

1864

DIGGINGS, THE BUSBY & MELLBOURN

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AND MELBOURNE;

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REMINISCENCES OF THREE YEARS' WANDERINGS
IN VICTORIA.

GLASGOW:
G. D. MACKELLAR, 18 Renfield Street.

PRICE NINEPENCE.

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P R E F A C E .

THE following short narrative was written specially for a small circle of intimate acquaintances, who varied the dulness of village life by meeting once a week to read manuscript essays and selections from favourite authors. The time allowed for reading being limited, and the audience being partly composed of young people, I confined myself mainly to personal experience. As many of the company had previously heard me relate in an off-hand way, the leading incidents, detection would have been sure to follow any attempt at spicing my story with fiction.

The incidents are selections merely from three years' recollections of the Colony. Some who have never been further from home than in their annual visit to a watering place, have been pleased to call them adventures. The term may appear too strong to those who like the writer have reclined by a bush fire, listening to the stories of old hands, but as there may be much serious living without broken bones, I submit this brief history to those who think so.

James Arnour.

GATESHEAD, *April*, 1864.

THREE YEARS IN VICTORIA.

CHAPTER I.

MARCH TO BENDIGO.

EARLY in the month of September, 1852, I landed at Cole's Wharf in Melbourne, one of four hundred passengers newly arrived from Liverpool by the "Lady Head" sailing ship. While yet at sea I had agreed to join a party of young men who intended starting for the diggings without delay. We found the lodging-houses overcrowded, with table-tops, chests, and chairs in use for bedsteads, and we were made acquainted with a considerable portion of the town before we found accommodation. Our capital being small we grudged the price asked, but were disposed to be thankful on witnessing next morning the shifts that numbers of our shipmates had been put to in getting shelter for the night. Some were lying among the barrels and bales of goods that lay lumbering the wharf. Some two dozen had made free with some piles of planks and built off-hand houses for themselves, but the night had been rainy, the roofs had leaked, and they looked anything but refreshed. Among these latter I observed a mother with a family of young children. A shawl hung across the opening that faced the road, but it was too scanty to screen her as she sat with a looking-glass before her setting her hair in order. The husband was absent, and the children sat with comfortless wonder in their young eyes, gazing at the rude throng that was beginning the bustle of the day.

I heard my name called, and turning to look, I recognised a late messmate perched on the top of an old waggon-shaped boiler, that stood, as it were, stabled, amidst the piles of wood. At first I thought he was but taking a birds-eye view of the situation, until another well-known figure struggled up from within, through the man-hole by his side, then a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, and a seventh, and all so brown with rust from the hair to the boots that it was evident they were not far from where they had been sleeping. Awakened by the rumbling din they make in clambering out, an eighth

figure is added to the group, but he comes from beneath, and is in a more singular condition than the others, for the lowness of the fire arch not allowing him to lie otherwise than on his back, his face has got sooted, and the handkerchief with which he wipes it spreads the marks all over, in various shades of black. They tried to console themselves with the thought that all this was but right and proper training for the diggings, but he who had lain in the chill fire-hole seemed to have some doubt upon the matter by the haste he made to a hot-coffee-stand that stood close by. One who had lain within proposed that they should further inure themselves to roughing it, by retaining possession of the boiler for the few days they would be in town, but the suggestion fell to the ground for want of support. The ground about was littered with the wet chests and the softer baggage of the houseless, and before we returned to town the first of the new day's arrivals from the Bay, by lighter and by steamer, had begun to add to the confusion and the mud, to the evident distress of the wives and others who had been left in charge meantime.

Our preparations for the road were soon made. Dressed in blouses blue and red, with the creases of the shop folds bearing witness to the newness of our purchase, and in bright new leather leggings, and each carrying a couple of blankets and a change of clothes, with a quantity of bread and other necessities in a pack slung across his shoulder, and each provided with a tomahawk stuck in his belt, and a tin pot, we joined company with a large party about to start from Flag-Staff Hill in the afternoon, having been advised to do so on account of the unsafeness of the roads. We were about forty in number at starting, but the packs, or as we were taught to call them, "swags," began to sit heavy on many of our unaccustomed shoulders, obliging us to halt so often for re-adjustment, that I found myself at sundown one of six far in the rear.

On reaching Keilor plains, about ten miles from Melbourne, it began to rain, and as it was now useless to think of overtaking the main party we looked about for some place to camp in for the night. Much previous rain had drenched the ground, but we found a spot, with a dwarfish tree standing in the middle, and with perhaps a little less water than elsewhere standing about the grass roots. With difficulty we got a fire lit. We took no thought of those who would be coming after us, but carried and dragged from far and near the old mouldering wood that lay thinly scattered in our neighbourhood, and piled log upon log, until we raised a blaze that reddened the clouds overhead. We were drenched to the skin, our blankets were wet, and our bread and tea in a miserable condition. Fixing our loaves on long forked sticks, we would have toasted them, but the rain kept pouring down, and only made them softer, until the crust could be

distinguished only by its colour. The steam from our fire-heated clothes enveloped us like smoke; we began to feel drowsy, and yet unwilling to lie down, for where were we to lie? Our feet had swollen in our rain-soaked boots, but for fear we might not be able to get them on again if taken off, the boots were allowed to go with us to bed. Breaking some branches from the tree above us, we made a rain shed of them, and spreading a few upon the floor, crept underneath the dripping bower, leaving one on guard to see to the fire and our general security while we slumbered. One of the company, when the fire had begun to throw out heat, had called the situation "jolly," and in the exuberance of his delight, had commenced to sing,

"In the days when we went gipsying,"

and sacrificing both poetry and music to his desire to bring the thing home to our hearts, he improvised, and made the diggings and bags of gold the burden of his lay; but finding he was having the singing all to do himself, he soon gave over, and now here he was lying next to me, close huddled up, and shivering I thought even worse than myself.

In the middle of the night, those lying down had almost succeeded in falling asleep, when splashing footsteps were heard approaching. The watch called out, and we scrambled to our feet, our wits all flying loose in vain attempt to gather what the calling was about, or even where we were; and before we were thoroughly aware, a man with his face streaked with blood, and his clothes muddy and torn, ran in amongst us. Gazing on us for a moment, with eyes swollen and red, he inquired whereabouts the nearest police station lay. Truly we were sorry we did not know, for the question made us suddenly apprehensive that the knowledge might be useful to ourselves before morning; and not knowing but that this apparent distress of his was merely a device to throw us off our guard, while he spied our quality and means of defence, we felt glad when the owner of the only gun in our possession came forward with it in his hand. Willing however to propitiate the powers of evil, we spoke him softly, in our ignorance of how many confederates he might have close by to come up at his signal. Making known to him that we were strangers, he looked round on us, and in a tone that was anything but complimentary, and that sounded strangely from one seeking help, he answered. "Ha, I might ha' seen't afore.—A lot o' new chums, d—'em." An awkward pause followed, in which we were beginning to regard him with increased suspicion, and to connect him with numberless shadows that we had not noticed till now outlying in the gloom, and to which the unsteady flame of our fire gave the appearance of motion. After sitting a few moments with his head between his knees, he abruptly rose, and started off in the direction

of a light that appeared away on the border of the plain, and we saw him no more, though we thought we did several times, which led us, when the fire burnt low, to be content with a seat closer to it rather than venture out for more fuel.

At daybreak we tried to dry our blankets and spare clothes, but growing impatient to reach the bush, we rolled them up as they were, and started. The sun rose, and by midday we were making good progress. Finding the dray track wound much about, we decided upon guiding ourselves with the aid of a pocket compass, and the occasional sights we got of Mount Macedon, close by the foot of which the road to the Bendigo diggings lay, and setting out, we made what we thought were short cuts through the bush, but as we frequently lost ourselves, these were often the occasion of warm discussion and a change of leaders. The creeks were swollen by many days' rain, and we had several times to strip in fording them. The scenery improved as we advanced. In the morning we might be crossing lightly wooded ranges, and at midday winding our way through what seemed ancient forest, in which at intervals stood groups of huge blackened trunks, the relics of bush-fires long before the white man had appeared upon the scene, the ground around being strewn with the old charred limbs, half-buried by the mould of bygone vegetation, and the rank luxuriance of the present. On the evening of the same day we have come upon wide-spreading grazing ground, and at times on scenes where nature, simple and unhelped, surpassed in beauty the finest parks we had ever seen in the old country, the indented margin of the forest that surrounded them, being as positively marked as if the hand of man had been there to clear away, and strike the lines with fence and ditch; while fancifully shaped clumps, with rich green underwood, relieved the lawn-like surface with so much appearance of art and method in the general arrangement, that our eyes have involuntarily looked about for signs of human habitation. Again, our way lay sometimes alongside of what at this season of the year were full watered creeks—great trees overshadowing the pools, and the banks on either hand spreading away with easy undulation, and looking so pleasant, with the sun shining on their soft carpeting of grass, waved gently by a fresh-smelling summer breeze, as to beguile completely the weariness of the way. One of our small company, becoming thoughtful as he looked abroad one morning on such a scene, said that if he had not been going to get gold he might have been tempted to remain and try what he could do at kitchen gardening; but recollecting that we had seen neither man nor habitation in the last twenty miles we had come, save one solitary shepherd, and his small bark hut in the distance, our friend's thoughtfulness took a turn, and brought him the first to his feet to resume the march.

Towards sundown of the seventh day of our journey, wearied in feet and shoulders, we found ourselves limping along in melancholy scattered train the songs of the morning exchanged for sighs and useless, because unheard, murmurings against the two stronger men of the party, who would keep going on and on though passing places that seemed in every way suited to our wants for the night. The wearied ones being the majority would have halted and obliged the two to come back to seek them, but as darkness might have prevented reunion in this way, and as the two were carrying the beef can, there seemed no help for it but to continue following. At last, when the head and tail of the company were about a mile apart, a halt was made in front among some grey moss-grown rocks by the side of a small running stream. Oh what relief to throw our swags off, and to bathe our distressed feet in the cool clear water. Bendigo, where all the gold lay, was distant now only some ten miles; we hoped to be there by midday on the morrow. The stragglers as they came toiling in singly and in pairs with sullen moodiness louring in their faces, were made quickly to forget they had an explanation to demand, and soon all were merry as a wedding party, some gathering fire logs, one out with the gun, and the others preparing supper. One of the latter beckons from the water side that there is something to be seen there. We go to him, get down upon our knees, and can hardly think it real, but the sandy bottom is glittering with small gold-like atoms. We try to lift some with our fingers, but—it may be from our clumsiness—we are unable to raise anything but pinches of pure sand. We have learnt how the diggers wash their bottom stuff, and hurry up for some of our tin dishes, and are busy with them, when the man with the gun returns, and learning from us what we are hoping to be true, urges the advisability of getting under cover with our operations, in case we may be seen from the road by passing travellers, who might claim a share; we see the wisdom of the advice, scramble behind a bushy knoll, and speedily forget everything but our new discovery. We wash and try again, but we seem awkward hands at it, for we never can retain in the dishes anything the least like metal. Darkness is fast coming on, and we begin to fear we shall have to give over for the night, when a bigger bit than we have yet noticed is seen in the failing light, faintly glistening in the bottom of a shallow pool: three pair of legs on the instant wade in for it, and there might be more, but a certain pearly lustre, too like the moon, for the first time brings misgivings as to the nature of the chase. We have seen gold grains exposed in shop windows in Melbourne, and are anxious to attribute the difference in colour, as it now appears, to the presence of the water, but, a finger and thumb bring the truth sadly to our notice—we have been fishing powdered mica. We now find that we have been incredulous from

the first as to its being anything but something of the mica kind, and the man with the gun claims credit for having saved us from making fools of ourselves openly, by getting us to go where we were not likely to be seen before wisdom came. We had lost time by the occurrence, and had to do without our usual brushwood shelter from the cold night wind; but making a large fire, we lay down to windward, with our feet to it, and slept soundly, with our heads covered by the blankets. One however allowed his crown to escape from under its mantle: hoar-frost had whitened the ground like snow, and had glued the blankets to his uncovered locks. We found him first hard to waken, and then slow to rise, but beyond that he seemed but little the worse.

We now kept upon the dray track; it was sadly cut up by the winter traffic, and the numerous carcasses of bullocks and of horses, that lay in some places at short intervals where they had fallen in their yokes, told a tale of road hardship and adventure, that made us better satisfied with our simpler though toilsome mode of travelling. Half an hour before coming on the diggings, we passed a bullock dray that had started from Melbourne, a hundred miles distant, the day before we sailed from the Mersey. The men looked sullen and toil-worn, and the cattle seemed scarce able to pull their feet out of the mud in which they sank half way to the knees at every step.

We reached the diggings about an hour before sundown, and were rather disconcerted at the appearance of a company of diggers, whom we met, and who called out that there was "still some left for us to get:" they were wet to the knees, had evidently been sitting among water, and their shoulders looked as though they had been dragged through a clay bed. Our mica business had but little prepared us for this sort of work, and—hum—a newly open clay field in wet weather, before the bricks have begun to be made, is clean and comfortable walking compared to this that now comes in view, as we near the creek that lies between us and the tents; and what water! yea, what a place to look for gold in.

Not wishing to be out of the fashion in the mode of living as practised by those who were now to be our neighbours, we without delay set about making for ourselves a house, but where was the stuff to make it of? One said that he had "some needles and three pirns o' thread," got for casualties among the buttons; but that seemed small help until another who had brought some fine bed linen with his blankets, pulled it from his swag, and remarking that it would be "name the waur o' the bleachin'," offered it to make the roof; a third gave a tartan plaid, and a fourth a blanket; a fifth, in the enthusiasm of the moment, tore a striped shirt open, and throwing it with two towels among the other offerings, said these would make a gable. While some were fixing forked sticks in the ground to bear the ridge pole

and attending to the fire and supper, the rest were busy, without thimbles, at the needlework. "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." We were happy and contented, nay more, we were thankful when at last, by the aid of firelight, we got all finished, the floor strewn thick with rosin-smelling leaves, and our blankets disposed in order. Though not so grand looking as many of the neighbouring edifices it was our own, and the occupiers of those others might not be able to say more.

CHAPTER II.

THE DIGGINGS.

In the morning, having provided ourselves with tools, we made a beginning in a small gulley near our camping place. There did not seem to be much business doing in it, but it was nice and dry and quiet, and we had been informed that great hits were occasionally made in very unlikely spots. We had agreed to work in pairs, my lot falling in company with a decent man, a hand-loom weaver to trade, from the North of Scotland. We took spell about at the digging, short spells being in favour, as my mate argued that "the chance o' goold bein' below, was'na like to be ony greater, for oor hurtin' oorsels, ye ken." We agreed very well, but a large stone that we came on about four feet from the surface, sorely troubled us. When sitting on the top looking ruefully down upon it, and inclined to shift to some other place, a stranger with pick and shovel on his shoulder came sauntering up, joined us in looking down, asked what we intended doing, and remarked that we ought at least to see what was beneath, that many a digger would give gold to have such a boulder in his ground, they were found to have been such grand catchers of the nuggets when they came "scouring down in the flood." As he seemed to have been longer acquainted with the diggings than we, we thought it might be true what he was saying, and that we might at least try till dinner time. The weaver dropping down, commenced afresh to pick away the clay at one side, but our friend said "No, the stone will drop on you if you go below it: you must break it up, and bring it to the surface." "Break it up, break it up," I heard him in the hole say, "man ye're shurely thinkin' its a muckle cheese ye're speakin' aboot," on which the man left us to engineer as we had a mind.

Evening came, but we had not made the progress we expected, for as my esteemed mate said, "the hannels o' the picks were aye in our road, there was sae little room to work in." The holes were only about eight or ten feet deep, bottoming on the usual pipe clay, imbedded in the surface of

which, and in the gravelly stuff immediately overlying it, the gold was found. Sometimes it was got in gutter-like depressions, in which numerous pockets occurred, full of grain gold and nuggets; sometimes it lay in patches, and often lay like seed grain in a new-sown field. In the case of gutters, only the holes that struck upon the line was generally so uncertain and took such unexpected turns, that those who in the morning might despond at being so far to a side, might in the evening be harassed with fear of the encroachments of their neighbours.

The common crowd confined its operations to the ground already opened, but kept itself ever ready for a rush to new discoveries. Numerous small parties, possessed of more than average enterprise, were ever on the move amongst the outlying ranges, sinking shafts on speculation. Did they light on gold, they passed the word quietly to their friends to occupy the ground immediately adjoining them, that the common harpies, who went spying about, too indolent to seek for themselves, might be outsidet. Not long could the matter remain hidden; a rumour would get upon the wind, a few would be seen to leave their old claims hastily, with their tools upon their shoulders, and steal off through the scrub; friendly signals would be passed about, men would be seen tumbling up out of their holes, and in a little more time than it takes to tell it, the bulk of the multitude were away upon the run to overtake those who were before, leaving the place that before had swarmed with life, with only a mere gleaning, which often seemed in doubt whither it was doing the best thing for itself by remaining. In one such rush we joined, but arrived too late for anything better than an uphill claim, which we bottomed at about one third of the depth that gold might be expected at. A few yards below us, two men had come up panting among the first of the runners, and on the instant marked off twelve feet by twenty four for their united claim, but thinking the ground too much on the slope, they shifted just twelve feet lower down. Another party immediately took possession of the vacated ground, and within four hours, the sinking being shallow, broke through into a bed of nuggets, worth, as was afterwards affirmed, four thousand pounds. The original claimants bottomed theirs on a few pennyweights only. There was feverish excitement in all this, and the fortunate, when wise, kept their own counsel, at least until their findings had been placed safe under the charge of the Commissioner, for conveyance down to town.

With various small fortune, my mate and I continued our labours, with bankruptcy at length ominously near. We tried surface washing, but got only sore backs by it, and returned to the sinking, there patiently to await the approaching crisis in our circumstances. One day, a little before sundown, we took our way homeward, rather downcast, and with some mis-

givings about supper. Happily our friends had been more fortunate than we, and the sight of half a sheep hanging from the tent pole, and of a well-known face bending over a frying pan, quickened our dull weary gait, while my companion, evidently touched with thankfulness for the visible mercies, said half to himself, "I kent the puir ravens would be fed," adding for my encouragement,—“We're no jist at the wab en' yet, my man.”

The night was cloudy and dark, but calm. We had drawn a large log to the fire for want of chairs. We were in no lack of topics for conversation, and there, spread out before us was a singular panorama of tents illuminated from within, log fires among the trees in height and hollow, and groups of big-bearded men, squatted around them. The Government being at that time weak for want of policemen, all went armed, and for the protection of the tents and what was in them during the absence of the owners, dogs abounded. The firearms, partly with a view to intimidate the ill-disposed, and partly because of damp, were fired off nightly, which occasioned a protracted fusilade far and near before bed time, the dogs not being idle the while, and the uproar being increased in interest, by the uncertainty about the ballets. Putting fresh logs on the fire we go to bed, six of us in a row, with no room to spare upon the floor when we are down. In the middle of the night we are awakened by the rushing of the wind among the trees, a few drops come pattering on the roof, and we feel thankful it is cloth that covers us, but we soon hear a sound that is different from the noise of the wind as it sways the branches; nearer and louder it comes, and we hold our breath in fear; our fire outside roars in the blast, and the lighter brands are whirled down the slope. We see it all, for there is no door to our dwelling. With a fury, the like of which we never before knew, the storm breaks on us, in a moment all is confusion and dismay, and an unbroken deluge of rain drowns our voices by its drumming on our roof, which reels as if it would forsake us. The sewing gives way, and the water comes spouting through the openings; we try to stop the leaks with our caps and stockings, but we only make the breaches bigger; what matter this however, when a torrent begins to dam up behind our uphill wall, ultimately breaks through, and washes across the floor. Helpless and beaten now, we gather our blankets hastily together, roll them into balls, and sit on them. We have no help but to continue sitting till daybreak, for our fire has been washed out, and cannot be renewed till morning; with its last simmering sob expires our hope of coffee or even a light to our much desired pipes. The storm in its great violence soon spent itself, but the morning showed a wreck around of limbs of trees torn from their living trunks, while the face of the hill was furrowed deep with

torrent beds. A clump of bushes to windward had alone saved our habitation from being blown away.

On reaching our hole early in the forenoon, we found it filled to the brim with water. Some of our neighbours, in like predicament, had already begun with pails to bale theirs out. Want of a pail, and the urgency of our necessities, caused us to betake ourselves to some of the deserted workings, in the hope of gleaning something there. The ground was shallow, and so much honey-combed that our search was accompanied with some little risk, when we had to use our picks upon the thin partitions. But half a sheep among six men was not likely to last long, so, providing ourselves with candles, we descended each into a separate hole, making this agreement before disappearing from each other's sight, that any change made by either of us must be reported to the other in case of accident. Late in the afternoon I heard my name called from above, and crawled to the daylight at the bottom to answer and learn progress. In reply to his inquiries about how I was, I cried up merrily, "Pretty weel, I thank ye, in ma health, but I hae got nae goold." "Ah weel," he says, "never mind that, my man, we'll speak about goold the morn, come yer wa's up ti the tap, and bring yer tools wi' ye, there's been awfu' wark gan on here I'm thinkin'." A fight or something equally interesting immediately occurred to my mind as the occasion of his seriousness, and I lost no time in getting to the surface. I could see no crowd, and turned to him for explanation. He had come upon some yellow specks in a corner of the roof he was examining, and had used his pick in following up the clue: the hollow sound made by his blows startled him a little, and he moderated his first zeal. He began soon to be more and more sensibly aware of a smell of a particularly disagreeable nature, and which increased so much as he made the opening bigger that he was seized with nausea, in which his mind became troubled with strange apprehension unaccountable to him. He could hear no sound but what he made himself, his tallow candle but feebly lighted up the face of the wall before him, and left the pillared chamber with its crumbling drifts behind in solemn darkness. Making an attempt to shake off his depression of spirits, he made his pick fall vigorously into the hollow he had already made, and wrenched away a clod that left a cavity beyond. Seizing the candle, he held it to the breach, and to his dismay, there lay "glowerin' oot at him, the wasted face o' a deed man." We made known the circumstance to a party of men whom we met on our way back to the tent; but they seemed not sufficiently interested to go out of their way to see the place. We made it known to some of our neighbours on the hill, and learnt that wood for coffins being scarce, and church-

yards scarcer, it had been found convenient in the earlier days of the diggings simply to pass the bodies down a deserted hole, and fill it up with top stuff.

About a week after, we found ourselves reduced to dependence on the others of the company for the bread we ate; they were willing that it should be so, while they continued able, but I prepared to go in search of daily work, washed my spare shirt, baked a small loaf to take with me, and bade them all good bye. My mate having some prospect of joining another party, whose finances were in a better state than ours, remained in hope, but accompanied me on my way for about a mile. Having no particular occupation in view, all roads were alike to me. At starting, however, we set our faces in a direction somewhere between south and west, but when we stopped to part, we discovered we had gradually turned, and were going somewhere between north and east, judging by the sun. This specimen of our art in bush travelling caused my friend evident concern about how I would get on when left to myself, and he wished me to return and make a new effort to better our circumstances, but as my doing so would have prevented his acceptance of the offer that had been made to him, I declined, but felt my heart moved strangely when my hand loosened from his parting grasp. All day I travelled, but towards evening, when looking out for water by which to camp for the night, I came upon an old square hole, that seemed familiar to me. My mind at first was inclined to disown acquaintance with it, but the surrounding evidence was too strong, and I sat down for some minutes, overpowered by thoughts on the circumstance. I must have been travelling in a circle, for this hole lay scarce half a mile from the tent I had left in the morning, in fact, now that my attention was awakened, I could hear the barking of the dogs belonging to my late neighbours. Was it providence that was thus overruling my movements? I thought of Whittington. Or was it merely a case of inattention to the course of the sun? My whole heart went in favour of the Whittington interpretation, but there was one from whom I feared the remark, that "A bad shilling was ill to get quit of," were I to appear among my late companions again; so I rose and walked about two miles further off, and camped in a bushy hollow. I made my bed close in among the matted undergrowth of a clump of thick growing bushes, but was awakened in the middle of the night by certain rustlings underneath and round about me, that made me a wiser man before daylight came. In all my subsequent wanderings I chose open level ground, with a shelter of my own making. Distrust of the creeping things I had heard, and thought I felt, caused me to sit up the last few hours of darkness, but one end of a decayed log I sat on being near the fire, its tinder-like

substance became heated and began to smoulder. With my head resting on my hand, I was in a musing way watching the thin wreaths of smoke spueing from the cracks, a few of which extended to near my seat, when I was rather startled by the sight of a large beetle running wildly about among the crevices, but I rose quickly to my feet when a centipede about as long and as broad as my forefinger, came crawling from the under side within a few inches of my hand. There seemed nothing left me now but to stand, until it suddenly occurred to me that mistaking my motionless legs for stumps, the creatures might be crawling up for concealment under my loose bark-like trousers, but I had not well begun to walk about to deprive them of the chance, when a new fear took hold of me, that of possibly treading on their tails. This was the first sincere misery I had met with in the country; it was the first, but not the last by many of my lonely nights in the bush. I had made an ill choice of my resting place, a small green spot surrounded close at hand by piles of mouldering wood, in which small animal life was swarming, and set astir by the heat of the huge fire I had made before lying down. Next night I camped by the side of a small marsh in an open forest scene, being very tired and retaining unimpaired the serious impressions of last night's lesson. I looked upon a certain dampness of the ground as an assurance that I would not be similarly disturbed, but in the morning as I sat at breakfast, from time to time taking a perplexed look at my swollen hands, and passing them over my evidently ill-treated face, I began to fear that I had no longer personal appearance to rely upon in finding an employer. The musquitos had hived about me from the going down of the sun till the chilly hour before daybreak: in vain I had wrapped my head in a blanket, the knobs disfiguring my nose and brow told that the pests had found their way to me. Wearied and sore with the two day's travelling, I had hoped to get a little sleep when I found their numbers thinning as the morning advanced, but a damp white fog hung low above the ground, and the cold from the wet turf beneath had reached me through the few twigs I had made my bed on. I became cramped in all my limbs, and was glad to rise with the first flush of the rapid dawn.

CHAPTER III.

BULLOCK CREEK.

After walking about a mile, I came upon a sheep station at Bullock creek, and got engaged to assist in sheep shearing. The station being only

about ten miles from Bendigo where I had been digging, it was plain I had not come as the crow flies, nor by the beaten road. A portion of the building was in use as a tavern called "The Albert," appropriately fronting which, at a distance of two or three hundred yards, was a small police station, where the few who would not suffer the many to get drunk quietly were taken care of—a great convenience to the landlord. The few shearers who had been collected meeting with old friends in one another, and in certain of the general company, seemed fast making themselves eligible for the lock-up, when I first made their acquaintance. Till they sobered, I was employed in a generally useful way in the garden and the horse paddock. The first of my service, however, was with a wheelbarrow, in the removal of broken bottles from the open space in front of the tap room door, thrown there by the frequenters of the place, in brick-bat practice at the trees, the skill thus learnt to be exercised when occasion came upon the constables. Before I left, a mounted trooper in attempting to lay hold of a suspected horse-stealer, had his head cut open by a heavy champaign bottle thrown by the thief, who was enabled thereby to remount the stolen animal and get away. The circumstance for a time put me off the notion of becoming a policeman, having an impression, the result of certain small casualties, that my skull was rather delicate, and hardly round enough for maximum resistance to flying bodies.

The shearers being quartered in a hut by the side of the creek, about a stone throw from the main buildings, I took up my abode there with them. The hut was roomy; the walls were formed of hard-wood slabs, split like huge laths from logs, and having been framed together when yet green, they had shrunk so much that the hand might have been passed edgewise between any two of them. The roof was composed of great sheets of bark, and happily was rain-proof; there was no need of a window, and no shutting of the door could keep the draught out. Along the walls was a sparred bench of rude construction, on which the first comers had made their beds, the later arrivals having to be content with sheep skins on the floor. The fire-place was big enough to accommodate a sitter on each side within when the fire was low. There was a man to cook, and to attend to the house wants of the company.

Being among strange people, whose manner of living I had yet to get acquainted with, I sat up later than was agreeable to me waiting and wearying for my fellow-lodgers to come home, that I might see how they did about the sleeping. About midnight they came—a noisy multitude, full of brandy and "Old Tom." Their coming lured me from a tedious and apparently endless recital of rheumatic and other ailments, under which

the old cook—toothless, and bald, and bowed, was suffering: the poor man's eyes watery and dim with age, seemed to brighten at the sympathy that notwithstanding a certain dulness in the subject, I could not help feeling for him. He had no home, and had wandered here like a thing driven by the wind, to die some day, and be reproached for the trouble he would give to those in whose hands he left his wasted body. About an hour or so after their arrival, the men prepared their beds, and I did mine on a bare place near the door, but was kept long awake on account of a few who restlessly kept staggering out and in, their heavy-booted limbs not always careful about where my legs were. I was too tired however to keep awake until the danger was quite past, and awakened in the morning with a great beef bone lying across my neck, thrown there by him who had been last gnawing it. These were the grosser inconveniences, there was another that I did not quite understand at the time I was first feeling it; however, on spreading my blankets in the morning on the fence, I got to know the secret—fleas. There was no use trying to catch them, even had I been inclined, so I contented myself with quietly looking on as they scoured away through the woolly fibres on being exposed to the light and the cool air, and I wondered whether instinct would guide them back to their kindred inside among the sheepskins and the dust.

On the morning of the third day the sheep shearing commenced, and the packing of the wool in bales became my work. The press consisted of a large box set on end, and without either top or bottom; the sides were detachable, and were merely clamped together when the pressing was being done. A strong coarse canvas bag, exactly fitting the inside of the box, was placed in it; the flaps that were to enclose the top end of the bale were turned over the sides and secured there, so that the bottom barely rested on the ground within. Throwing a few fleeces in and armed with a spade, I kept stuffing the wool that lay along the sides down between the bagging and the mass I stood on, until I made it somewhat solid, then more fleeces, and more stuffing, till I reached the top, which, on the flaps being sewn together, was packed by means of a short staff. I did feel proud when I managed to turn out a bale that had no soft spots in it, but my specimens on this first day were few, the shearers were out of condition, their wrists grew feeble, and their backs grew sore, and they adjourned to the tap-room for "a stiffener," and I saw them no more till late at night, when they came down in a body to the hut bringing disorder and two strangers with them, also some liquor, which however, lasting but a short time, and their fierce humour inclining them to make "a night of it," a select few were despatched to procure, if at all possible, no matter by what

means, a five gallon keg of rum, as they could no longer satisfy themselves with drops in bottles; but the proprietor having an eye to his flocks, which before the public-house was started, had been his main stay, gave them instead a certain warning of police proceedings were the shearing any longer delayed on their account. Shearers were scarce, and consequently were disposed to stand upon their dignity, but these having been made debtors for "slop" goods, and for liquor supplied to them at the rate of twenty shillings a bottle, felt themselves on the wrong side of the law for showing airs, having no money to pay off the score, besides present thirst making them like very Esans, they gladly for the sake of two bottles more agreed to the terms he now imposed on them. These bottles were soon drained dry as the others, on which the yet unsatisfied began to quarrel among themselves. One sang while the dispute was going on, and another, too drunk to stand, sat on the floor reciting doggerel verse, which he appeared to make as he went on, every now and again stopping to say that he was Fraser of Kilbarchan, and that everybody knew him.

I sat for about an hour by the side of the singer, his hands clasping mine, and his drunken breath blowing full in my face. I was delivered from him ultimately by a commotion taking place in the far end of the hut. During my distress, I had observed one of the shearers paying much attention to the elder of the two strangers, who were both becoming stupid with the liquor that had been given them, and had noticed him lead the man into a little place partitioned off from the main room, and containing bed benches. In a few minutes the shearer came gliding out, and passed through the open doorway into the outer darkness. The other followed with only his shirt on, and loudly muttering to himself, but in a few minutes returned, and, apparently more sober than before, commenced to gather his boots and clothes together. While so engaged he said something that appeared to touch the honour of the company, and raised a clamour of indignation at himself, an Edinburgh man called Jack, being so much overcome by it that he staggered out, and made his way to the police to complain of unjust accusation. I had gone outside, and stood leaning against the fence gratefully enjoying the cool night air, and the solemn quiet of the forest scene, when I heard a rustling of feet among the dry grass of the enclosure, and saw two figures stealthily approaching. I moved away, they came on then at a run, and leaped the fence, and were up with me before I reached the door—two constables. Shoving me roughly to one side, they entered with pistols cocked and ready in their hands, and asked for the man who had the complaint to make. The wrangling din was on the instant hushed to a dead stillness; the man was sitting by the

fire with his face hidden in his hands. Some one pointed to him on the question being repeated, but as all he could be got to say, was simply "he knew," the constables angrily turned him out of doors and left us. I then gathered from the hints that were dropped that his pocket had been picked of £40. The ill-looking rascal who had shown him so much attention, and who went by the name of "Brummie," had returned during my absence at the fence, and was now standing with his back to the fire, but with his outer blue shirt off, no doubt with a view to prevent his victim recognising him. From the talk that followed I learnt that nearly all the company had been "Government men," as convicts style themselves, and that the stranger in declining to inform the police of his loss, had but shown himself to be a good man and true, according to the notions of trueness held in common by his class—to regard the police as the common enemy, and to settle all private differences according to the unwritten law of the fraternity. Jack was blamed for having brought the enemy upon them, but Brummie afforded him an opportunity of redeeming his character in this respect some few weeks after, by eloping with £5 belonging to him. He was very angry, called Brummie a mean sneak, declared he would never speak to him again, and then let the matter rest. Jack being a fellow countryman of mine, I made free to speak to him about what I had observed of Brummie, but got for reply a discreet hint to see as little as I could of what happened, and to keep my own counsel when I did see, as being a "square head," that is one outside of their community, I would readily be suspected were tales told out of school.

During one of their drinking days I had found one of them, a Yorkshire man, asleep on the banks of the creek, close to the water's edge, and had gathered him up, and taken him home to bed, and in the act of doing so I seemed to have roused him sufficiently to recognise me, and know what I was doing with him. After that, to the end of my stay among them, he never got warm with liquor but he retold the story to his mates, and hugged me in his arms, with vows that he would make a man of me after shearing was done, by taking me with him to the diggings; but "Philip drunk and Philip sober" appearing each to forget what the other had been doing, I formed my own plans for the future, and left him out. Philip drunk said that his wife Nancy—an old "government lady" I had every reason to believe—would be as good as a mother to me. I felt quite safe in agreeing to become her son, for I knew that Philip sober would put the matter right for me again next morning.

When I had been about three weeks at the shed, the men learnt from some passing travellers that shearers were in great demand at neighbouring

stations—stations that had no public house attached to them—and that the rates of pay offered were far beyond what they were now receiving. Making application and being refused a rise on present rates, they left off working and adjourned to the tap-room, there to enjoy themselves and await the consequences. They were paid at so much the hundred fleeces, whereas my pay was fixed, thirty shillings a week with rations, much work or little. I did not think myself directly interested in the strike till Jack on coming down in the evening to the hut, rather unsteady on his legs, began to question me about what I meant to do. Recollecting I was a square head, I replied "Nothing." He rose, called me a cur and nob, and said it was me and the like of me who were ruining the country, by playing into the hands of the masters; then seizing an empty bottle by the neck, he raised it and advanced a step to strike. A pang of fear shot through me, my heart beat quick, for I had seen the effects of a blow made with such a weapon, and I had just nerve enough and no more to retain my hands behind me, my back being to the fire, and fix my eye steadily on his. For a few moments we stood thus balanced. I could not have borne the suspense long, but held to it when I observed his arm relax a little. He could not hit me thus, the arm dropped by his side, and throwing the bottle from him with a muttered curse he staggered out of doors, and I heard no more of it. It was the only instance of personal violence offered to me, during the whole of my mixed wanderings in the colony, and the sorry impressions left upon my mind, became lost in gratitude some few months later, when seeking shelter from a storm, at an out station where the same man happened to be cook and hut keeper.

Changes were frequently occurring in the working party. The high wages earned by the better classes induced many who had never shorn a sheep to offer their services, hoping that their unskilfulness would be winked at in the dearth of high-class hands. A hundred and twenty fleeces a day was reckoned good work for one pair of shears. We had several who shored sixty, a few eighty, and one or two a hundred, but the latter were often brought to task for "tomahawking," or leaving ridge-and-furrow shear-marks. The learners—old government men like the others—seldom reached higher in the count than from fifteen to twenty, and let the poor animals go spotted sometimes from neck to tail with shear wounds. The superintendent was a humane man, but the flocks were sorely afflicted with the scab, and humanity had to choose between allowing the animals to linger with disease, or letting them smart for a short time with tarred holes in their pelts. The accidents of unskilfulness were overlooked, but when the bad workers, vexed with their own unhandiness, and the jeers of their abler

comrades, began to let loose their passion on the wretched, restless animals by furtively digging the shear-points into their sides, and knocking their horns loose, it was thought high time to part with them. Thus dismissed, they might go no farther than the next station, get a little more practice there, and perhaps have learnt sufficiently before the season ended to make a fair start in the next. The talk in the shed and hut ran much in boasting about what each had been able to do in shearing before the diggings put their hands out of practice. It was good to see their pride honestly interested in this direction, but I fear there were many great lies told. After the shearing had been fairly commenced, I was much attracted by the appearance of two new-comers, who, during the rudely animated discussion in the hut, sat quietly smoking their pipes, seldom joining in with more than a chance comment, or a brief reply when asked to verify any assertion, more than usually extraordinary. The undisguised and avowed rascality of many of the others required but little study to understand, but those silent ones—hard-featured, sullen, with eyes ever stealing searching glances at the speakers—seemed undefinable. In the others, a kindly trait would now and again flash out in their outspoken lawlessness, but in these there seemed ever a dark spirit of evil brooding, all the more terrible because unknown.

Of the tales of old-hand doings that they told, I may briefly mention two. One was related as a piece of confidence from an absent comrade, the circumstance happening on "the Sydney side." He had been for a year serving as shepherd at an out-station in the interior, and as such, was held responsible for the full number of sheep committed to his care. When the pay-day at the year's end came, his employer deducted the value of two or three sheep he could give no account of except that they must have been killed and eaten by wild dogs. Muttering vengeance, he took his leave and stole by night to a fold in a distant station, where the sheep were under treatment for catarrh, killed one, cut its head off, and, under cover of darkness, returned to his late master's, and threw it into the midst of the flock he had recently been tending. The sheep, after their first alarm was over, gathered about it with down-stretched necks to sniff and feel it with their noses. The disease was contagious, and the savage design took full effect, but before the discovery was made, the miscreant had taken himself out of reach. I could not detect any particular impression the story made upon the hearers, except in the case of one who appeared to have some old grudge festering in his heart, and who jerked out that "it would serve them bloody right if a lot more could have sheep's heads thrown at them." The other story, however, was the occasion of much laughter, being given by one of the actors in it. He was travelling

with a comrade from Bendigo to Tarrangower. They were beginning to be foot-sore, when they overtook a "new chum" with a cart laden with stores for Bendigo. He had missed his way, and was going in the wrong direction. O'Brien, for so the man who told the tale was named, seeing his advantage at once on the youth making inquiries about the road, informed him that he also was bound for Bendigo, and would guide him there to the very spot he wanted, if he would give himself and comrade a lift for a few miles inside the cart. The offer was readily accepted. O'Brien had a bottle of strong brandy with him, and the young man was plied with it so well that when three hams that formed part of the lading were pitched out one by one down a bushy bank he neither saw nor heard. The two got out when about a mile from Tarrangower, pointed to some tents at a distance as his destination, then struck off through the bush, and towards dark, with the hams wrapped in the blankets at their backs, arrived among their comrades at the other end of the diggings from that the cart would reach. The story was well and circumstantially told. The youth's simplicity, and the art used in ensnaring his attention when the hams were being thrown out, were declared by the company to be "as good as a play." The transaction was looked upon not as a robbery, but as a first-rate practical joke, marred only by the two jokers having to absent themselves from the locality for a few weeks, on account of "the noise" the victim had made about it to the police.

CHAPTER IV.

A V O C A .

Having earned a few pounds, I left Bullock creek, and returned to Bendigo, but found my old comrades gone. Meeting however with an acquaintance whose mate was about to leave for town, we agreed to go together, and hearing Tarrangower well spoken of, we proceeded thither. We met with varying success, that barely covered our expenditure. My companion became anxious, his wife, left behind in Melbourne, being in great measure dependent on what he might send from time to time. One day, in speaking grudgingly of the cost of a quarter of mutton, it suddenly occurs to him that selling mutton is more profitable than buying it; he puts it to me, and I cannot see but that he is right, and make no opposition to his proposal to try the selling business. The arrangements necessary were of the simplest nature. We purchased a small frame tent, a dead

bargain, from a butcher leaving for other diggings. Being already furnished with window board, table, block, and hooks, the place required only a few yards of chintz to make it in our eyes quite a trap for customers. A red and yellow pocket handkerchief nailed to the top of a light pole, would enable folks to find their way to us. We purchase half-a-dozen sheep from a passing dealer, and for want of another place pen them in a corner of the shop, and nervously prepare for our first job with them. He does the knife work while I hold the feet; but never having examined the neck of a sheep unboiled, he misses his way, and only ultimately gets the vital spark to take its leave. We hang the body to the branch of the tree, and he proceeds to flay it, my attention being wholly taken up with the leakage of the animal's late dinner from its neck. Much water is needed, and when we hang the carcase up inside, we confess it has rather a washed appearance, and fear we may have the eating of it to do ourselves. We were busy with the second when a digger on his way home drew near and stopped to look. We thought we were doing rather better than last time; not quite so much water needed. Hopes of a customer made us wink at his presence till he asked leave to try. The victim's groans lay heavy on my conscience, and I humbly hinted to my mate that there was murder enough upon our hands for one day, we had better give him the doing of the third, but for my answer I got a foot to hold straight out, and after the man's departure, his services having been civilly declined, I was brought to task for compromising the business by my unbutcherlike compliance with his offer. I was not sure but that my frequent application of the wet clout was a confession of weakness to the stranger quite as much as my acknowledged willingness to be instructed, but as logic failed somehow to acquit me, I ceased to argue and hardened my heart for the third demonstration of our doubted skill. Before we turned into bed, we had transacted business to the extent of sixpence, for a paunch, which a lean dog that accompanied the purchaser by the eager interest he exhibited informed us was for him.

Early rising profited us nothing. Dull sales all day begat in us a doubt whether mutton was so much an article of food as formerly. To induce trade we patronised a home-brewed beer business that was carried on close by and got the woman to promise us her custom. My partner happened to be absent on the first visit that she made. The legs and head and tail of a sheep I knew, but whereabouts the piece she asked for lay I could not think, but making an attempt at sharpening a knife, I smilingly asked her to point out precisely where she would like the cuts made, and as this shift to save myself had occurred like a new idea, I thought it well

to acquaint my partner with it, that the one idea might serve us both. Custom continuing shy, and fly blows appearing on the increase, we hold much private consultation, and reflecting on the weary sameness of mutton, roast and boiled, we resolve to try the effect of mincing it, and purchasing mint and spices, set to work within the hour—for we find there is no time to be lost. A new-killed sheep supplies us with skins, which we wash and dress to the best of our ability, and with a tin bottle filler to assist us, we have soon some ten or twelve yards of sausages, all nicely coiled in a large tin dish that has recently been washing bottom stuff. Certain inequalities in the filling detract from their appearance—corpulent bits, and spindly bits, with occasionally a windy looking vacancy—but we think the people will not be too fastidious about appearances, so far from town, and as they seem slow to come to us, we think it well to go in search of them, taking the sausages along with us. But here a difficulty arises, as to which of us should undertake the mission. I talk him over, and prevail on him to go, he being the elder, and the better able of the two to give an account of himself if asked. In less than an hour he returns in great glee with empty dish, having sold all the stock. Great hopes now arise; mincing with the knife too slow a process, and filling with the bottle funnel sore upon the thumbs after the first few yards have been rammed. Wish we had a machine. We sit up till far in the morning preparing a supply for customers' breakfast. Wonder if we could not add pies to our stock in trade; think they would sell well, with nice crimped edges, and a paste button or something neatly clipped out of dough upon the top; think people would not grudge sixpence for them. Put lots of seasoning into the sausage meat, lest any change should happen to it while we slept. In the morning, after an absence of less than an half an hour, he returned perspiring and excited, without his cap, and with the dish full as when he left with it. He never told the tale of what had happened to him, but having heard a great clamour among the dogs in the direction he had come from, and seeing him put his nose to the dish as if in the act of smelling, I for the present forbore to question him, and made haste to cook a supply for our own use before it would be too late. We gave up business and separated after disposing of our effects for a mere trifle. He returned to Melbourne, and I, lonely and with only a shilling in my pocket, set out again in search of work upon some sheep station. Late in the afternoon of the third day I got from a drayman the direction to a station, known as M'Gregor's.

Feeling far from well, and looking forward rather anxiously to the expected shelter, I reached the neighbourhood just as the sun was setting. The buildings were in sight for some time before I reached them, and I won-

dered at the broken condition of the fences, and the silence: not a living thing was to be seen. Twilight was deeping into darkness in the surrounding wood when I drew near, and found the place deserted and in ruins, the doors and windows hanging loose, and rank weeds in masses overgrowing what had been the public yard. My heart sank at the sight, I shivered as if struck with sudden chill, and felt for the moment as if the blankets across my shoulders were bearing me to the ground. Sitting down on a heap of moss-grown stones, I tried to think, but there came to me only thoughts of home, of changes there, of deaths, of the young ones whom I had left crying on the door steps when I came away, and of all the expressions of affection that had been sent after me in the few letters that had reached my hand. For the first time for many a day I found myself crying, for it seemed as if I had been sent here to die, and that no word would ever reach home of the when and where. A white mist began to gather along the marshy flat, making me very cold, yet my head was burning hot. I rose and with weary effort, regained the road near where some grass grown water troughs were, and, seeing some draymen encamped, went forward and asked leave to sit down by them. Their tea billy was simmering by the fire, and they were busy kneading damper for their supper. I felt like one drunk and may have so appeared to them for they answered me that there was room enough in the bush for those who wished. I was not wanting in resignation, and moved away a few hundred yards, and managed to get a fire kindled, but had not strength to gather wood to keep it burning. Drawing a few withered branches together to save me from contact with the ground, I lay down upon them with my blankets.

The morning dawned, but I could not rise, and could hardly turn my head to look at the draymen as they yoked and slowly drove away. My lowly bed was at too great a distance from the road to be seen by passers by. Twice I heard the jolt of passing carts, but the sounds fell on a listless ear, for there was no hope of any one caring to be burdened with a sick man. As the sun got higher however, I began to take better heart. Having eaten but little since leaving Tarrangower, three days before, there was therefore but little grossness for the fever to work on, and it was sensibly abating. I rose to my feet, giddy and tottering, gathered my things together anyhow they would come, and after walking doggedly for a while broke out into a sweat, which made me feel quite clever on my legs, but more supple than strong. In about an hour I came upon a man reclining wearily on the limb of a fallen tree, weary looking and rather meditative. Hailing me to come to him, he handed me a bottle of brandy from his pocket, saying as his eye wandered over me "have a glass old fellow, you

look as if you would be none the worse of it." Feeling rather in want of a tonic, I was not slow in accepting, but gaped somewhat after the draught like a fish brought to the air, and for a reason somewhat similar, want of water, but recovered sufficiently by and by to recollect something about half a loaf which ought by rights to be somewhere among my blankets—my stomach had resumed its work again. My friend had that morning left the "Burn Bank" public house, where in a week he had squandered fifty pounds, his earnings for the previous six months at rail splitting. The bottle that he carried had been presented to him by the landlady on leaving, and was all that he had left to show for the money which he had sacrificed to a thirst for popularity amongst the idlers about the place, who on getting wind of him, had crowded to his levees, till on his resources failing, he had unfortunately gone a borrowing among them. Though I had inadvertently lain on the loaf all night, and it looked as if something of the kind had happened, he gladly accepted half of it, and went his way.

At sundown I camped about four miles from the Avoca diggings, and in the morning entered on them with the intention of passing through for the bush on the other side, should no friendly face meet me on the way. I had barely reached the inner circle of tents, when I observed a little man apparently eyeing me with rather more than ordinary interest. My breakfast had been anything but stimulating, and my gait in consequence was perhaps a little pensive, but I quickly mended that on drawing near him. His face somehow did not invite me to seek close acquaintance with him, yet I was glad when he asked if I wanted work, and soon engaged myself to serve him with stones and mortar in the building of an oven, for fourteen shillings a day and my rations. Taking me to his tent, he introduced me to his wife and child. The place looked clean and tidy, and wore an air of comfort I had long been a stranger to. My employer told me his name was Watty Scott, and that I would find him a good man and true if dealt fairly with. After much talk about the perfidy of former mates, he said that on the completion of the oven, he would take me for a partner and go digging; that meantime he thought he had read me sufficiently well to know me; I might consider the partnership already entered into, and might look upon all he possessed as half my own, all except—here he drew his wife tenderly to his side, and looked prayerfully in my face. I knew not what to say to this, and was perplexed about what might be coming next, so rapidly had events developed within two hours, but as he sat between me and the door I could only ask how he could think it of me, and look reproaches at him.

Meanwhile the wife never spoke, but disengaging herself from him, went outside. He laughed, and, laying his hand upon my shoulder, said, "its all right, Jamie"—he had already familiarised my name—"I was only trying you, come let's take a walk." He does not care about beginning work that day, but next, meantime I can take a look about me.

Evening comes, and Watty is not sober. I try to guess his age, but fail to satisfy myself; he has no whiskers, seems never to have needed shaving, and has a crop of jet black curly hair. He seems to be between thirty and forty-five. His wife seldom speaks, seldom looks at either of us, and appears very sad. Watty regrets that I have no tent with me, but thinks an arrangement can be made for my accommodation. The night being too chilly and damp for camping outside under a bush cover, I was only too glad at the offer of a strip of bark upon the floor of their tent to make my bed on. The wife made up a pillow for me, spread a spare quilt upon the bare hollow of the bark, and then my own blankets over all, in so quiet and kindly a manner, that I felt moved with respectful gratitude, while somewhat ashamed of my intrusion on her privacy. On making some remarks to that effect, Watty poohed and bade me never mention it. I was to consider myself one of the family now. When bed time came, he and I discreetly went outside to the fire. A drunk man's talk is none of the most edifying, and I had become weary of his during the long evening, but had borne with it so patiently, and so followed up his humours as at least to delay his very evident desire to quarrel with his wife. To this fact I in part attributed her motherly interest in the comfort of my bed. The little while we remained outside, he talked more rationally, but as the topic was mainly of the weather, with which the passions have but small concern, little positive conclusion could be drawn from the circumstance regarding the man.

On re-entering, we found as we expected the wife and child in bed. They lay upon a rude bench raised some eighteen inches from the ground, and which occupied at least one-half of the tent floor, which measured only about ten feet by eight; a narrow space of some twelve inches wide separated my humbler couch from theirs. I could not get to sleep for Watty's talking to or rather at his wife, who maintained a singular silence, save once or twice when she ventured on a brief meekly-spoken answer; somehow this meekness did not suit him, but only excited him the more, until about three o'clock in the morning, his delirious abuse became outrageous. Sense and reason, judgment and humanity forsook him in the paroxysm he had wrought himself into, and I could only hear the ravings of a madman. I tremble for the wife and child—by the sounds he

seems to be gathering himself together, and while I am still holding my breath in doubt about what he means to do, they are pushed bodily out of bed and fall heavily on me. The case was beyond my help, so I lay still; the cries of the child made it a hard task to do so. The madman's delirium seemed to calm considerably on getting the whole bed to himself, and it might be towards four o'clock he muttered himself to sleep; the wife then taking courage rose from the floor, and ventured in again beside him. On awaking at break of day, I found him up and dressed; hearing me move he bade me good morning more heartily than I could answer him just then. A habit he had of raising his eyebrows, and which seemed to say "look within who may, there is nothing to conceal," lent a certain air of candour to his face, that at first shook my faith in what had passed being more than a troubled dream. He got the fire lit, and the kettle boiled, and addressed his wife Eliza in accents so subdued, that I was almost inclined to doubt the evidence against him.

We commenced the building of the oven. I was not a weak man, but he proved so good a workman, that my back was never off the bend keeping him supplied. In an hour or so however, greatly to my relief, he became thirsty, crossed the road to a grog tent for a drink, and came back no more till dinner time. After dinner he said that this being now a broken day, he would wait till next day, and then begin work in earnest. I fetched water and firewood from a distance for the wife and began to talk with her, and keep the infant in amusement, and when Watty came home in the evening, continued to keep him in at least peaceable humour. His prodigious self-esteem made this comparatively easy so long as I continued feeding it, but I found it at times disposed to froth up into arrogance, and, at intervals, my ready consent to all he said and did, seemed likely to take a wrong direction. Taking my hand in his, and falling away into a whining mood, he said he had been an unfortunate and ill-used man all his days, that he ought to have been, and would have been an independent gentleman long before now, had he not been deceived, and robbed, and kept down among the dust by—here his eye glanced over to his wife, as she bent her head over some piece of sewing for the baby, and I felt uneasy at the glare of malice that reddened in his face. At haphazard I broke in upon him with as lively a sally as I could muster at the sudden call; for a moment he hung in the balance, I prepared myself for some extremity, but happily the fell grimness of his look relaxed, his overweening pride was recovering its seat. I had touched him rightly, and to my intense relief he broke out into a laugh, and for the present contented himself with merely blowing out the candle she was working by. I felt it dreary work, but for the woman's

sake I persevered, and so passed our second night together. I thought the drink that he had taken would surely overpower him when he went to bed, but the warmth seemed only to make him worse, and the frightful words that poured from him made it like a night in a cell of hell. He appeared to have lost all recollection of my presence, so that what I suffered I feared was but a little of what the poor wife would call her daily life with him. It had been taking place before I came to them; it could not go on so for ever, but the end I never knew.

The oven was not progressing, and on the fourth day I found him in the company of two slouching fellows in a beer shop. He introduced me with due form, for he liked to do things respectably, then taking me to one side, begged the loan of half-a-crown, but I could only promise him the loan of one when I received the wages due to me, and took the opportunity of calling his attention to the condition of my boots, the soles of which had quite loosened from the uppers, requiring some little management when walking to keep my toes within. My appeal was ill-timed, and he seemed for the moment ashamed of my dilapidated appearance, the eyes of his friends being at the time directed towards us. Having respect for my feelings, however, he said no more there, but led me out to the road, and reminded me of our partnership agreement, and that talking about wages was as good as mistrusting him. The oven he said would be soon finished, and then boots and whatever else was needed I would receive to my heart's content.

Late in the afternoon I returned to the tent, and found the wife sitting pale and trembling, her eyes fixed with evidently unobservant gaze, and her lips twitching nervously apart. As I stood for a moment in the doorway, looking in at her, there fled once and for ever from my mind all doubt of the reality of broken hearts. For such distress I had no consolation adequate, but mute though I was at first and disconcerted, it seemed as if my coming had broken the rigour of her grief. I was sad with very pity for her, and my manner may have revealed that much as I quietly seated myself inside the door. I made an attempt to speak about something I had seen on my way back, but was stopped short by an indescribable working of her features, and while I was yet looking—my half-told story fast dropping out of mind—the tears started to her eyes, and for a few minutes I heard nothing but sobs, the like of which I had never before known. When her grief had somewhat spent itself, she told me I had better leave, or I would be getting into trouble, as Watty was after no good with the men I had seen him with, one of them she knew to be a common thief. After a fresh outburst of crying over her poor infant, she told me further with many an outbreak of shame and sorrow between, that he had brought

this man to the tent for her specially to entertain, and had menaced her with his eye, because she would not, and that she looked for nothing short of death on his return. Her arms encircled her young child, and her eyes were at times bent sadly on its small upturned face as it lay innocently asleep upon her breast.

The day was already near its close, there was barely time to seek out and prepare some sleeping place in the bush, even did I start at once, and the weather was too wintry for an unsheltered bed upon the ground. I had not yet determined what to do, when there came to the door one of five rough looking men who had erected a couple of blankets for a tent early in the day a few hundred yards from Watty's. Being acquaintances of Watty's this was a friendly visit. After a little talk, making known to him my intention of leaving, he kindly invited me to pass the night with him and his mate. I gladly accepted, and left with him shortly after. On getting among my new acquaintances, I found that one of them called Bill, had only the day before returned, the victor in a prize fight at Tarraugower. He was a short but strong and heavy-bodied man, with a dark stolid-looking eye, and very deaf. He no sooner learnt that the little mason was illusing his wife than he swore he would have her from him in the morning. He appeared to have no thought of her objecting to the change; his faith had very likely grown to this assurance by considerable practice in similar disinterested knight-errantry among the distressed wives of the society he moved in. By their conversation I learnt that they were all old convicts, that Watty was one also, and that they were mostly natives of the town of Paisley. One of them had only half served his sentence of seven years in Van Diemen's Land, and had stolen away in a passenger ship bound for Melbourne. On this account he was living as quietly as circumstances would permit. There seemed no lack of money, for liquor was in plenty, and they appeared fond of it. I was luckily in time to hear how Bill had fought and won his battle, in which he had received but little damage. His opponent, a "new chum" fresh from England and conceited with excess of science, had looked on him as an unlearned bumpkin upon whom his subtleties of art would be almost wasted. In part this estimate was right, Bill was brute enough not to see the beauty of the other's fence, and being of the old barbaric school had at once rushed to blows and butt-ocking; feints and manœuvres he snuffed at, and going in straight at his man was ever quickly bringing him to grief. His knuckles were his pride, he had before now driven nails up to the head in pine boards with them, and cushioning one blow upon the new chum's stomach quickly brought to light what he had been eating last and all but broke his back, a feat that he gleefully styled "doubling him up."

It was my general habit to be civil and conciliatory in strange company and I felt no inclination to be otherwise now—whichever way my “fur” was rubbed, I made that the right way, and so succeeded that when bed time came there were two who claimed me to lie next them. Our sleeping place was the floor on a litter of brushwood; each rolled his blanket round about him, but the space was so limited, that one had scarce room to turn without jostling his neighbours. On the one hand I had to fend my face from the long greasy uncombed hair of the Vandiemonian, and on the other from the sour beery breath of Bill’s brother.

Breakfast was scarcely over, when Watty came tumbling in amongst us with an air of muddled defiance, and yet with an evident desire to put himself on the best of terms with us. Slapping as many shoulders as he could well get at, and ruffling one head of hair, by way of provoking the owner to say something pleasant, and failing in his object, the situation was becoming awkward for us all, when the dish of beef and bread from which we had been eating caught his eye. With a “hie Joe reach that dish here, the very thing I wanted,” he took it on his knee, and without uncovering commenced with his knife upon the victuals. Regardless of the coolness apparent in his hosts, he called on one of them for mustard, saying “that beef was nothing without a relish,” then nudged another with his elbow to see if there was any tea left in the billy. Wiping his lips when he had at length taken his fill—and that was not a little—he replenished his pipe with borrowed tobacco, and set himself to talk. He had a perfect command of words, and a pointed manner of expressing himself that readily attracted attention in his more earnest moods, so that the discussion he now entered on soon found interested listeners. He began by drawing a picture of their defenceless condition were misfortune or sickness to come upon them. Pointing to the disordered brushwood of the beds, and the damp dirty looking piles of blankets huddled together at the far end, he painted them lying there through days and nights of sickness, dependent on chance friendships for all those little attentions that a sick man needs, and when he had apparently sobered them to think how it might be thus, he shifted ground, and asked them to look at the men of Manchester and Liverpool, placed in like circumstances with them, but banded together in a common cause against bad times—relieving their needy, and from their mutual sympathy and support, never knowing want, while they of Paisley went their ways in solitary pairs or single tentfuls, stretching no helping hand to save a brother in distress, but with close-fisted narrow meanness, with a single eye to self, leaving fellow townsmen, old schoolmates even, to fight with their troubles as they best could, and drift away on their necessities if they

could do no better. His heart, he said, was pained at the estrangements and cold-shoulderings of those whom a long life of misfortune such as theirs should rather have drawn together in the fellow-feeling of fellow-sufferers—it led him at times, through very shame, to disown being a native of the town that had raised men possessed of so little generosity. The times in short were so grievously hard upon the working man, that with the counsel of a friend he advised the establishing of a fund, from which relief might be given as need required, and contributions from the more successful among the brethren might for this purpose be deposited in the hands of some well known party. As his subject grew upon him, his manner became more earnest, till at the close he bore the look of one ready to sacrifice himself to any extent in the good enterprise; his pipe had gone out in his enthusiasm, his eyes sought to gather the feeling of the company, but a more stolid lot of faces I never before saw grouped together. Vexed by their apathetic treatment of the scheme, he stretched out his hand to them saying “Well now men, how is it to be, for the honour of our town how is it to be,” on which the Vandiemonian broke the spell by crying “to blazes with the town, much reason have we to mind its honour.” The others fell back in a roar of laughter. Watty in a fury dashed his pipe into fragments in the beef dish, and cursing their stupidity hurried from the tent in the direction of his own, the cries that shortly afterwards arose from which made known to us that his gentle partner was expiating our indifference, on which Bill, recollecting his vow of the previous night, to see to her relief, abruptly rose and catching Watty as he was coming out of his own door with the air of a conqueror, thrashed him well, but only with his open hand, for “he never made his hand a fist,” he said, “but when he had to do with men.” The wife cried bitterly when she saw it. It was not likely to help her any, and I could not help thinking that the sight of his suffering under the chastisement reanimated her old abused affection for him into throbs of tender but timid compassion. The weather was stormy and wet, which made me glad to accept my friends’ hospitality for at least twenty-four hours longer. I repaid their kindness by becoming hewer of wood and drawer of water to them.

Towards sundown the Vandiemonian and another who was a barber to trade quarrelled about some trifle. They were both the worse of liquor, but the barber having apparently a little more mind than the other for the liquor to work upon, was the more demonstrative of the two. The others soon interfered to see justice done, but so managed that the disputants saw no other way to get their rights than fighting for them. They set themselves and footed the ground unsteadily for awhile watching for what was

called an opening, but the Vandiemonian being evidently deficient in strategy, went straight to business at once, by lowering his head and rushing with it full tilt upon the barber's stomach, lifting him off his feet, and, as it so happened, sending him sprawling with his back across the great log fire that was blazing opposite the door. He was quickly laid hold of and lifted off, loudly protesting against that manner of fighting, but one of his hands being apparently necessary now for the rubbing of his back parts, he was content with argument for the rest of the battle, and became quite companionable again, on the Vandiemonian informing him that on account of a rupture he could fight no other way.

About two hours after sundown we were all inside, playing at cards by the light of a slim candle, when Watty appeared at the door in company with a tall, robust, rough-bearded and unwashed man, rather past the prime of life, whom he introduced in rather a stiff manner as his friend "Scottie Stratton." They seemed both the worse of liquor, but as regards that, the others were fairly on equal terms with them. My impression was that the mental habits of the company tended little to reflection, and that the things of the passing moment were generally sufficient for their attention, but I detected an air of wariness in Bill, attributing it to his small transaction with Watty in the morning, and to his deafness, which called for the more active use of his eyes. However that may be, room was made for the new comers, and the cards were reshuffled that a new game might be begun to include them. All went well enough for a while, and the bottle passed freely from hand to hand, the absence of a glass obliging them to measure their takings in their mouths. At length a hitch occurred, Watty declared that Stratton was being imposed upon, on which Stratton knocked the candle out, and in the darkness all struggled to their feet. I was farthest from the door, and for a moment thought from the shaking of the tent pole that a fight had commenced upon the spot, and was glad on hearing Bill in the midst of the stumbling and confusion say with steady voice "O, if that's your little game I'm ready for you, come, get outside." A couple of candles were got and lighted. The two men, Bill and Stratton stripped, Bill shorter by a head than the other. The candles glared in the damp breeze, as they were held high above the level of our eyes. The places were taken, the word "all ready" was given, and I heard a rush and the dull sound of blows upon a face, then a lumbering fall upon the ground. Again and again was this repeated, till I began to wonder how much beating it took to kill a man. Stratton's height and length of arm were of no avail against the determined energy of his opponent. I saw the bustling and the rushing leaps; I heard the deep muttered curses of the losing man, and the

shouts and imprecations of the others, and felt as if accessory to a mad revel of damned spirits. Could I have got my blankets out unseen, the dark bush that night would have been my bed. When becoming faint with compassion for the man whose flesh was being so bruised, I heard another fall, followed by a third, and an "ugh" exclamation, that plainly told me the uppermost man had fallen with his knees upon the body of the other, but before I had time to think, there came a succession of mashing sounds that needed no interpretation. Stratton was being beaten on the ground, Bill's blood was up, and had not his fellows rushed in and taken him off, there would have been murder done. Bill was forced into the tent, Watty with difficulty getting his man raised to his feet, staggered off with him, and I saw him no more.

When, after a time, I ventured in among them, the bottle had resumed its work. Bill was singing ballads, and the others were so elated with his fighting merits, that daylight was close at hand before they went to bed—possibly they would not have lain down at all had the liquor lasted. In the morning, after breakfast, I bade them good-bye, and wandered forth, not caring whither. I had now tasted of both frying-pan and fire, and felt truly thankful on finding myself once more breathing the air of solitude among the ranges. The low-toned sighing of the breeze among the branches overhead had a peculiar tranquillizing effect upon my mind, and set me adreaming of things old and new, of home and gold, of my ill-clad feet, and the number of days I could do without food, in the event of falling in with none. I was in the gold country, on the lower ranges of the Pyrenees, from the heights of which it was thought by many the gold found on the flats had been washed down. I had often heard the unlucky joke with one another about the pots of precious stuff yet to be discovered up there on the mountains, their jest savouring of just so much sincerity that I thought want of means alone prevented them from venturing up to seek for those real pots of the molten stuff, of which that found in the valleys was but the boilings over, the mere tricklings from the lips. But what about the quarrying of such blocks? I had no tools; and what about the carrying when thus quarried? While yet discussing these matters, I had almost without knowing it begun the ascent. The extreme summits appeared so near that I thought to reach them in time to return to the plain, if necessary, before sundown. I was charmed with the scenery. The romantic glens and shady recesses among wood and rock, with floor of bright green grass, made me at times linger on the way with what would have been a feeling of true enjoyment had I been less eager about what might be found further on. Now and again I got sight of the plain spread out below, with tents

peeping out among the trees in the neighbourhood of the diggings, and with light blue smoke curling up in many places from fires that, judging by the position of the sun, would soon be engaged with pots and frying pans for dinner. My heart softened at the sight. I felt myself in for a little hardship, but tightening my belt, I resumed my toil, and arguing with as much philosophy as the circumstances allowed, saw no reason to suppose that hunger was different on the hills from what it was on the flats. Upward and onward I sped, not neglectful the while to eye the ground in hopes of seeing something to my advantage. Much rain had fallen previously, and the surface stones and broken quartz were clean and bright, as would also be the case with the projecting knobs of the surface nuggets when I came upon them. After some hours' fatigue, the upper summits appeared but little nearer than at first. I had still hope enough and to spare, however, until brought to a pause on the spur of a high ridge by finding myself separated from them by a deep valley about a mile in width; and I abandoned the attempt on observing that between that valley and the summits lay many another hollow, whose extent I could guess at only from the hazy atmosphere that filled them. I felt as a very atom in the scene. When the sun went down, I made a fire and prepared to pass the night, impressed with a notion that it would be well for me to retrace my steps at daybreak. When I rose with the first light of the dawn, I felt like one who has been in a night-mare, and is unable at first to assure himself it has been all a dream. Recollection coming, I got up and started to regain the beaten road, and falling in with an "old hand" also in search of work, gladly put myself under his guidance. He appeared like one just recovering from a fit of drunkenness, out of patience with himself and everything else. He was very clean, however, and his chin looked as if newly shaved with a dull razor, his nose as if he had been blowing it overmuch, though I could see no handkerchief that he used and his eyes as if he had been recklessly smoking a pipe too short to carry the smoke clear of them. Hunger and fatigue were beginning to distress me, and I felt quite of his humour to talk none but to make the best use of our legs in the hope of reaching the next station before dark. I was the more content to remain silent from observing the irritation the slightest hindrances raised in his mind, on which my air of composure had by no means a soothing effect. I was glad when we reached "The Amphitheatre" sheep station, so called on account of its situation among surrounding hills. A hut-keeper and cook being wanted for a new slaughter-yard at the Avoca diggings, which lay about twelve miles off, I was engaged, and, passing the night in the men's hut, started in the morning to make my appearance on old ground in a new character.

CHAPTER V.

COOK AND HUTKEEPER.

I never had given much of my attention to the art of cooking, and was rather alarmed on finding I would have some seven or eight experienced bushmen to deal with. The first day's bread we had brought with us in the cart, the frying-pan and kettle were to do the rest. The men seemed satisfied with plain things, and the superintendent appearing favourably disposed towards me, I felt less anxious than I had expected on commencing breadmaking on the second morning. I had never baked anything bigger than a three or four pound loaf before, but the process being all the same, I ventured on a stone of flour for this my first professional attempt, and not seeing well how to lay so great a cake of dough in the usual manner among the ashes, a happy idea came to me of cooking it in a large circular camp oven. I got it in very nicely, set the vessel on a bed of red-hot cinders, and heaped plenty of the same upon the lid. In about half-an-hour, I looked within to see how the work was going on, and was glad to see the top hoven up, and as brown as well-baked pie crust, quite tempting to look at. I gave it a few minutes more, to make sure that the heart was reached, and when all was done turned out upon the grass as pretty a loaf as I had ever seen, with a top like a flat dome, and sides as crisp-like as butter biscuit. Setting it upon a stump to cool, I again placed the oven on the fire to bake a leg of mutton, being careful to lay some small lumps of suet on the bottom to prevent burning. Burn it did however; turning it appeared but to present a new face to be charred. I put more suet in, and still no gravy. Dinner time drew near, and I became excited at the thought of the seven hungry men. I sighed, but got no relief thereby, in the certain prospect of being sent about my business for incompetency. The dinner party stopped their work upon the stock-yard fencing and approached. The wind was from me to them, and I noticed one or two looking curiously forward directly after I had lifted the oven lid to get the meat out, and feared the smell was telling tales on me. My hope now rested solely on the loaf. With a subdued air, silent and foreboding, I handed it to one to cut, while I served the tea out. I heard a sound as of some one at the dish that held the dry roast, and a query put, "What's this a piece of," and then a great guffaw of a laugh with "Well done Scottie, will we have to skin you or it I wonder." I turned my head to look and knew not how to shape my excuse, but there was so little sign of anger in the speaker's face that I was encouraged

to tell how the thing had happened with me, and to promise better work next time. A few of the older men grumbled a good deal, and asked what I was good for to do no better than that, but Tom, the young man who had first spoken, rubbed the edge off their comments, and going with me to inspect the oven, found a small crack in the bottom had let the fat out. But hardly had the discovery been made, when a faint crash was heard; the cutter of the loaf had sent his knee through its arched top in setting it bottom up upon his lap. On clearing away the broken shell there appeared a substance "that might be either cheese or grindstone," the man said, "which ever you please, it's heavy enough for the one, and blue enough for the other." Tom laughed as I never saw man laugh before, and said I would be the death of him, if he looked much longer at me. Though very grateful to him for standing between me and harm, I could not see the occasion of his mirth, and for once felt it was not contagious. There being nothing else to eat than the two things I have named, the men did the best they could with them, but Tom, as he was leaving to return to work, told me he was afraid after the "tuck out" that I had given him he would hardly be ready for the next meal, and asked if I had such a thing as a pill or two about me. Before they came back at sundown, I had baked a large flat loaf about the size of an arm-chair cushion, among the hot ashes of the large wood fire—very eatable—but the dough having been rather soft when I slid it from the sheet of bark that served for kneading-board, it had doubled up in places, and had absorbed too many cinders in its bottom crust. I had besides made ready a pile of pancakes, fried in fat, with which Tom fell so much in love that I spared not the frying-pan in maintaining the supply at all the three meals of the day. About the end of a week however, on perceiving he was not eating so freely of them as at first, and was evidently transferring his affections to the loaf, and on finding that they were not altogether agreeing with myself, I made no more.

When I had been about a fortnight thus engaged, the cartman left suddenly, and I was told that I would have to take his place for a day or so. When the information was brought to me, I was busy making ready a dinner that I assured myself would atone for all past deficiencies. All my ingenuity had been expended upon a potful of beef and mutton stew, which was slowly simmering at the fire; the fluid portion had assumed the consistency of jelly, and I flattered myself that great though the quantity was, there would be but little of it left for supper. The cart was got ready with a load for the diggings, and I was hailed to come and take charge of it. A strong breeze was making free with the lighter ashes of

the fire, and the pot had no lid. I was hurried, and a little anxious about how a horse was managed, so that my mind was not altogether with my work. The hail was repeated, this time by the superintendent; the frying pan stood on end against a stump; seizing it I made a lid of it and ran. Shortly after returning, I looked to see how my last production had been relished. The pot stood away from the fire, full as when I left it, cold; and the meat hidden beneath a thick brittle layer of what unmistakeably was mutton dripping. The phenomenon was unaccountable until, to my confusion, I recollected the make-shift lid. I had been using it at breakfast time, and in my haste had forgotten to clean it out. There was very little said to me about it, but on the following morning, on returning from a second journey to the diggings, I found an old man, a stranger, had superseded me. I tried to think that the change from cook to cartman was promotion; but for a time every fresh meal the old man set before us, humbled me into sincere thankfulness for having been spared from going on the tramp again.

A few days after the change took place, a drove of fat cattle, about twenty in number, and the first of our killing stock, arrived under charge of two horsemen from some distant station. Calved and reared at large in the open bush, they were just wild enough to fly either from or at a man on foot, but at the same time so innocently stupid, that a man on horseback might ride in and out amongst them if he but kept quiet, their distinction between friend and foe being apparently ruled by the number of his legs. The animals were too tired to make the first yarding of them difficult. On the following morning, however, when assisting to enclose a few of them in the slaughtering pen, I was made to fear that here might lie the end of my strange pilgrimage. The main yard was about thirty yards square; the twenty bullocks gathered close together about the centre, snorting and pawing the ground as we mounted the high rails and dropped inside. Refreshed by their night's rest, and nimble with hunger, they rushed about seeking some way of escape, now and again crowding into the railed passage leading to the slaughtering floor, which served as an intermediate yard, with slip rails for barring it from the main enclosure, when we had got the animals we wanted in. A rush was made to these slip rails as often as this happened, but as often, for close upon two hours were they hurled from our hands in the act of placing them. The courage and temper of the superintendent were much tried; once I saw him fight his way singly from behind through the angry herd, to help the men who were trying, but again in vain, to close the passage. As the now infuriated beasts ran at us with lowered heads, I was too busy making my own escape

to see how his was made, but I heard some cracks given on a dull sounding body, and seeing him from my perch on the top rail a few minutes after still on the ground, with a light stake in his hand, I felt encouraged next time not to run so readily, and by a little careful observation was by and by enabled to distinguish signs of mischief in the animals from those merely of alarm. By what rule I judged I could not say, but believe the process was much the same as when interpreting the expression of a human face. Once, however, I presumed a little too much on my discernment, and had only time to get upon the top rail with one leg over, when the animal sprang up, and it and rail and I were thrown sprawling on the ground outside. As it did not on the instant run away, I did, as well as a stunned leg would let me.

The weight of the bodies when killed and dressed ranged from eight to eleven hundred weight, and it fell to me as cartman to carry the quarters as they were cut, from the sling bar to the cart, no light task to one who had yet to learn the art of balancing a yielding mass upon my shoulders, and who trusted only in the stiffness of his back. I only dropped one quarter the whole time I was employed in carrying, about six months, but that one was the first I attempted, and unfortunately it fell in the mud. On the second morning after breakfast, the superintendent desired me to make ready to ride the cattle out for a few hours' feeding. It was not for me to say No, but I told him I had not practised any other riding than in a cart, and that I was doubtful he would lose his stock. He poohed at my scruples, saddled a small brown horse that had a character for sobriety and slowness, and mounting it himself, rode after the uncaged animals in their first rush to the water. When they had quenched their thirst, he headed them round to where I stood waiting under cover of a bush, but before I could take his place, they had gone off at a run, and there was nothing for it but to beat them in the race. Never, I thought, had horse flown as mine now did, over holes and stumps with flying leaps, his head erect, and his ears laid back, as if he knew his work, and expected I knew mine. After galloping thus about a mile, we got in front, but could not stop the herd; half a mile more, but still they ran. I was beginning to be alarmed, for they minded me no more than they would one of themselves. At the end of the third mile, however, their pace began to slacken, and shortly after, on reaching a fine grassy bottom, they commenced to feed. It had taken us but a short time to come this distance, but I doubted the like expedition in the return, and consequently got into the saddle again shortly after mid-day to begin it. I had a stock whip with me, the lash of which was about fifteen feet in length, attached to a handle shorter and

smaller than a policeman's baton. I had felt quite unable to use it in the morning's run, but now made bold to try. Throwing the lash out from me, and describing a large oval in the air with the handle end, finishing with a jerk as I had seen the drovers do, I thought to make some of the brown hides smart, but a swing of the tail round to the part touched, was for a while the only answer the phlegmatic brutes would give me, and having to stop the horse at every such attempt, thereby losing much more than was gained, I broke a branch from a tree and rode at them with it determined to bring the matter to an issue one way or another, but on raising it to strike, the horse mistook my intention and shied, nearly throwing me to the ground. I durst not repeat the experiment, but as something had to be done, resumed the whip, and now swinging it round my head, produced after many trials a soft twiney crack, that made my heart leap for very joy, seeing it made the creatures prick their ears, and snuff the wind. The horse stood quiet while I practised, meekly winking his eyes, and appearing to take no offence even when, as often happened, I got the lash entangled about his legs. At last I made a crack that rang like a gun-shot through the woods, and then another. The herd came walking as to a centre; I pricked the horse forward, shouted, and while they were yet on the move, got them headed for home, and giving them no rest, we reached a ridge about half a mile from the yard, with the sun yet a good hour high. But here the superintendent met me mounted on a tall grey horse without saddle. He was out in search of another of the horses that had gone amissing. Seeing me so near home, and all going well, he set me on the bare back of the old horse he had come on, and rode away upon the other. My new seat had a projecting back bone running down the middle, I made the best use I could of my knees to bear my weight, and might thus have saved myself from damage, but just as the yard came into view two diggers on foot appeared. Foreboding mischief I shouted and waved to them to keep away, but they did not understand or would not. The herd caught sight of them, and ran off at a swinging trot across the creek and away up into hilly ground. My knees could no longer support my weight, which at every leap the horse took, came down with cruel effect upon the ridge board I sat astride of. The men jeered and laughed, whistled, and called "Joe, Joe," after me until I was lost to hearing. Darkness was fast approaching, and I was beginning to despair about my work, when the superintendent came riding up, and with a few cracks of the whip, quickly made the animals close their ranks, the rearmost crowding to reach the front, and all at the top of their speed to get out of reach of his anger. I had a tale to tell on reaching the hut, but did not

tell it, though Tom next day let me know in confidence that a plaister of pipe clay was the finest substitute he knew for lost skin.

Next morning at daybreak I was sent with a saddle on my shoulders to bring home the missing horse from the stock yard of an out station about four miles higher up the creek, and in due time was mounted and making my way slowly back along the road. Becoming a little more confident in my seat when about half way home, I applied my single spur with the lightest of touches, and received in return a whisk of the tail across my back. The reply made me hold some little consultation with myself. The animal had turned his head slightly round as if to see what the matter was; his ears seemed fidgetty, and I wondered what that signified, but the pace becoming slower and slower until it came to a dead stop, there was no alternative but to use my armed heel as before. The hinder parts rose on the instant and I was nearly thrown. I was glad to make peace on any terms, and "wood" him quiet. We could not remain standing still however; I geehopped and chirked with my mouth in the style of my predecessor the cartman, but all in vain, until by slapping him with the end of the bridle on the neck, I got him urged forward to where a tree dropped its branches within my reach. I was becoming angry, and might have to ride him often yet before leaving the neighbourhood. Having heard it said, that according as the will of the man or of the horse ruled at the first acquaintance, so was it likely to be afterwards, a now-or-never impulse overrode my fear, and armed me for the battle. He stood peaceably looking back at me as I wrenched a branch off. Giving him one hearty whack with it behind, he winced and shook my feet out of the stirrups, and went off at a hard gallop which was never slackened till I drew him up at the hut door. My face felt rather flushed, and the horse was blowing. The superintendent came out and asked if I had not more sense than to ride a grass-fed horse at that rate. Feeling that sense had very little to do with the matter, I would have justified myself had not Tom at the moment clapped me on the back, and said with a singular grin upon his honest face that I had a very devil in me, if I but knew it. The character suggested in the remark being likely to be more serviceable under existing circumstances than the other that would have been assumed in telling the plain story, I held my peace, but shortly afterwards ascertained from Tom that a horse that has been accustomed only to a riding switch, is apt to misunderstand the meaning of a spur. The adventure seemed to have rid me of my fear. Duty became a pleasure to me when I could perform it in the saddle. The ranges were no longer hills of difficulty when other legs than my own were bearing the fatigue. The risk of losing the direction

in which the hut lay ceased to be a matter of anxiety, when I had the unfailing instinct of my dumb companion to rely on, though once that instinct played me false, by bearing me to the home station at the Amphitheatre, when I meant returning to the slaughter-yard. Night came on shortly after I had slacked the rein to him, and in the darkness I failed to recognise the road that we had struck on until too late. Much hard work previously at the slaughter-yard had, no doubt, much to do with this visit on which he took me to the place where he had been foaled and reared.

Our old cook left, and in his room there came a young man newly arrived from Scotland, whose christian name was David. It took but little time for us to discover in each other kindred sympathies and habits. It was like finding a green place in the desert. Had we been Frenchmen, we might have kissed, and sworn life-long brotherhood, but being creatures of less impulse we merely "hung our harps upon the willows" and mourned over departed joys, and the small prospect at present of meeting new ones. He had been at college, with a view to becoming a minister, but something which he could not well explain had unsettled him, and sent him—here. He talked of books, and was yet so full of the school, that he was often on the floor reciting passages from the classic authors; Greek and Latin seemed to be the languages that best suited him, when the pots and pans did not require his attention. Very companionable, and with an expression of face, that looked somewhat like a sly laugh taking a rest, he had unfortunately become possessed of the idea, that there was no securing personal independence but by keeping strict guard upon the personal dignities. He quickly made himself acquainted with the duties proper of a cook and hut keeper, but beyond these he would not go when the superintendent himself was not concerned. This was soon made plain to his fellow-servants, who thereupon took in hand to correct the evident errors of his education. David was in their mouths at every turn of their leisure in and about the hut. Not a draught of water or light to a pipe was wanted but he was called upon, and as for face washing, there was more of it in a week now than I had seen in a whole month before, for David was the water carrier, and they could not think to see him idle. When there was a sheep to kill no hand but mine interfered to help, for who but David had any business with it. He at length lost heart; I tried to counsel him, but he could not bend, nor could he leave, for he had engaged himself to serve twelvemonths upon the station. The superintendent at last got him removed to a bush hut, to cook and shift the hurdles for two shepherds. In this isolated and lonely situation, without books, and with, in all likelihood, the rudest of society

in the men he shared the hut with, the yet fresh memories he had related to me of his early homes and haunts and his hopeful studies, would begin to burn within him, run in his dreams by night, and waste the vigour of his mind in vain imaginations by day, until the dull routine of his duties saddened him down to passive acquiescence. A few weeks after he left us, I received intelligence from Melbourne that called for my presence there, and never saw him again.

I had not heard from home for about twelve months, and it was by mere chance that a note to me addressed "Post Office, Avoca," came to hand. It spoke of letters and of the arrival of an old friend from Glasgow. I left the slaughter yard on the second morning after receiving the information, and, carrying only a pair of blankets, and a hook pot, with a little bread and tea, started for Ballarat, there to take the coach for Geelong, thence to Melbourne by the steamer, being much too impatient to think of walking all the way, though my pay of thirty shillings a week with rations, could ill afford the expense. My mind running so much on home during my journey down, I looked with somewhat modified impressions on the scenes traversed; they had no longer novelty to recommend them, and I found myself contrasting them with those of the old country. I thought of the old hawthorn hedges there, of the quiet little villages, where, to the passer by, peace and contentment seemed to find a home, and where perhaps, when the children were at school, few were to be seen—an ivy-covered spire, rearing its modest head above the thatched roofs near, with a little graveyard, hallowed to the villagers as the resting place of their dead—every nook and corner associated with some story of the past, almost every house intimately connected with the memories of preceding generations—green lanes and shady walks, where the aged in their feeble rambles find the young following in their early footprints with just such blushing tales of confidence and love, and just such simple-hearted hopefulness, as they can remember of themselves: whereas here, everything in which man has a hand seems new, and hardly finished, the smell of paint and fresh split timber predominant through all, with occasionally a scent upon the air of green-wood fires. Little for the old world superstition yet to fix upon outside of the mind; the few hillocks that have begun to dot a corner of the township must be multiplied—familiar voices must first be missed, and memory dwell upon the bygone years in which they were accustomed to be heard—the living must feel themselves walking near the dead—before those old home impressions about things unseen, that make men grave and uneasy, they know not exactly how, can renew their troubling influence in dreams and times of loneliness. Without local tradition to establish mental

sympathy with the place, and with people of strange dialects and tongues gathering around, the heart may miss much of its accustomed comfort, but there is work to be done, and good reward for it, and while that is being realised, old habits modify, friendships and local interests arise, so that gradually the place becomes to all intents a lasting home.

CHAPTER VI.

MELBOURNE.

Melbourne consists of two portions, older and newer. The former, which grew much slower than the latter, lies between two low, irregular, broad-browed ridges. These are of no great length, and flatten out their south ends on the Yarra-Yarra river which here flows westward in front of them. Elizabeth Street, the main thoroughfare of Melbourne, runs along the bottom of the valley between these ridges, and in line with it is now the highway to the Diggings in the north. The streets, unlike those of the cities in the hot countries of the East, are wide and straight, and run at right angles. This, while affording scope for traffic, is attended with a sacrifice of comfort, as the rays of the sun, reflected from the white plastered walls, and smiting direct upon the surface of the roads, make the feet sweat and burn, while eyes unused to it and perhaps fresh from the green shade of the forest, are oppressed by the constant glare, and in vain seek relief in umbrellas and broad-brimmed hats. The town lies two miles from the shipping direct, or four by the river. The latter has its source in a diminutive spring in the Snowy mountains, about a hundred miles to the eastward of Melbourne. The banks are in general abrupt, and in many places high, and well wooded, with here and there flats and gentle slopes of limited extent occurring. The scenery is picturesque, the foliage diversified. Every short distance presents new combinations of beauty in tree-clad height and hollow, with birds of bright plumage, and schools of chattering parrots on the wing. At Heidelberg, about seven miles above Melbourne, and at intervals along the river side between, small farmers, market-gardeners, and vine-growers have taken possession of the slopes and alluvial bottoms, and brought them under cultivation. In times of drought, when hot winds and clouds of dust come sweeping from the plains, these settlers may congratulate themselves on their situation. They are exposed, however, to danger of

another kind, for the river, slow of descent, winding much, and confined in basin, occasionally fails to carry off the waters poured down during the heavy rains. The bottom lands and lower slopes are then laid fathoms deep under a turbid flood. On reaching Melbourne, an elbow in the course at Richmond, and abrupt projecting banks, a little lower down, in the neighbourhood of the Botanic Gardens on the one side, with trees ranked close along the margin of the other, retard and heap back the waters upon the lower portions of the townships of Richmond and Low Collingwood. Should this occur by night, and the condition of the weather at the time allow it to be heard, the rippling of the current against the angles of the houses which stand nearest to the swelling tide-way, may give early warning to sleepers not too dull to unusual sound, but in places more remote the water surrounds the habitations silently, progressing from fence to door step, from doorstep to hearth, and steals upward on the lighter furniture, and at last with slow oscillating motion, floats it gently off the floor. Were an ear awake to listen, it might now and again hear sounds like half-hushed lisping whispers, when the surface of the deepening pool reaches the lips of empty vessels, and begins to trickle into them; but the slumbering sense is inwardly engaged with the incoherent details of dreams, the filling is accomplished, and the silence that has scarce been broken is resumed. Before the mattresses on which the sleeping inmates lie are reached, some one, more sensitive to cold, or more lightly covered than the others may awaken, and struck by the singular raw-smelling freshness of the confined air, and the strange blackness where before he has been accustomed to see only the varying shadow of the floor, puts his foot or his hand out, in an effort to get up to learn the reason, and so discovers it. Wading may still save them; there is little time for hesitation when life may depend on a few inches more or less of depth on the uneven ground that has to be crossed in the dark to a place of safety.

The flood is released only after passing under and around Prince's Bridge, abreast of Melbourne. It there finds room to spread, upon the wharves and the streets adjoining, on the one hand, and the low marshy ground between Emerald Hill and the town on the other. River and roads, all are alike swallowed up in the wide deluge. A few tree tops and roofs, a frothy swirl above submerged clumps of scrub and tea-tree, with a drifting wreck of wooden houses and furniture, proclaim the extent of the yet uncompleted disaster to the anxious, interested crowds on the heights around. During the heavy rains, all unmacadamized or unpaved roads are reduced to an almost impassable puddle. Elizabeth Street, from its low situation, receives nearly the whole of the surface drainage of the valley slopes, and,

during rain-storms, becomes impassable on foot. One morning during a flood of only ordinary magnitude, I found myself with many others at the crossing of Great Collin Street, cut off from communication with the opposite side, by a torrent that ran leg deep close in by the foot path, while two men were ferrying people across in carts. I never till then had known a man in danger of being swept away and drowned at his very door. This was immediately after a rather heavy and protracted fall of rain, but the capacious causewayed side-channels, and the elevation of the footpath above the level of the road, showed that emergencies of this kind were not unlooked for. It is good to turn from these accidents of situation, to the contemplation of the climate, with its generous salubrity, as exhibited in the fields and strips of garden ground. Vines flourish, and when trained on rods round doors and windows, serve at once for ornament and shelter from the sun.

The scarcity of houses that followed the sudden increase of the population, led the Government to apportion a piece of Reserve ground, near the south end of the bridge, whereon tents might be erected. At the time of my arrival, about twenty families were so housed, some of them looking as if they thought they had left home truly, and were in the wilderness. Their firewood was scarce, and their hearth on the hill side, their couch a brush bed on the ground, and the candle after nightfall revealing unpleasantly their every movement by the shadows on the cloth walls. In the course of a walk through, I came upon a few loose branches, and a blanket thrown over them as if to dry. I heard a mumbling of voices, but was at a loss to know from what quarter, till something round dimpled the blanket from underneath. There was life there—I was looking on the roof of a house. A laugh, and more dimpling as if by elbows and hands, then a merry commotion, during which the roof fell in, and disclosed the inmates—two beardless youths—reminded me as I walked away, while they were disentangling themselves from the ruins, that happiness is not dependent on outward circumstances, else these two, without a pillow or a dish, save one ship hook-pot, and with the rain sapping its way under them down hill, and gathering in the hollows of their knee-high ceiling, to be dislodged by an upward punch of the hand when found to drip too fast, would have been too serious for such exercise of limb, as revealed their state to me.

On the northern or Melbourne side of the river, a vacant piece of ground fronting the end of Elizabeth Street, came somehow into use as a ready off-hand market place, where the needy might dispose of their spare clothes, and such things as guns and pistols, razors, watches, trinkets, books, chests &c. Symptoms of feeling and of sadness were observable now and then in

those who were thus engaged, but in no instance so very plainly as in that of a man well up in years, decently but humbly dressed, who was offering for sale a fishing-rod, a fiddle, and two walking sticks. When I approached he was seated on the shafts of a loose cart; he had perhaps grown weary waiting, and had taken the fiddle up, and was softly playing a sweet simple air. His eyes were bent upon the ground, and his body drooped like one whose thoughts were elsewhere than with the scene around him. A very little girl, who had no doubt grown weary too, was standing by his knee, just old enough to know, on being told, that the things were to be sold, if any one would buy them, but too young to have any memories associated with the instrument that was deepening the father's melancholy reverie. Eagerly she eyed those loitering past, in the hope of some one stopping to look at the slender stock; her young simple face expressive of wonder and disappointment, and, I thought, of hungry wistfulness, as she saw her father's neighbours getting money and he none. I never think of him but my heart reproaches me for leaving without speaking, but I was then too poor to help him much, and more than likely the story of the past that seemed revisiting his mind was incommunicable to a stranger, while such words as he might have spoken, failing to embody the dejection visible, might possibly have weakened the impressions already made by making his case seem only common after all.

The market increased in importance. The articles at first had been exposed on boxes and chest lids, and in umbrellas opened and inverted, or on the ground, but as trade grew brisker, tables and light stalls were brought by those who, on making a good beginning, had commenced to buy the stocks of others, and adopt the business regularly. Jews were very numerous in the town, their faces began to appear among the throng, the trade was quite in their way of life, and they soon expanded it to such an extent, that a removal to more roomy quarters became necessary. Two unoccupied building-sites, one in Great Bourke Street, East, and the other in Great Collin Street, West, received them. Open-fronted frame tents, and light temporary wooden shops were raised, and the character of the business so changed from its recent humble original, that a poor dealer with a box, or a yard of bare ground only, for the exhibition of his wares, must have felt like a vagrant on forbidden ground.

The community of tents at the bridge end, which latterly was known by the name of Canvas Town, met eventually with a somewhat different fate. In Melbourne, house rents were high, and the place being of easy access from the town, many workmen were induced to make their homes there; and, stretching calico on light spar frames, with a calico door framed on

hinges, a turf fireplace and chimney at the end, they were enabled to live comfortably enough in mild weather. Men with small means—builders in the first stage of development—erected such places, and let them by the week. Small shops were opened; hand-printed cards, announcing that tailoring or cobbling was done within, began to appear, pasted to the sides of doorways, with perhaps a pair of newly-mended boots, or a small sheet of square cloth patterns. Before long, jobbing carpenters and coopers found they need not cross the river, or go to the adjoining townships in search of work, when the want of benches and stools and water-barrels increased with the growing inclination of their neighbours to settle permanently. Habitations that in the beginning of the week had stood alone, would before the close have become hemmed in all round by a crowd of new erections. The buzz of life grew louder, and the hillside began to be trodden bare by the increasing multitude of feet. Tents where, on a stall before the door, a modest trade in harmless effervescing drinks had been established, began, as the neighbourhood became more populous, to outgrow their early humility, and aspire to stronger liquor; the painted sign-board was set up, the wings of the establishment spread out, and nightly from underneath came sounds of clamour and reeling men, who, jostling and rubbing their way home along the frail cotton walls, indenting the thin fabrics with staggering thrusts of their numb elbows, made the place no longer habitable for the timid or the weak. Lying beyond the city limits, the police had hitherto left the inhabitants to their own care and keeping. This suited well the tastes and habits of many about town, who, for reasons understood by the police, but better known to themselves, gladly took the opportunity to escape from observation, and came and settled down on the hill-side amongst the unsuspecting tent-dwellers. Cries of distress, however, began to be too common in the neighbourhood of the bridge after dark, for this their retreat long to escape public notice. Every morning came fresh reports of robberies and personal ill-usage, blows struck from behind putting it past the power of the victims to say or know more than that the thing was done. Policemen were set to patrol the district, but they only shifted the crime from a centre to outlying roads and pathways. The ground the tents stood on formed part of a Government Reserve. The people had been allowed to settle on it only to meet a temporary want of more regular accommodation, but, as they increased in number, the opportunity for trade had induced many from choice to set up business among them in the hope of Government yielding to the claims of vested rights and occupation, and allowing them to buy the ground for the permanent formation of a township. It was agreed that were this done, substantial

buildings would quickly take the place of the existing motley and camp-like assemblage of canvas coverings, but the authorities appeared to think that lawlessness had struck too deep root to be so easily eradicated, and shortly before my return to town, gave orders for the whole to be cleared away. The Brighton road now sweeps over the silent site.

CHAPTER VII.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE.

I had not been long in town before I experienced the feverish discomfort of a sand-storm, known by the familiar name of "a brickfielder," and happily not more frequent than great storms in England. The weather had been extremely hot for two or three days, with a thirsty breeze coming from the parched plains of the interior, the sky became of a dirty light drab colour, and the dust, heat-dried and light, began to be whirled about in columns taller than the house tops. Woe to the wayfarer when the road proves too narrow to admit of an escape. Let all who can, seek shelter, for the columns begin to take the form of clouds; close doors and windows, stuff chink and crevice, cover beef, bread, butter, everything that will not bear the duster, for we begin to have it thick and fast. The air is darkened by the multitude of atoms borne along in it, to a height above the steeple tops. All traffic in the streets has ceased, no sound from without is heard but the rushing wind and the hailing of the larger particles upon the panes, while the finer grains come spueing through the seams like thin grey smoke. From the highways on the windward side, dust, sand, and leaves, drifting in thick volume come pouring like a torrent in upon the devoted city, burying it in a cloud so dense that the thickest mid-day fog of England does not produce a greater darkness within doors. The closed houses become like heated ovens, the butter that has been covered up loses its form and begins to spread itself along the bottom of the dish, the shirt that in the morning was stiff with starch, now hangs wet and clinging to the shoulders of its owner, while the head that has to wear a hat heavier than the lightest straw, escapes delirium only by such perspiration as puts the covering out of shape, and brings it slipping down about the brows. Those unhappy ones whom necessity has compelled to be outside have their sweated faces so begrimed, that without the aid of the voice it were difficult to recognise them, eyes, nose, and mouth being caked with the grit, and

their clothes of one even dusty hue, with every lurk and fold laden so that the cloth itself is hidden. In the streets not a stone or wall but the dust has gathered in wreaths round its leeward angles, ready for a new flight on a change of wind. Before that could happen on the occasion that I speak of, a copious shower of rain fell, and transformed it into mud. The gale as usual, lasted only a few hours, and ceased shortly before sunset. Several of my new acquaintances, about the time it reached its height, had crept underneath the bedsteads, in the hope of the floor there being less heated than that in the full light of the windows. This being their last resource, and it failing them, they began to curse the country for being nothing better than a dust-bin, and were answered by a hollow groan from the fire place, from a youth who, for coolness (which he was not finding) sat in it with his head a full foot up the chimney. After sundown, however, the fierceness of the heat abated, the rain clouds came, the dust was laid, and the clear air made soft and pleasant, and, as we stood grouped under the verandah a little before bed time, we were led to confess that either our senses were very grateful for relief, or there was something in an Australian summer night that was peculiarly enjoyable now that the rain had gone and a light wind was coming sighing from the forest, smelling fresh and sweet, as if earth and leaf were yielding their fragrance to its healing breath.

The acquaintances I have mentioned had but newly arrived from Ballarat, each with about fifteen hundred pounds' worth of gold. Immediately previous to bottoming their claim, their prospects had looked desperate. They had spent their all in the sinking of the shaft, which was 150 feet deep, and slabbed from the surface to the bottom. The gutter in which the gold lay appeared, by the signs of business above ground along a wavy line of claims, to be taking a course outside of theirs, but, on bottoming within one or two feet of the given depth, they had driven downward on the slope of the bottom bed, with anxious, hopeful haste, and found the gutter had taken one of its uncertain turns and traversed one side of their claim for a length of twenty feet. It was but little sleep they got until they had all removed and washed, and safe in the hands of the commissioner. They were all of them seamen, and all single men. Happening to live under the same roof with them, it was occasionally my fortune to hear them discuss their adventures of the past night, in places and with people regarding whom Solomon has left us much solemn warning. After a time, their pleasure palled on them, they wanted change, and went to Geelong, leaving the house quiet and orderly as it had been before. On the third day, however, two of them returned for a further supply of money, and, observing mysterious but evidently deeply conscious silence regarding their

intentions, quickly disappeared again. Four days later, on entering the house in the early evening, I found these two sitting with two well-dressed strangers in serious consultation with the landlady. The strangers were their wives, for a double marriage had taking place during their brief absence. The conversation was somehow far from brisk; the new husbands were beginning to get sober and reflective, which they had never fairly been since they struck the gold four weeks before. One of the wives I would say was aged, but the other was very young, with a simple-hearted cheerful look about her, that seemed likely to make her sailor husband Peter, take kindly to the fireside when he got one for her to sit down by; but so busy had he been in getting married, the idea of a house being needed to put her into had not until now come under his consideration. He had never been very fastidious about a bed, or who shared the room with him, if they kept quiet when he wanted sleep, and he seemed willing to wink at trifles now, but the house being a bachelor's home, he was over-ruled, and was glad of my company in his search for other quarters down about Low Collingwood. His comrade, whom he had led almost against his will into this nice dilemma, appeared with mysterious suddenness to have fallen into meek subjection to his late spinster's wishes. He prepared to go along with us, she did the same and at the first turning, making some slight excuse about there being a double chance if we separated in the search, she led him off, he looking much like one who has been asked to accompany a policeman to the station, when he would rather not. Peter was at a loss what to make of her proposal; he was hardly prepared to be thus thrown upon his own resources in the new and untried life, and as she nodded back to him across her shoulder as they walked away, he quietly confessed himself "done brown," and scratching his head with an outwitted air said "he had never been left with so much slack in his hand before." We wandered up and down through many streets, finding plenty of lodgings for single men, but none for wives. At last in one of a detached row of newly erected wooden houses, we found a family who made no positive objections. Tired with repeated failures, Peter thought to overrule any little scruple they might have, by saying that the price was no object with him, but this, together with the absence of anything very husband-like in his air or manner, awakened suspicion that caused the young housewife to send for her father to have some talk with us, but the addition of three shillings to the twelve that had been at first named for the week removed the difficulty. We were then asked to look at the accommodation. Peter replied that it was no matter, he supposed it was all right, but followed me as far as the room door, and turning his head right and left, said it would

do as well as the very best. For floor there was the bare earth, with a few tufts of withered and foot-trodden grass, and with a plentiful sprinkling of wood shavings, chips and sawdust, which of course would be broomed out before Peter with his wife returned to take possession; the bedstead was made of wood with the bark still on it, if what was seen of the low post feet told a true tale; there was a small table made of an old chest lid, with four slim new legs; a broken looking glass, one chair, a long stool, and nothing more. The family seemed personally decent, and Peter's money would no doubt help them to complete their furnishing, but he remained with them only a few days.

He had no notion of the use his money might be put to. He saw no call for distressing himself with work when he had so much in the bank, but to occupy some of the time that would otherwise have hung heavy on his hand, he bought a horse and dray, always drawing upon his capital when his earnings were deficient, until at last, but not till after I had left the colony, his capital became so small that he banked it in his pocket. His married comrade not having been so left to his own guidance, is now living in comparative independence, and having had to forsake the company of his old associates, his manner towards them so betrayed obedience to a resolution that was not his own, that out of consideration for him, they gave over troubling him, but not before one of them was treated by the wife to an unsolicited opinion of him and his confederates, too near the truth for repetition to be desirable. Previous to the visit to Geelong, Peter and the young woman whom he married were perfect strangers to each other, but discovering they were from the same small town in the north-east of Scotland, they appeared to think it recommendation enough, and quickly came to their agreement. The other two had been slightly acquainted years before; a good idea of the value of money on the one side, and the excitement of drink on the other, brought them to conclusions with Peter's help, Peter disliking to get married alone.

About the time of the marriages, another seaman, a fellow townsman of the bridegroom's, came to town for a few weeks to recruit from the fatigue of twelve months' constant labour at the diggings. He told no one what success he had met with, but from his manner on being questioned, it was judged he had got enough to satisfy him for the present. He was known by the name of "Roddie." He was bald, but liked not to be told so, and when his age was spoken of had ever the same answer, that he could lead some of us young men a dance we durst not follow him in, he was not so old but he could do that—in fact he was not old at all. The case of his friends causing marriage to be talked of, we affected to think he would greatly

consult his own interest and comfort by marrying some one to take care of him in his declining years, but, winking slyly, he said he knew a great deal too much for that, he had not been born with a fool's hood on his head. It so happened however that a young woman in service in the neighbourhood, came on a visit to the landlady, one evening when Roddie was at home. She was about half his own age, stout, not very good-looking, and rather grey in the skin, but with no airs about her, and, as far as we could see, not likely to object to become "Mrs Roddie." We did our best to raise a flame, but Roddie would not burn, though as he seemed not to fret under our very plain attempts, we persevered from time to time, but ever got the same sly wink and the remark that "he knew too much for that." At length, however, the landlady, in confidence, showed us some manuscript poetry, the production of her friend, whom she familiarly called "Peggy." The rhyme was very middling, and not well measured; the sentiment was of love, and was very serious and simple. In due time, Roddie was given the luxury of a reading in our absence. On our return we found him spelling his way through it for the third time. Our opinion being asked, we proved more amiable critics than young poets generally meet with, but were careful not to say too much, and lest we might, we shortly began to talk of something else. Before bed time the landlady asked him for the paper, but he seemed reluctant. She begged it of him, and put out her hand to take it, on which he put it in his pocket. She implored him to return it to her, as she was afraid if Peggy knew she had been showing it, she would never visit her house again, but Roddie was not to be moved, and ended the matter for the present by telling her to let Peggy know that he wanted to get the verses off by heart. Our help was but little needed after this, the poetry had done the business. He began to visit her, and was every now and again bringing some new verses to delight us with. Sitting down by another young man and me, his heart swelling with feeling to big for him to hold it all, the act of letting loose the excess threw him into raptures that were sometimes too plainly honest for amusement to be drawn from them. Not an expression of hers the least uncommon, but was repeated to us, not a trait observable, but was made the subject of a long warm discourse. Her life however being rather commonplace, there were visits made in which nothing really novel or out of the ordinary course came to the surface, however much they helped to confirm their growing sympathy. He maundered considerably after these seasons of level happiness, and made us at times wish he had her and was done with it, but, though inclined enough to talk, he had not quite yet reached the marrying emotion. It took him some weeks to do that, and a lot of

new poetry descriptive of the married state had to be written before he did. I happened to be at a distance when the wedding took place, so was not there to see, but learnt that it had been a grand affair. Neither of them having any friends, at whose house to celebrate the event, he hired a tavern in Little Bourke Street, and kept open house to all comers. All went well until near midnight, when the general public, who were being treated so handsomely withal in the lower rooms, moved by a very natural desire to see their benefactor, went in a crowd up stairs, and unceremoniously ushering themselves in among the marriage guests, had all quickly in an uproar. Roddie was not sure about this behaviour being quite proper, but feeling powerless to command the storm, and much too happy at heart for outside disturbance to disquiet him greatly, he calmed the commotion in Peggy's breast, by telling her the men meant no harm, it was just a way they had, it would all come right enough. Distrusting them, however, he saw reason to retire with Peggy shortly after the irruption, but being quickly missed, and followed, their bedroom door was forced, and the old and unseemly custom of "bedding" was observed, with just such ruthless barbarity as might have been expected of drunken men. They thronged the room—they crowded upon the bed. Roddie besought and prayed they would "give over," but his bald head had no reverence in their eyes, and got many a slap as he was told to hide it beneath the clothes, and not till Peggy cried and wailed as if her heart would break, could the room be cleared.

I heard of them afterwards living on the diggings, he so proud of her that he had committed to her care the management of all his movements and concerns, and was thriving none the worse for having done so. He had before been only a single unit in the crowd, herding and shifting with it undistinguished, but now he had got both name and habitation. Friends came to visit him, and, under his hospitable roof, enjoyed cheerful home-like hours, that my own experience taught me must have been precious to humble unmated wanderers, laying on their minds impressions then little heeded, but destined to exercise, it might be, unmeasured influence, when time and circumstances, and the heart unsatisfied, would cause them to lean their heads upon their hands, and run back among the memories and shifting homeless scenes that seemed to be repeating themselves without end.

There were too many seeking clean-handed occupation for one to be readily successful, and I was thankful at last on getting employment as yard-hand in a small brewery, at two pounds a-week, out of which went about sixteen shillings for provisions, which I had to buy and cook myself. For the better protection of the property, I required to sleep upon the pre-

mises at one end of a low wooden shed, lumbered with bags of corks and bottle racks. The situation, close to the depot for Government emigrants at the west end of Little Collin Street, was lonely. The time was winter, so that, as my work was limited to daylight, I had long nights of leisure; and being very content with books for my companions, I read much, and I look back upon the quiet enjoyment so derived under the peculiar circumstances with subdued but not sorrowing remembrance. The wind whistled and wailed about the frail erection, and whirled the rustling straw about the yard, as I sat with my feet to a small pan of glowing wood—the feeble rays of the small yellow candle barely lightening the box-like darkness round about, and bringing a dreary feeling creeping over me, that occasionally, before I had got quite accustomed to the singular distinctness of sounds heard by night, caused me to see shapes in shadows, and hear fingers as it were feeling for the latch.

There were many places of amusement in town at this time, though not so many as now. The one that most attracted me was at the head of Great Bourke Street, East, an old circus transformed into a promenade concert room, where, though the assembled company might not be strictly select, the music was. My visits there, however, seemed but to make my loneliness at home more dull. To save me from rats, and to serve in some way for a companion, a dog was given me, a melancholy-looking animal, short-haired, with brown spots on a white ground, and with a tail about the length of my fore-finger. He cowered and trembled, and seemed ever so ready to run out of the way into a corner, when I moved or rose from my seat after a short stillness, that, apart from the effect of strangeness in me and in the place, I saw he had been unkindly treated in his youth. The place swarmed with rats; they clambered up and down the walls, and, gnawing their way into boxes, made sorry work with my provisions, and when my blankets happened to hang down from the "stretcher" on which I slept, they over-ran myself as if not satisfied with the provisions only. One night I was awakened by one with its fore-feet in my whiskers, and its nose dotting cold points upon my cheek. The dog lay alongside within reach of my arm, sound asleep and snoring. I called him while the enemy was yet audibly scampering under cover, but he did not understand, and only licked my hand as if in humble appeal to me not to beat him, he had not been guilty of anything he knew of. I felt angry, and, by a cuff, was about to let him know it, when my uplifted hand was rendered powerless by the recollection of something that happened on the previous day, in which, had cuffs been a meet reward for neglect of duty, I would have had one; the tongue gave another lick, and followed the retreating hand with

more. The poor animal whimpered and rose with his fore-feet on the bed, and licking my face, as good as asked me what I wanted with him. I would rather he had remained dull and stupid on the ground, for I was troubled at the contrast between his conduct and my own, and lost some sleep by thinking over it.

My work, consisting mainly of bottle and brew-cask washing, lay outside in the cold wintry weather. There was too little bodily exercise in it to keep one warm. Much rain fell, the unpaved yard was miry, my feet and legs became wet and clogged with clay, and the loose bag on my shoulders failed to keep my body dry. My thoughts began to turn upon the better life I had forsaken in the old country—began, upon reflection, to fancy myself a worse man than then, not so God-fearing, ruder in feeling, and unable to see harm where before harm was plainly visible. Old attachments that I thought forgotten began to win their way back to my heart. Recollections of old office-mates, and of my race with them for preferment mingled with the rest, and made me restless. After losing close upon three years, was it possible to overtake them now? I felt the spirit moving that would try, but for some time hesitated at the thought that, once returned, I might find my chances marred, without the easy alternative of such humble occupation as this with the brewer. Balancing the arguments in my mind, while picking my steps through the thinnest of the mud, I observed my poor dog following me wistfully about, his tail down, his legs bent under him, his body arched, and plainly shivering with cold. I stood and looked. Drooping his head he crept closer to me, looked pitifully up, and, wiping his nose with his ever-ready tongue, gave a low trembling whine that seemed the nearest thing to a cry I had ever heard from a dog. He tried to reach my hand, and, forgetting for the moment where he stood, dipped his tail into the mud in an offer to sit for a more upright look at my sympathizing face. I felt it was good for neither of us to be there. In his unhappiness, I saw as it were my own reflected. He tipped the balance in favour of old home, but, poor fellow, in doing so he lost a friend.

iii.

first and only sight of the kind I ever saw, and for a while it infused great zeal into me.

The sinking at Ballarat requires capital, the shafts being from 120 to 180 feet deep. For the Quartz reefs, crushing mills with steam power are necessary. Many of the workings are held by companies, who hire men at a daily wage to do the labouring work. For an ordinary shaft aiming at the gutter, eight men form a common complement. Of these, two may be occupied in cutting and preparing slabs for the lining of the shaft, two below, two at the windlass, and the other two pumping the water out, and acting as reliefs, but sometimes the eighth man is employed as cook and hutkeeper for the party. These numbers vary according to the capacity of the men for work, and the greater or less hurry to get to the bottom, or, when there, to get the gold they may have come upon cleared out.

The price of provisions in the older diggings, before the railway connecting them with town was made, varied according to the weather and the state of the roads. When we first arrived at Bendigo, flour was selling at £100 per ton wholesale, and what came nearer our mark, 1/3 per pound retail, equal to nearly £180 per ton; salt and sugar alike 2/ per pound; tea 3/6; mutton 4/ and 5/ a quarter. In the remote diggings at the present day, similar high prices rule the market in rainy seasons, and will continue to do so, till either railways are made to them, or the highways are macadamised.

ERRATUM.

In a portion of the impression, page 8, line 4, read:—"In the case of gutters, only the holes that struck upon the line were profitable, but the line was generally so uncertain," &c.







