very simple matter. The emeralds were found by Mr. Skews several days before Mrs. Inglefield was robbed, and Skews did actually have them in his pocket on Saturday night. No, I am not denying that the lady was robbed. Mrs. Inglefield, the man who stole your emeralds was your nephew, John Weston. He worked in collaboration with a young working jeweller named Carter, now under sentence for assaulting Constable Ryan. Weston and Carter met on that block behind Osgoods on the Wednesday night after securing the emeralds, probably to come to some settlement. They quarrelled and fought. A constable came upon the scene, and Weston dropped the emeralds into the cement barrel, our friend Skews's bedchamber. The two young men were arrested, and were tried and sent to prison under false lames. They are in prison now."

"But I had the emeralds after that," said Mrs. Inglefield.

"Certainly, madam, the necklace was snatched from your neck some time after— but you need not bother about that. Here are your genuine emeralds. Examine them closely, and you will find traces of plaster of Paris still adhering to the setting. Your nephew and his confederate, the working jeweller, made an imitation emerald necklace sufficiently like your own to deceive you. That you had been wearing for some time while the genuine emeralds were in Weston's hands."

"And the thief on Saturday?" gasped Kewt.

"The Lord knows who he was," replied Porteous; "we need not bother our heads about him. He got what he deserved— a handful of paste!"

End