BUSH-LIFE IN QUEENSLAND

OR

JOHN WEST'S COLONIAL EXPERIENCES

BY

A. C. GRANT

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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TO

MY BELOVED MOTHER

WHO AT AN ADVANCED AGE CROSSED THE SEAS TO
ASSIST HER SONS IN SUBDUING THE WILDERNESS,
AND IN REMEMBRANCE OF
HER DEVOTION, COURAGE, AND STEADFASTNESS
IN EVERY TRIAL AND DIFFICULTY,
THIS BOOK
IS DUTIFULLY INSCRIBED.

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BUSH-LIFE IN QUEENSLAND.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN WEST SETS OUT ON HIS TRAVELS.

The good ship Marie Hamilton, an Aberdeen clipper, 700 tons burthen, bound for Sydney, is forging her way down the Channel with a fair wind in her top-sails. The pilot has gone on shore, and with his departure the last adieu to England has been spoken. The green slopes of Sussex are sinking over the quarter. Beachy is already behind, and it is doubtful if the passengers can catch the Needles before nightfall. Most of them are too full of the parting to speak much. Remembrances of friends left behind crowd their memories, and the receding shores give a point to the poignancy of their parting regrets. To-morrow it will be different, when there is only the wide sea to greet the eye on coming on deck. Then men's

minds must turn perforce to the new land whither Fortune has beckoned them with smiles that, in too many cases, may turn out to have been delusive. Then the life of the voyage will have begun: friendships will be formed, the seeds of enmities sown, and the social organisation of the floating microcosm will enter upon its three months' course of development.

John West leans over the side; and as the lights fade in the loom of the darkening coast, his whole life seems to come up before him and fade also into the past. He thought of the fond mother who had been called away too soon, before she could see her boy ripening into manhood; of the father whose naturally feeble constitution had scarcely rallied from the shock of his wife's death, but whose tender affection and care had been exerted to their utmost, so that John might never feel his loss. Though of a good family, the Rev. Ambrose West had been only a poor curate in a manufacturing town, who had all his life to struggle with poverty, and who had been indebted for the means of giving his son a good education to the bounty of a female relative, who had accidentally seen the handsome young lad, and had bequeathed his father, in trust for him, a sum of £1500. How he might best turn this legacy to his boy's account was a thought ever present in Mr West's mind; and his anxiety was quickened all the more by a consciousness that his

own end was rapidly approaching. That his son should not have to live like himself—a penniless scholar—he was determined; and his acquaintance with an old schoolfellow who had made a fortune in Australia led him to think of a career in that country for John. This gentleman, Mr Cosgrove, who at first had been inclined to throw cold water on the clergyman's scheme, readily undertook to be John West's patron when he heard that the lad would have some small capital to invest in the colony.

"Australia is the finest field in the world for a young man with a little money," Cosgrove had said with enthusiasm. "You buy your sheep or cattle, travel them on to a magnificent country, lease it from the Government for a mere trifle, and in a few years your sheep and cattle will have multiplied six or eight times over, and you are a made man. Mere accumulation will make you rich. You live the life of a prince,—out on the green downs all day, riding through the forests, and home at night to your comfortable bunk, turn in, and you sleep like a top."

This prospect did much to reassure Mr West of his son's future, and he could look forward to the end, which was now close at hand, with a feeling of more cheerfulness. There were many points in Mr Cosgrove's character that did not recommend themselves to Mr West; but he could make allowances for his

neighbour's roughness and vulgarity, as the crust under which lay a spirit of honesty and fair dealing. When Mr West died, John was scarcely seventeen, and he at once passed under the guardianship of Mr Cosgrove. Neither John West nor his father had much knowledge of Mr Cosgrove's colonial career, or of the way in which he had accumulated his fortune. But while John is thus leaning over the side of the Marie Hamilton watching the night settle down upon the bank of gloom which is all that is by this time left of the English coast, we shall give a few particulars regarding the man who is now our adventurer's guardian.

Mr Cosgrove had, as a boy, been a schoolfellow of Mr West, and had gone out to California when the discovery of gold first attracted a rush of emigration in that direction. He had made money, but had been victimised by a partner of superior cleverness if not of more honesty than himself. Attracted by the glowing accounts of the wealth of New South Wales which followed the famous discovery of gold by Hargraves in that colony, Cosgrove was next drawn towards this new El Dorado, taking with him about nine hundred pounds—the proceeds of his Californian enterprise. In the new colony his previous experience stood him in good stead; and after engaging in many operations of land-jobbing, money-advancing, and other dealings

of doubtful character, he soon found himself fairly on the road to wealth. He had married meanwhile; but his wife had died and left him with one son—a boy called Ralf; and soon after, Cosgrove once more looked around him for a mate by whose means he might manage to raise himself another step in the social ladder.

His choice fell upon a young widow lady of good family though rather slender means. Her husband, a young and promising Government official, had been accidentally killed by a fall from his horse, leaving his young wife and her little girl Ruth, an infant in arms, to make the most of the small sum he had been able to save. She was received in the best society which the capital of New South Wales afforded; and in marrying her, the wily squatter looked forward to a more extended field of labour than he had as yet been able to operate upon. His wealth, address, and rather presentable appearance, procured for him a favourable termination to a suit which, as far as the poor lady knew, she had every reason to regard as a desirable one, but which could only have an unfavourable ending. Not long after the marriage, he induced through his wife, a cousin of hers, a young man of considerable wealth, to emigrate to Australia. Cosgrove had shortly before this sold his original property and bought another, much larger, chiefly on bills, his

money having been mysteriously disposed of, no one knew how. His name could have procured advances from the banks to an almost indefinite amount. He had laid a trap for some one, and his wife's cousin walked into it as soon as he was asked.

Greed of gold, and Cosgrove's specious arguments, induced him to place a large amount of cash in the farmer's hands as part payment of a half-share in the station, which had never been paid for; and the utterly inexperienced one hugged himself in the expectation of untold wealth. To his intense astonishment, he was awakened from this delusion about a year afterwards by his partner, who coolly announced himself a ruined man; and finished up by informing him that he could not meet his bills—that the mortgagees had foreclosed, and were now about to take possession. The unsuspecting youth at first thought a joke was intended, and some time elapsed before he actually realised the ghastly truth.

"Do you mean to say that the station was not yours when I bought half of it?"

"Well, it was mine to a certain extent. I bought it on advances from the banks, hoping to clear off the debt by degrees. Depreciation in wool, interest and compound interest, have not only prevented that, but it has put me some thousands in debt; and as I told you, the mortgagees are sending up to take possession."

"But they shan't get possession," returned the young man, alarmed and growing angry; "I own an interest in the property. I won't be swindled out of my money. Let them pay that back to me, and I'll go. I hold your bond of partnership. I dare them to set foot on the place while I am here."

"Listen," said the other; "you had better destroy that little paper."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I shall publish it in every newspaper. Though you have married my cousin, I'll proclaim your treachery everywhere. I'll——"

"Hold on," rejoined his quondam partner, serenely surveying his victim; "I have no money—overdrawn my account long ago—every one knows that. I owe about £10,000. The mortgagees are willing to give me a clearance when I give up the station. Should it come to their ears that you are my self-acknowledged partner, you will find yourself compelled to pay the remaining money you possess into their hands to liquidate my debts. Now hold your tongue, and burn your bond—first loss is best loss."

The force of this argument struck the dismayed young man so strongly, that, feeling himself quite helpless, though raging inwardly, he submitted to his fate.

Cosgrove retired for some time into private life,

but before long emerged again, brighter and evidently richer, as the possessor of a station in the more northern portion of New South Wales, which subsequently came to be known as the colony of Queensland.

In his new property he may be supposed to have succeeded; for on his return to England, after the death of his second wife, whose gentle heart had never been able to get the better of her husband's unscrupulousness, he was apparently a wealthy and prosperous gentleman. In Mr Cosgrove's house John had spent a few weeks after his father's death, and had learned to like Ruth—who had all the sweetness and affection of her mother's character—and to thoroughly detest Ralf, who, to a naturally vicious disposition, developed among the rough characters of a bush-station, had added still more objectionable qualities, caught up from the society of stable-helpers and betting-men, since his arrival in England. John West's intercourse with the young Australian had been far from pleasant, and he had had on one occasion to enforce good manners upon him by a sound drubbing. But Mr Cosgrove was anxious that he should start; and the days of mourning were scarcely accomplished when John found that his passage had been taken on a Sydney ship; and he himself was hurried off, in company with his dog Spot—the gift of a lad

who was Ruth's groom, and whom John had protected at his own personal peril from the tyranny of her brother. He was furnished with a letter to Mr Cosgrove's superintendent at Ipswich, in Queensland, and with a draft, payable to himself, on Messrs Bond and Foreclose, Mr Cosgrove's agents in the capital of New South Wales. As for his money, Mr Cosgrove had undertaken to invest the sum in the way most profitable for giving him a start when he had learned his duties.

And so John looked over the side of the Marie Hamilton, and thought of his dead father and of Ruth, to whom he felt all the fervour of a boyish attachment, and of Cosgrove and Ralf, of the old life that he was leaving, and of the wonders of the new world that was before him, until the light was swung from the mast, and the watch was set, and passengers were beginning to go below and make for their berths. The wide ocean was around, night was above, and Old England was now far away on the lee.

CHAPTER II.

ON BOARD THE MARIE HAMILTON.

The chief mate of the Marie Hamilton was a hearty, coarse, pushing man, and a good sailor. He soon put John in the way of getting things in order, and managed, as there were not many passengers, to let him have a cabin to himself; and he also extended his protection to Spot, for which John was very grateful.

How new were these experiences! how many things were to be learnt! Everything he saw filled him with surprise; and next morning John, who had never lived on the sea-coast, was aghast as he watched the active sailors swarm up aloft and shake out the white sails. There was a stiff breeze blowing, and poor John experienced all the customary sensations.

He lay aft, dreadfully sick, and could not be prevailed upon to move. The sailors, who every now and then came aft in a party to haul on the braces as the ship was put about, walked over him, but he did not mind it. One of them drew him a little on

one side, but it was like moving a corpse—in fact, John would not have minded being a corpse just at that moment. The steward had been up several times with offers of food, which his soul abhorred, and now brought round a blanket with which he covered the wretched youth. The warmth did John good, and towards midnight he managed to crawl down and get into his bunk. In a few days, however, these feelings were a thing of the past, and the warm, sunny skies began to exercise their genial influence on our young traveller. How delicious to move about in the month of January with summer clothing; to bask in the warm rays of the sun, watching the snowy-winged sea-birds poising themselves on the yards! Now they dash like a streak of lightning round the quarter of the vessel, circling gracefully up into the air again; and now they dropped on the water, falling gradually behind, until one could scarcely note the tiny white speck on the boundless blue of the rising wave. How charming to watch the minute "Portugee men-o'-war," each little bark cruising on its own account, and commissioned in the Admiralty Court of Nature, in the name of Nature's God! How delightful at night to lean on the quarter-rail and look over into the wild, whirling eddies of dark, deep water, sparkling with phosphorescent fire; or to note the ship's bow as it

ploughed its way through the solemn main, furrowing its track in living fire! How glorious to sit and watch the golden sunset, the sky at first fretted with a network of gorgeously tinted cumuli, then dissolving into less bright but more delicate and not less beautiful shades of colour, till at last the great light sinks — a living, burning, glowing sphere — behind the vast waste of waters, to give place to the "gentle Lady Moon," which, rising "full-orbed in silvery majesty," casts her fairy-like enchanted light in a bright chain athwart the darkened rippling sea, until, rising on high, she watches with "her silent eye" the universe below, causing the masts and cordage to stand out in alternate light and shadow! What a glamour steals over the heart of man at such a time! what a desire for solitude, for communion with one's own heart — the hour of faith, of prayer, of love! Who of those that have gone down to the sea in great ships have not felt the sad, inexplicable yearning of the heart for the higher, purer life, when watching the star-sown heavens, or contrasting the insignificance of themselves and their bark and the huge immensity of space around them?

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." But "the heavens declare His handiwork."

John West felt all this. He thought he could never

tire of the voyage; but after a time, the continual sameness and monotony became irksome.

There were a few other passengers, but none with whom he cared to become intimate. One was a young man of the name of Boyle, on his way out, like himself, to learn sheep-farming in Australia. Boyle had rather exalted notions of his destiny, for he frequently informed any who would listen to him that he was going to manage a large station belonging to his uncle. The young man had a natural taste for low company, and his greatest pleasure lay in playing cards with the sailors in the forecastle.

There was also a travelling bagman for some London firm on board—a Jew named Cohen.

It so happened that Boyle had in some manner made himself obnoxious to the "son of Moses;" and one night, when he was returning from the forecastle, a bucket of bilge-water, emptied on him by an unseen hand in a lofty position, drenched him to the skin. Boyle vowed vengeance. The perpetrator of the trick was not to be discovered, but in his own mind he was convinced that to Cohen the debt was due. This little affair happened when the Marie Hamilton was about crossing the line; and the weather being very hot, the passengers were accustomed to go forward before sunrise in order to bathe, the water being played upon them through the hose of the fire-engine.

A few mornings after Boyle's little adventure, the passengers went as usual for their early refresher; and West, who was first ready, was about to advance, when a meaning look and wink from the man who held the hose made him draw back. He noticed that this morning the brass nozzle was screwed on to the canvas-pipe, and that two men were working the pump instead of one, as was customary. Cohen now stepped forward —he was a big, stout, fat man—completely undressed. The two sailors at the engine set to work with all their might, the third directed the nozzle, and in an instant the unfortunate bagman was covered from head to foot with tar. In vain did he turn his back, he only received on it the remainder of the dose which had been ingeniously concealed in the nozzle. Consternation was depicted on the faces of some, while others greeted the unhappy victim with shouts of laughter. No one enjoyed the affair more than his enemy Boyle.

But he laughed too loud. Cohen's eye settled on him. Suspicion flashed across his mind like lightning, and rushing at the unsuspecting and wholly naked youth, he seized him in his arms, and rubbed himself all over him, causing the bystanders to shriek with hysterical laughter. The infuriated young man struck out right and left, a successful blow lighting on and "bunging up" the eye of his antagonist, who retaliated with great spirit, until the combatants

resembled a pair of North American Indians. Just then the chief officer came up. His appearance was a signal for the sailors, who were looking on with pretended amazement depicted on their faces, to disperse.

A few words in his rough, imperious tone of voice sufficed to part the coloured gentlemen, who now became alive to the intense absurdity of their position. Boyle made his way in safety to the cook's galley, where, with the assistance of some of the men, he got slushed down and cleansed.

Cohen, however, was not so fortunate. His cabin was one of the stern state-rooms, and to reach it he had to pass through the whole length of the saloon.

It was obviously impossible to put on clothes, and nothing remained for it but to clear the coast and to make a desperate rush. So turning to John, he begged him to act the part of advanced-guard and reconnoitre ahead. John returned with the welcome news that no one was to be seen, whereupon Cohen made a frantic effort; but, alas! "the best-laid schemes of mice and men," as Burns says, "gang aft a-glee." He had barely got half-way down the companion when he was met by a middle-aged married lady from Ireland, of the name of Sullivan—who was returning with her husband to the colonies—and a Miss MacFagg, a sentimental, long-bodied Scotch maiden of forty, with a

partly lackadaisical, partly sanctimonious, expression of visage, and a long thin head, sparsely covered with a crop of wiry sandy hair, who was on her way out to a relative in Sydney.

They had emerged from their cabins to enjoy the morning air just as West left the saloon, and in consequence a meeting on the companion was the result. Owing to the impetus, caused by the rate at which he was travelling, Cohen hurriedly swept past Mrs Sullivan, liberally besmearing her hands—which she had stretched out in front of her to protect herself—with the sticky pigment which covered his own skin, and almost rushed into the arms of Miss MacFagg, who was a step or two lower down, and who saluted him with a piercing shriek. In vain he turned to fly; his self-possession—bewildered as he was by the shouts of Mrs Sullivan, who kept bawling at the top of her voice, "Murder! savages! the bloody, dhirty villyian, he's ruinated my dhresh intirely!" and hewing at him with her sun-shade, and the shrieks of Miss MacFagg, who on her knees entreated him to spare her innocence and her scalp—completely deserted him. In vain, covering his face with his hands, he endeavoured to pass on either side of his strong-minded Irish adversary. She set to him with the precision of a dancing-mistress, until a heavy and well-directed blow from the sun-shade sent him rolling

down the cuddy-stairs into the saloon, bringing the terrified Miss MacFagg along with him.

The whole scene had not occupied a minute, and John was the only bystander who had witnessed it. The other passengers and stewards, who had hurried to the spot on hearing the noise, had arrived only in time to see the half-maddened Jew disappear in his cabin, and they now surrounded West in order to get an explanation, and the saloon resounded with uproarious merriment as Cohen's awkward situation became known. Miss MacFagg retired to her cabin, from which she did not emerge until the afternoon of next day; but the dauntless Mrs Sullivan appeared at breakfast, at which meal she narrated the adventure to the much-amused skipper, who absolutely shrieked as she finished by saying, "The dhirty blackgyard! I dhrew out and I hit him acrass the shouldthers and knocked him dhown."

This and one or two other little occurrences served to break the tediousness of the trip, which was beginning to tell upon all, especially the more experienced travellers; and the near approach to Australian shores was hailed with delight, and by none more than John. Why was he glad? He had no friends awaiting him. He did not know, he never even asked himself the question; but the feeling of delight was almost ecstatic as the glittering coast

shone under their lee; and universal enthusiasm existed as the Marie Hamilton ran close in, affording her passengers and crew a view of the beautiful panorama of wooded hills and blue mountain-peaks, and grassy slopes running down to the open sandy beaches or rock-bound shores of the sea. "That's 'Kiama,'" said the skipper to John. John did not know what "Kiama" was—he had never heard the name before. He stood leaning on the rail, watching the shore, and lost in thought. In imagination he peopled those green hills with a savage, bloodthirsty race, whose ancestors had gone on the war-path, and followed the chase over those silent valleys and rugged mountains for hundreds, ay, perhaps thousands, of years. He thought how, when all Christendom was convulsed with strife and war, the inhabitants of these dark, rolling forests had lived on calmly, pursuing their own primitive mode of life. What they were at the time of the advent of our Saviour, that they were still. It had wrought no change for them. Their life was what it had been, it might be, in Moses' time, or still further back in the obscurer ages of the world's history. It seemed almost like paying a visit to one of the planets, approaching a country whose people were utterly ignorant of the commonest European information.

As the day wore on and the glorious sunshine came

to an end, bets were freely offered and taken as to the hour of arrival at Sydney Heads.

The moon was at the full, and the Marie Hamilton sailed merrily onward,—just as if the "Sydney girls" had hold of the tow-rope, as the boatswain cheerily remarked. About ten o'clock in the evening they passed Botany Bay, and soon the perpendicular cliffs which line the shore between it and the entrance to the Cove towered above them in the clear moonlight—the abrupt, rugged harshness of the rocky wall seeming more awful as each lofty headland was thrown forward into bold relief by the dark-shadowed clefts and chasms behind. They passed the dreadful Gap, the scene of a shipwreck, the harrowing details of which will never be forgotten by the inhabitants of Syndey; and shortly afterwards the pilot came on board, and the Marie Hamilton entered the Heads and cast anchor for the night.

But whose pen can describe the fairy-like beauty of the scene next morning, when the steam-tug towed their floating home up the glorious harbour to Sydney, the Queen of the Southern Seas?

The clearness of the atmosphere, and the deep blue of the sky, in which blazed a semi-tropical sun; the smooth water; the charming little coves and sheltered bays; the wooded shores; the splendid villas crowning the rising slopes and embosomed in luxuriant verdure;

the trim little yachts; and the noble aspect of the city from the harbour, which was crowded with steamers and ships, a perfect forest of masts rising close to the shore,—enchanted John beyond measure.

Garden Island and Pinchgut are passed, and the towers of Government House rise imposingly over the waters of Farm Cove, where two or three men-of-war lie serenely at anchor, their union-jacks hanging lazily from the sterns of the vessels; while the beautiful Botanic Gardens lend a tropical character to the whole which absolutely transports the beholder. No wonder the Sydney people are proud of their City by the Sea, for there are few spots more lovely.

John soon got his things on shore; and having fixed on lodgings, he went for a stroll. He found out Mr Cosgrove's agents, Messrs Bond and Foreclose, who honoured his draft, treating him, however, with a business-like off-handedness which rather took him aback; for he had expected, from the familiar way in which Mr Cosgrove spoke of them, that a friend of his would be a person of some consideration with them. A walk about town filled him with surprise. The puggaree-encircled hats and helmets were to him a novel sight. The Chinese stores in the lower part of George Street, and the diggers (in coloured flannel shirts and long boots), some of whom he saw loitering about the booking-office of a coaching firm, were also

new and strange; and he listened in puzzled wonder to the quick sharp cries of the omnibus cads as they rapidly uttered a string of foreign-sounding native names.

The long wooden drinking-troughs for horses outside the doors of many of the suburban inns, gave an air of rustic simplicity to the long one-storeyed buildings, with which the presence in town of innumerable horsemen from the neighbouring country was quite in keeping.

At the same time, John was much impressed with the architectural beauty of some of the newer streets and public edifices, and with the evidences of wealth and prosperity which greeted him everywhere.

He found his way to the office of the Australian Steam Navigation Company, and having taken his passage for Brisbane, Moreton Bay, he returned to his lodgings. On the evening of the next day he went on board the s.s. Telegraph, and soon afterwards the countless lights of Sydney twinkled in the gloom behind them and were lost to view.

Here he met a different class of people from any he had hitherto come in contact with, and he did not at first exactly know what to make of them. There were a number of stout, bearded, and very much bronzed men, who looked like gentlemen: and yet there was an off-handedness and air of recklessness

about some of them which he had never perceived in those with whom he had associated at home; and he noticed that the hands of nearly all, although in some instances decorated with rings, were rough and coarse. They appeared to have much to say; and from the familiarity with which they treated one another, John at first inclined to think that they must be members of what he had heard termed the swell-mob. Occasionally a few words of their conversation came to his ears; and the expressions "new country," "account sales," "horses and cattle," "pound a-head all round," "up at my place," &c., reminded him of Mr Cosgrove's conversation, and he made up his mind that these must be Queensland squatters returning after a trip to Sydney. When John in the course of time came to know this class better, he found that among them were to be met numbers of men of first-rate education, gentlemanly manners, and high principles, as well also as those of a rougher stamp; but nearly all were shrewd, practical men, devoted to their independent bush-life, and bearing about with them a frankness which seemed born of the rough-and-ready stirring life they led. There were also a few younger men of the same stamp, some of them looking rather unwell, as if recovering from the effects of Sydney dissipation. John's fellow-passenger Boyle was also among the number. He had managed to introduce himself, or

had been introduced, to a circle of ladies, and was evidently affording them amusement, as could be seen by the endeavours which some of the younger ones made to draw him out, and the merriment which followed each sally. There were also some who looked like city business men, and one or two travelling bagmen. The passengers seemed to agree very well, and there did not appear to be any of the stiffness which characterises English travelling at home. The captain, a polite, highly educated seaman, made himself agreeable to all, and was especially attentive to the ladies and children. John mentioned Mr Cosgrove's name; and the captain, who knew everybody, was quite interested, and inquired in the most particular way after Ruth, who was, he said, a charming child, and a great friend of his. The table was well supplied, and the scent of pine-apples seemed to pervade the saloon: the whole surroundings called to John's mind descriptions he had read of steamer-travelling in the Southern States of America. Two days' rapid steaming along the coast brought them in sight of Stradbroke Island; and shortly afterwards, passing several islands, they entered the mouth of the Brisbane river. The shores were low and uninteresting at first, and devoid of all life, except where, here and there, a group of native companions stalked solemnly or played fantastically on the mud among the mangroves; but as the steamer

tore the placid waters, and forced her course onward, the banks gradually rose, and became densely covered with vegetation of a tropical character. The river bent and twisted in many a romantic winding; and as each corner was turned, a still more beautiful scene than the last lay before the travellers. The long reaches of deep, calm water, fringed with dense groves of plantains and bananas or tall graceful bamboos, delighted John's gaze.

Here and there were passed beautiful verandaed cottages covered with creepers, situated in the midst of luxuriant gardens and orange-groves, from which little jetties or boat-stairs led down to the water's edge. Numerous buildings announced the approach to the city, as it is called, of Brisbane. The steamer was soon made fast alongside the jetty, and it being a moist wet day, there were few people to witness its arrival.

John got his things ashore, and set off to find accommodation. Both the principal hotels were full, and he turned away in search of a third, where he was fortunate enough to secure a small room.

It rained all day, and when towards evening it ceased for a time, and our "new chum" went out to explore, he was astonished to find that the city was almost entirely built of wood, and that it was scarcely bigger than many villages at home. Since then a

great change for the better has taken place in the capital of Queensland, both in size and architecture. He returned to an early supper and bed, but, alas! not to sleep. He suffered the tortures of the Inquisition from a numerous and active body of mosquitoes, who, having discovered the treat awaiting them in the person of a new arrival, obstinately defied all his efforts to dislodge them from the positions they had taken up within the curtains, and prosecuted their investigations with the most pertinacious perseverance, discovering the tenderest portions of his body with a scientific skill which said much for their vast experience and interest in the matter on hand.

Towards morning he fell into a feverish sleep, on awaking from which he resolved that from Brisbane he should depart that very day: so having finished breakfast, he had his things put on board the river-steamer Ipswich, bound for Ipswich, an inland town about thirty miles distant from Brisbane, and the place where he expected to meet the horses which were to convey him to Mr Cosgrove's station, Cambaranga.

CHAPTER III.

IPSWICH IN THE OLD DAYS—A "JACKAROO" ON HORSEBACK.

The river-steamer Ipswich was not long in conveying our "new chum," like hundreds of others previously, and thousands subsequently, to his place of destination. The river-scenery appeared even more beautiful than on the preceding day, for on three parts of the days of the year in Queensland the sun shines brilliantly.

He found, on inquiry, that Mr Cosgrove's agent knew nothing about him or horses; so taking up his quarters at one of the hotels, he despatched a letter to Mr Cosgrove's manager, acquainting him with his arrival, and then proceeded to survey the town. This he accomplished in a very short time; but, nevertheless, much was occurring around of a novel and interesting character.

Numbers of bullock-waggons, each drawn by ten or twelve great, bony-looking, large-horned oxen, lined

the streets, their drivers sunburnt, healthy-looking men, in home-made flannel shirts and moleskin trousers, and cabbage-tree hats, mostly engaged with others similarly attired in either unloading bales of wool or loading supplies at the various stores, the occupation being interrupted every now and then by what John soon learned was the great national pastime of Queensland—viz., having a drink all round.

Laden teams, groaning and creaking, slowly made their way into or out of the busy little town, among clouds of dust, with much cracking of whips and shouting of bullocks' names by the drivers, who walked beside their teams, carrying over their shoulders a long-handled whip with thong of raw salted hide, called in the colony "greenhide."

In many instances, when two or three teams travelled together, one or more were driven by blackboys —that is to say, aboriginal natives—the term being invariably employed by colonists towards the blacks in their service, no matter what age they may be. These were attired similarly to their white companions, in shirt and trousers—but the shirts were, as a rule, of a more gaudy pattern; and a bright-coloured handkerchief as often as not encircled their waists or was bound round their heads.

They seemed very proficient in the vocabulary neces-

sary to the professed bullock-driver, and thorough masters of the formidable cowhide, and, on the whole, were happy, merry fellows, with dark shiny complexions, bright eyes, and strong white teeth. As a rule, they had beautiful curly hair, and some of the more civilised among them seemed to bestow great care upon their personal appearance. Horses of all kinds, and ridden by men, women, and boys, passed continually up and down the streets, or stood tied up at the doors of stores and private dwellings. Every one seemed to ride who had any business to do. Each house had its stock-yard, or enclosure of posts and rails, for the purpose of holding horses and cattle when driven in from the surrounding bush, where they pastured. Men kept arriving from the country or departing thither chiefly on horseback. To a practised eye it was an easy matter to determine the calling or profession of each from his appearance. The old shepherd generally came slowly along, mounted on some long-tailed, quiet mare, or good-looking but aged and broken-down hack, sitting on a stained, patched, old saddle—a huge bundle of clothes, wrapped in a well-worn blue blanket, strapped in front of him; a dog-chain or two fastened on one side of his saddle, and a quart-pot and pint rattling together on the other. An old, worn, blue-serge shirt on his back, a pair of dirty white moleskin trousers covering his nether man, and

a battered old felt hat on his head, completed his attire; while his pouch containing his knife, matches, and tobacco, together with his last agreement of service, a few old receipts for horses bought, and, in all probability, a considerable cheque—a sensible collie-dog or two generally bringing up the rear.

The splitter and fencer or the shearer presented a much smarter appearance. Strong, muscular, bearded, in his prime, clad neatly and comfortably, sometimes with a spare horse carrying his baggage, he came into town hearty and jolly, to leave it, alas! too often, with an emptier pocket, and a bloodshot eye and shaking hand.

The neat, smart-looking, well-mounted stockman passed quickly along, sitting his horse with an easy grace, the result of many a long overland journey or sharp mountain gallop. Now and again a squatter, mounted on a well-bred, active hack, moved by, a spare horse or two being driven by his attendant black-boy. The public-houses presented a very busy sight; and judging by the bars, it seemed that when men were not eating, sleeping, or working, they were drinking grog and boasting (or blowing, in colonial parlance) of some feat which they had performed, or of the particular merits of some horse, bullock, dog, or man. As a rule, the conversation was very horsey or bullocky. The bar parlours seemed to be quite as full as the tap-

rooms; and squatters, merchants, and professional men transacted their business, or amused themselves, very much in the same manner as their inferiors.

No bargain could be completed without a "wet" over it, and no friendship formed or enmity forgotten without recourse to the bottle. Many of the shepherds and other bushmen, indeed, considered it the correct thing to put their year's wages into the hands of the publican whose house they stayed at, with the request to inform them when the money was spent — until which time they themselves drank, and treated everybody else who would drink with them. Indeed they not unfrequently annoyed those whom they might chance to fall in with by insisting on standing treat —a refusal being very often answered by a show of anger and an indignant "Oh, you're too —— proud to drink with a poor man!" Quarrelling, singing, riding furiously, a night spent in the lock-up, a recovery of misery, perhaps a touch of *delirium tremens*, —in this way many of these men spent their short holiday in town, and the money they had laboured so hard for.

John soon got tired of these scenes, and took his way back to his inn. On the road he passed numerous parties of aboriginals—the men in tattered shirts and trousers, mostly without hats, their heads covered with a huge mass of tangled ringlets,—for the

black fellow who lives in the bush bestows but small attention on his "cobra," as the head is usually called in the pigeon-English which they employ. The women sometimes wore merely a shirt; and a favourite article of apparel was the skirt of a white woman's dress, the band fastened over one shoulder and under the other arm, the opposite arm passing through the slit. Sometimes they used cloaks made of opossum-skin, and many carried children on their backs.

John afterwards learnt that it was compulsory for them to appear clothed to a certain extent in town, their own natural inclination being the other way. They seemed to loiter about without any particular object. Occasionally one of the men might be seen chopping wood or fetching water, and some of the *gins*, as the women are called, employed in assisting at housework. Many begged, on the smallest opportunity, for *toom-bacco* (tobacco) or "white money;" others were seated or stretched lazily along the shady side of some building, incessantly singing a monotonous ditty, or enjoying a snooze. On the whole, they seemed a merry, happy, careless, tolerably well-fed, dirty, greasy set of black people, with a peculiar smoky, overpowering smell about them.

These were part of the Ipswich tribe, and knocked out a precarious living by hunting in the bush and begging in the town.

The enforced stay at Ipswich wearied our friend exceedingly; he found himself the only aimless person in the place. All day long there were arrivals and departures on horseback. Bullock-drays came and went; supplies were landed from the steamers, and wool was despatched.

Among others, John's shipmate Boyle made a start up-country, his departure giving rise to an episode of considerable interest. He had been staying in Brisbane for a day or two, and had there purchased a handsome, though somewhat shy, black mare to carry him to his destination. This animal he had caused to be caparisoned in front of his hotel with the paraphernalia which he had brought out with him from home, thinking that in a colony so remote all saddlery was difficult to procure. His steed looked brilliant, in all the shining glory of new furniture, a glistening new bit in her mouth, and a martingale half-a-dozen sizes too big round her neck; while a huge-sized valise, sufficient for a family, crossed the pommel of his saddle, and occupied almost the entire seat. A stiff, ill-made English stock-whip hung on one side, and an apparatus containing a multitudinous assortment of knives, forks, spoons, dishes, tumblers, &c., as supposed in England to be necessary for people who eat in the open air, hung on the other. Everything about the whole bespoke "new chum," and accordingly a

crowd of amused bush and town people gathered round to see the mount made and the start effected.

Presently the new arrival issued from the veranda, dressed, according to his own ideas, as much like a bushman as possible, in a thick coat and waistcoat, heavy enough for an English winter, and a pair of thick, baggy cord-breeches, with long, heavy-soled Napoleon boots, garnished with formidable long-necked spurs. A brand-new cabbage-tree hat protected his head; his waist was confined by a broad leathern belt, supporting on one side a revolver, and on the other a large butcher's knife.

It was a matter of no little difficulty for him to mount his steed, partly from his cumbrous attire and the huge "swag" which lay across the seat, as well as from the unpleasant way in which the newly panelled saddle kept slipping over the fat round back of his mare whenever his weight bore on the stirrup. In time, by dint of one man holding to the opposite stirrup, another keeping back the swag, a third holding the bridle, and a fourth pushing him behind, Mr Boyle gained a romantic and picturesque perch, much to his own satisfaction, amidst shouts of "Stick to her, squatter!" from the deeply interested spectators, whose amusement was, however, soon to be changed into consternation; for when they had followed the cavalier a short distance to an open space, it entered into

his head to see how his mare stood fire in case he might be placed in some of the perils which he fancied beset his journey. Accordingly, he drew his trusty and much-valued "double action" out of its bright new pouch. It had been loaded with much attention that morning; and aiming at a stump, he fired. He had no time to witness the effect of his shot. With a bound his charger flew round, and getting amongst the small crowd of onlookers, she put down her head, and executed in a circle a series of remarkably active buck-jumps. Her rider could not fall off. He sat there, trussed by the swag in front of him, desperation in his face, his long spurs jammed well into the sides of the mare, his hand mechanically holding the pistol, and with each succeeding jump involuntarily pulling the trigger, causing the bullets to fly in every direction. There was no more laughter from the spectators. With one impulse they threw themselves on the ground, preferring the chance of being trampled on by the horse to being subjected to the erratic fire of the equestrian acrobat. On the chambers being all discharged, the mare ceased bucking, and no one was more astonished than the rider to find himself still in his saddle. And he departed, much to the relief of those who had thus stood, or lain down to, powder for the first time.

CHAPTER IV.

A START UP-COUNTRY.

An evening or two after Boyle's departure John was sitting in the veranda, when a nondescript-looking vehicle, drawn by two horses tandem-fashion, and containing a very stout woman and a stockman-looking man, drove up. John had the pleasure of meeting the stout woman at dinner, and she turned out to be the proprietress of a hotel in the neighbourhood of Mr Cosgrove's station. When she heard John was going there, but detained from want of horses, she kindly informed him that he might ride one of her two back, as she intended remaining some time in town, and was about sending back horses and man.

Our hero gladly accepted the offer; and next morning, after many preparations, in close imitation of his friend Boyle, he made ready to start. His guide was the ostler of the hotel, who, being from home, was consequently on the spree. He called on John to make haste, sprang on his own horse, and in a few minutes

both were galloping out of the town. The ostler proceeded in the most correct bush style. Every now and then uttering a wild cry and dashing his spurs into his nag's sides, he would fly along at his topmost speed, only to pull up again at the nearest public-house, to the veranda of which his horse's bridle was hung until he had imbibed a nobbler or two. John's horse seemed rather astonished not to find his rider executing similar war-cries, but he neverthelesss tore after his companion with a desperate energy, which showed the interest he took in the proceeding, and pulled up at the doors of the bush inns with a suddenness which, but for the swag in front of him, would have sent poor John, who was rather aghast at this desperate mode of travelling, sprawling.

They reached their destination towards evening—a pretty, quiet little inn, the stout motherly landlady of which conducted our friend to a neat small parlour, and gave him a snug supper,—after which he betook himself to bed, feeling, after his twenty-five-mile ride, as if every bone in his body was broken.

Next day the travellers proceeded in a much more orderly manner; and about mid-day a man was descried coming towards them, leading a horse. This proved to be one of Mr Cosgrove's men with horses for the young traveller.

John enjoyed this journey through wild woods be-

yond measure; and when, after passing through many a dark ravine, and climbing the green slopes of the great ranges, they gazed on the distant shining peaks standing out against the blue sky, while all around rose silently tall straight-stemmed trees, whose leaves whispered away above them at an immense height, the first feeling of that love of the wild bush, its silent calm, and its eloquent beauty, began to dawn on him. His spirit welled up within him, and he felt, and rejoiced in, his strength—he revelled in the enjoyment of life. An unknown future lay before him, but he had no care as to what that future was; he lived in the present, and all was new and fascinating.

The startled kangaroo flying through the forest glade —the harsh-voiced, big-headed, laughing jackass—the bright-hued paroquet—the screeching cockatoo—and a hundred other forms of life,—amazed and delighted him.

How picturesque the encampment of bullock-drays looked on the roadside, when, the day's work being completed, the bows and yokes were taken off the necks of the great oxen, and varied-toned sonorous bells fastened round them instead, and the jangling crowd was driven by a man on horseback up the creek to some well-known spot, where the pasturage was particularly good, the deep knell of the stock-whip reverberating through the forest every now and then!

How pleasant to see the preparations for the evening meal, the huge fire of logs, the galvanised-tin bucket full of tea, the smoking dish of beef and potatoes, which, together with many other comforts and luxuries, proved that the Australian bullock-drivers have a partiality for good living, and indulge it! At last they arrived at the end of their day's journey, an inn similiar to the one they had spent the previous night at; and John's romantic imagination received a considerable check, owing to the exquisite pain which an alarming abrasion of his cuticle caused him. Indeed he almost feared that the end of his journey would find him minus the greater portion of his outer man.

He slept that night the sleep of the wearied "new chum," and with his companions was on the road next morning early enough to come upon a camp of fat cattle travelling down to market. The haze of the night had scarce lifted from the dank grass of the wide rolling downs. The smoke of the camp-fire rose lazily through the mist-laden atmosphere, at some distance from the road. A mounted horseman, enveloped in a large blanket from head to foot, emerged from the fog, and, as if out of the earth, there rose up slowly and deliberately bullock after bullock, to the number of forty or fifty, and took their way towards town, the horseman moving quietly after them in a zigzag manner. The mist clearing off soon after, dis-

closed a second horseman at the fire, apparently engaged in packing the food and cooking-utensils upon a spare horse, his own grazing beside him, the bridle between its legs.

The scene which now met their eyes was one of the greatest beauty; and John wondered at the unsympathetic manner with which his fellow-travellers listened to his raptured expressions of delight, as he viewed the vast extent of undulating, richly-grassed prairie, lovely valleys with timber-crowned ridges varying the beauty of the whole, while sharp wooded promontories here and there ran far out into the wide sea of plain, ranges of blue mountains forming the frame of this enchanting picture.

The lowing of the distant herd fell soothingly upon the morning air as, grazing slowly, the sated cattle made their way from the open country to the shady camps under the trees, beside the cool waters of the creek which flowed through this pleasant land.

As they proceeded they passed camp after camp of bullock-drays, the drivers and assistants all busy in yoking-up for the day. This cannot be effected without much running about, shouting, swearing, and use of the whip, which weapon the practised bullock-driver wields with the most severe effect, each lash leaving a long cut on the hide of the devoted beast, who cringes under it. As bullock-drivers are con-

tinually breaking-in young cattle, there is a constant freshness in this work, which is by no means devoid of danger, many of the young bullocks—and indeed some of the older ones—being of uncertain temper, and prone, when opportunity offers, to charge and gore any unhappy wight unable to get out of their way.

As the day wore on, they overtook bullock-drays lurching along heavily in the ruts of the road, the little keg of water at the tail-board swinging as if it would wrench out the staple it hung by, and the driver appealing occasionally to some bullock or other by name, following up his admonition by a sweeping cut of his "gully-raker," and a report like a musket-shot. The intelligence displayed by the leaders and polers was very great; and they obeyed the word of the driver, coming to him or moving from him, with the utmost docility. The pace they travelled at barely exceeded two miles an hour; and the mite of a small boy who in some instances drove the spare bullocks behind, found relief from *ennui* in addressing imperious words of command to them, couched in the strongest language, with as big a voice as his small lungs could produce.

CHAPTER V.

ROADSIDE SCENES—NIGHT AT A STATION—ARRIVAL AT CAMBARANGA.

THE travellers proceeded along the road, their horses walking or jogging, which are the customary paces when journeying.

They encountered and overtook many teams, their drivers exchanging a morning salutation and a few words of greeting with John's two friends, who seemed to know, or know of, everybody they met. Occasionally a horseman or two, or a pedestrian carrying his worldly goods rolled up in his blanket and strapped on his back, a billy (that is, a round tin pitcher with a lid) in his hand, and with a dog or two at his heels, met and passed them, exchanging the usual "good morning."

These men all seemed to go without coats or waistcoats, or braces, a waist-belt confining the trousers at the girdle. Indeed, so much did this seem the fashion, that partly induced by it, and partly by the heat, John

soon followed suit, and rolled his upper clothing in the swag in front of him.

Traces of favourite camping-places met their eyes at every water-course they came to. Each lagoon or water-hole had innumerable round spots of grey ashes, with a few black embers lying among them, all around it. Many of the surrounding trees were cut down for fuel; and great numbers of empty jam-pots, salmon, lobster, and sardine tins, broken brandy-bottles, perhaps an old boot or two, and part of a rotten old saddle, lay scattered about. Soon they passed a head-station, as the homestead and main buildings of a station are invariably called. It belonged to a very rich squatter, whose name was a power in the country, and was beautifully situated. The houses were comfortably built and of handsome design. A large garden adjoined them; creepers covered the verandas and outbuildings, of which there were many; and several paddocks of great extent, encircled by substantial posts and rail fences, surrounded the whole. They shortly afterwards crossed a small running creek; and it being almost mid-day, a halt was called for the purpose of giving the horses a spell and having a "pot of tea."

Accordingly, the horses were unsaddled. They were then taken down to the water and had their backs washed, to prevent the sweat hardening under

the saddle and causing sores; after which each had a pair of hobbles fastened round his fore-fetlocks, a proceeding which he quite seemed to expect; and they hobbled off in a series of short jerks, with their noses to the ground, seeking for the softest spot in the vicinity. This was no sooner discovered than they dropped on their knees, and thence on their sides, testifying their satisfaction by rolling over and over repeatedly. Then springing to their feet and shaking themselves free from dust and dirt, they set to work to crop the grass. John was so much interested in observing this that he forgot his own duties. However, his friend the ostler unstrapped the quarts and filled them with water, the other man having made a glorious fire in a few minutes. The quart-pots were now put on to boil, swags were opened and food produced. John, unused to the ways of the bush, and feeling, after the good breakfast, as if he never would want food again, had neglected to take anything with him for lunch, and now looked with considerable dismay at his own bulky but at present useless swag.

"Ah," said the ostler, "I know'd as how you new chums never thinks o' nothing, so I brought enuff for both of us."

"Look out there!" he continued; "quart-pot corroborree," springing up and removing with one hand from the fire one of the quart-pots, which was boiling

madly, while with the other he dropped in about as much tea as he could hold between his fingers and thumb. Then stirring it with a straw, he set it aside to draw. The other quart-pot was served in a similar way; but John's, although in a hotter spot, showed no signs of boiling. In vain he applied more fuel, the fire seemed to have no effect.

"It's no use," said his friends; "them new quarts takes a month o' Sundays to bile. Ye see, ours has been used many a day, and they're battered and black, and takes kindly to it; but them new ones don't like it, somehow."

And so it was, for they had almost finished their meal before the new quart "corroborreed," as the stockman phrased it. It came in handy, however, with the after-dinner pipe which both the men indulged in.

Horses were now caught and saddled, swags were strapped on, and they travelled onwards in the same manner as in the morning. They had not gone very far when Spot—the little bull-terrier pup which John had brought with him from home, and which was growing rapidly into a very handsome young dog—made a rush at something in the grass, and shook it violently.

"What is it?" shouted John, greatly excited.

"Snake," returned both the men in a breath.

"Oh, my dog, he will be bitten!" cried poor John;

and throwing himself off his horse he seized a bullock's shin-bone which happened to be lying handy. He struck the snake (a long, lithe, flat-headed black one) such a blow on the head as to deprive it of power. Bully rushed in again before John could prevent him, and crushed its head between his jaws.

"Do you think he's hurt?" asked John, anxiously.

"Well, if he ain't, it won't be long before he will be," said the ostler; "but, Lord, you never knows when a beast gets bitten. Just the other day I was a-ridin' along, and I notices a snake—the same kind as that un—under my horse's feet, and I thought I felt her give a bit of a kick with her off hindfoot, but I wasn't sure like. Howsomever, she went along picking up a mouthful of grass now an' agin quite lively like, when all of a sudden she stopped and trembled, then she lay down, and she died in half an hour in mortial pain."

"Ay, sometimes they dies in five minutes," said the other. "I think it all depends on whether their blood is hot or not. If so be as they are warm, the pison tells very quick; and I think *that* 'ere dog is agoin' to croak."

John's distress was very great at seeing his faithful little companion move about uneasily, lie down, get up, whine, lick his hand, then look up in his face as if mutely asking help. Once or twice he returned to

the dead snake and shook it, and John hoped they were mistaken in the symptoms. But it was not so: poor Bully shivered, drew up his limbs, became rigid, recovered, whined again, kept licking his master's hand, and at last died in great agony.

It was with a sore heart that John mounted his horse to continue his journey. The dog had proved a loving companion, and was growing very dear to him; besides which, he was very valuable on account of his pure breed, and was generally admired.

That evening they reached the hotel to which the ostler was bound; and after spending the night there, they bade him farewell next morning, the man refusing to take the gratuity which John offered him.

A similar day's travelling through forest-country brought them at night to a station called Cooranilla. They had struck off from the main highway early in the morning, and had passed over many miles without meeting a single traveller. Part of the distance lay over poor country, covered with ti-tree, box, and iron-bark saplings, with here and there heavy timber growing on sour-looking ridges. Lignum-vitæ and bastard-myall bushes were very common; while huge, dense scrubs, composed chiefly of bugalow-trees and under-growth, lined the road in many places. In the neighbourhood of these scrubs the game was especially

plentiful; and kangaroos, paddy-melons, wallabies, and kangaroo-rats crossed the road continually. Sometimes an iguana, disturbed from his siesta, would hurry quickly to a tree at some distance off, which he would ascend carefully on the opposite side to that on which his enemy appeared. Just before reaching the station the country improved.

In accordance with his mentor's advice, John rode up to the main building of the station, hung his horse's bridle to the fence, and walked to the house.

A lady came out to meet him; and John, mentioning his name and destination, requested hospitality for the night. He was most kindly received. The lady, who was the wife of the owner of the station, calling to a young blackboy to bring water for the horse's back, showed John the entrance to the paddock, into which he turned his horse. She then brought him inside, and asking if the man who accompanied him had gone down to the travellers' hut (a building especially destined for the accommodation of the labouring classes), she ushered him into a neat little bedroom. Soon afterwards the clatter of horses' hoofs announced the arrival of her husband—a big, bronzed man, with a fair beard and a bright laughing eye. He welcomed John in the most hearty manner; and before many minutes had elapsed, the young emigrant found himself talking, laughing, and relating adven-

tures to his new friends as if he had known them all his life.

Dinner over, the rest of the evening was spent on the veranda in pleasant conversation. His entertainers earnestly pressed their guest to rest the next day; but John, who was anxious to get to the end of his journey, declined. "Well," said the kindly squatter, "'Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest' is the rule of the bush, you know. Breakfast will be on the table at six to-morrow morning, and the horses in the yard ready for you. Good night."

Next morning, after breakfast, and bidding farewell to the kind owners of Cooranilla, the horsemen proceeded to complete their last day's travel. The roads were almost as deserted as on the preceding day. They sometimes, though rarely, passed a footman coming or going, or a tilted cart drawn by a couple of horses, and occupied by the driver's wife, children, and household goods. Towards the middle of the day, they came upon cheerful-looking iron-bark ridges; while on the right, green apple-tree flats bordered on a well-watered creek, along whose banks numbers of sleek, quiet, well-bred-looking cattle grazed. Occasionally they passed through a "mob" standing on the roadside, and John was greatly amused at seeing some of the young calves and steers advancing boldly to them with many airs of assumed anger, tearing

up the ground with their fore-feet, and shaking their heads—only to scamper away, kicking their heels in the air, on a movement being made towards them. This, his companion informed him, was a part of Mr Fitzgerald's run—Un-gah run; and pointed out, at the same time, that the cattle had all, even to the smallest, the letters FGD burnt into the skin of the near-side rump. They were also all marked with a peculiar slit in the off ear,—it being customary, and indeed compulsory, as regarded protection of property, for owners to brand and mark all their stock in a similar manner.

After some miles they came to barer-looking country. The grass did not seem so green, and was fed down much shorter, and innumerable little paths ran leading in the same directions. Towards evening they overtook a flock of sheep, greatly scattered, and slowly feeding towards a small hut which, with two large yards, occupied a rising ground about half a mile away.

The sheep seemed to have had plenty to eat during the day, for their sides were very much distended, and they moved slowly and steadily. The shepherd had left them to find their way home themselves, and had gathered a few sticks to make up his evening fire, when, hearing the horses' feet, the two black-and-tan collies which followed at his heels turned and barked,

causing the sheep in their immediate neighbourhood to rush suddenly and look round, and the shepherd to set down his load and wait for them.

"Holloa, Tom!" he shouted to John's guide; "got back again? How are things looking down in Limestone?"[1]

Tom gave a short description of what was going on, and of the people he saw there, and of the appearance of the country generally—all of which was listened to with much interest by the shepherd. They now pushed on at a faster pace, and the horses themselves seemed anxious to get over the ground. It was dark when they arrived at Cambaranga, as Mr Cosgrove's station was called. The night hung heavily on the dark forests which shaded each side of the road, but above, the heaven was unclouded and bright with stars. At last they saw a twinkling light in the distance. As they approach nearer, a dog, hearing the tread of hoofs, barked sharply, causing numerous others to take up the chorus. The dogs then made a rush in concert (yelping all the time) to meet the new-comers; and satisfied on hearing the well-known

[1] The name Ipswich bore before it received its present appellation. It is common for the older hands to retain the use of the name to which they were first accustomed. Many of the Queensland towns have these double names. For instance, Trowoomba was called the Swamp; Drayton, the Springs; Dalby, Myall creek; Roma the Bungill, &c., &c.

voice of the stockman, they joyfully bring up the rear.

John and his companion now arrive at the little paling-fence which encloses the main buildings. Two or three men come out and shake him by the hand and ask a few questions. The stockman gives a short account of his proceedings; the unsaddled horses are turned out free into the bush to find their favourite haunts, and recruit after the journey; and John is brought through a veranda, thickly covered with creepers, inside the house.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES AND NEW WORK—A VISIT TO THE BLACKS' CAMP.

THE room John West now found himself in was small, but comparatively comfortable. Chinese matting covered the walls, which were of hardwood slabs let horizontally into grooved upright posts. A large fireplace, or open hearth, occupied the greater part of one side of the room. The mantelpiece was covered with odds and ends, such as pipes of all sizes and shapes, a spur or two, specimens of gold-bearing quartz, lumps of galena and copper ore, and other samples of minerals. A rough sofa, a few primitive-looking hardwood stools, and what is known in the colonies as a squatter's easy-chair, together with a table laid for dinner, completed the furniture of the apartment. It could be detected at a glance that no female held sway over the arrangements of the interior, everything betokening bachelor untidiness.

"Now then, sit down to dinner," said a grizzly-

bearded stern-looking man, with a gruff authoritative voice, who was, as John guessed, Mr M'Duff, Mr Cosgrove's superintendent. "Let me give you some salt junk." John was hungry, and rather enjoyed the salt beef, which was not very old. Some boiled pumpkin and bread-and-butter completed the entertainment.

The two other men lit their pipes, M'Duff stretched himself on the sofa, and John took possession of a squatter's chair. Conversation was carried on for about an hour or two, and John was shown to the room which was to be his, one of his new acquaintances telling him, "You'll have to do without sheets, old fellow, till your own come—that is, if you have any—or else you'll have to send down to town to buy some; the station doesn't provide unnecessary luxuries."

The young Jackaroo[1] woke early next morning, and went out to look around him. Early as it was, he found that Mr M'Duff and his two friends of the former evening were already abroad. M'Duff gave a grunt of satisfaction at seeing him up so early.

"Well, young man," he began, "so you don't like lying abed, eh?"

John modestly gave him to understand that it was

[1] The name by which young men who go to the Australian colonies to pick up colonial experience are designated.

very agreeable to him sometimes, but that this morning he felt more inclined to satisfy his curiosity.

"You won't be troubled with much of it here," said M'Duff, grimly. "Shearing is about to commence."

"You can spell to-day and look about you," he added, "and to-morrow Stone here" (pointing to the youngest and best-looking of the two men) "will put you up to it. He is going to take charge of the wash-pool. I shall be in the wool-shed all day. Come along and look at the store."

They all proceeded to the store—a large wooden building filled with an immense variety of goods, from meerschaum-pipes and bottles of eau-de-Cologne, to blankets and all sorts of slops. Large boxes stood in the inner store full of jams, pickles, confectionery, preserved apples, raisins, and almost everything one could mention. A door opened into a little side-room, fitted up as a meat-store, containing a salting-table and meat-blocks, while all around meat-hooks hung from the walls.

Just at that moment a woman came to the store-door and asked for the storekeeper. "Now," said M'Duff, "watch Mr Stone, and you'll see what your work will be."

"I want my husband's rations for the week," said the woman.

Stone proceeded to weigh out 8 lb. of flour, 2 lb. of

sugar, and ¼ lb. of tea, with a rapid, practised hand, and to empty each quantity into the respective bags which the woman had brought with her.

"Now," she said, "I want a pair of boots for myself."

Stone brought down the articles in question, and with many compliments on the shapely foot which was being shod, soon satisfied the demand.

"Now let me have some beef," she said.

"All right. Go round to the window of the beef-store," replied the seller. Here he plunged his arm up to the elbow in the brine of the meat-cask, which stood in a cool part of the store, and weighing out the required quantity, he entered the different articles against the woman in the day-book, and also in her own pass-book, and returned to the party.

"Now," said M'Duff, "you'll find the price of every article on a list in the desk: anything you want to know about, ask Stone or me. You will have to be up every morning before sunrise, attending to the customers, and be here every evening about five. During the day you can go with Mr Stone to the wash-pool, and learn to wash sheep. I give him over to you, Stone; make the best of him."

John took a fancy to Stone, who was a man of intelligence, of a quick decided character, and of gentlemanly upbringing, though considerably roughened by

constant bush-life. He was one of that numerous class who have no capital to start with, and who spend almost all they earn in a generous, careless way. After breakfast, the other man, who was considerably older than either M'Duff or Stone, and whose name was Graham, caught and saddled his horse.

M'Duff had his brought down by a blackboy, and having saddled it himself, he rode away with Graham to search for a flock of sheep which were reported as lost. Stone then took John round the buildings of the head-station.

These were all built of wood, forming a square, a court occupying the centre. In front was a large, low-verandaed cottage, thickly covered with roses and vines, one room of which was occupied by Mr M'Duff. The sides of the square were formed by the store, with its offices on the one side and the kitchen buildings on the other; while the fourth side was filled up by the building John had dined and slept in, and which was called "The Bachelors' Hall." A stable and cart-shed, and a dry store for the reception of flour, salt, and other commodities, lay on one side in a line with the bachelors' quarters; farther away was a hut for the use of the men; and a substantially-built stock-yard, or enclosure for cattle and horses, occupied a site still more remote.

A paddock-fence wound away across the creek

which ran at the back of the station, and enclosed a piece of ground about a mile square, well grassed, and sheltered by many trees. An ample garden lay on the other side of a little creek which joined the main or Cambaranga creek just below the kitchen. Above the garden, on an eminence, was situated a substantially-built commodious wool-shed and wool-store, with several conveniently arranged yards for working sheep, and with a number of men's huts.

"There," said Stone, pointing to the big house, "nobody has lived in the *cawbawn humpy*—that is what the blacks call it—since Mr Cosgrove went away. That old cove M'Duff is a methodical old Scotchman, and I believe if you saw the inside of it you would find the tables and chairs in the same places they occupied when Mr Cosgrove departed."

They looked into the dry store at the immense quantities of flour and salt which were piled up there, and then proceeded to the stock-yard. "There is the slaughtering-yard," said Stone, pointing out a small enclosure where two high posts supported a tumbler with long arms, having ropes hanging from them. "This is the gallows for hoisting up the slaughtered bullocks. You, as storekeeper, will be head-butcher."

Many heads and feet of defunct bullocks, in various stages of decay, lay about; and on the branches of the neighbouring trees, and in endless rows on the caps

of the stock-yard, sat innumerable gorged kites and crows, waiting until their repletion should abate sufficiently to allow them to partake of another meal.

The two returned, crossed the creek, and entered the wool-shed. It was an immense building on piles; compartments with grated flooring, and little doors leading into and out of them, lined the sides; pens for sheep occupied the middle and one end. A lane went down on either side, between the compartments and the middle pen, floored with smooth planks for the shearers to work on. At the other end a long grated table, on which the fleeces were rolled up, crossed the room from side to side. Bins for holding different sorts of fleeces were ranged against the wall, and a large wool-press stood near the door.

"This building cost £2000," said Stone, "and it was cheap at that. In a few weeks' time you will see it full of shearers and sheep, and the interminable click-click of the shears will be going on for nearly three months."

"Mr Cosgrove must be a very rich man," said John, wonderingly.

"Oh yes," said the other; "I suppose he could sell this station for about £50,000. There are 60,000 sheep on it, and about 300 head of cattle, and lots of horses—and the improvements, you know; besides which, he has had a splendid income from his wool for some

years past, and I am told he does not spend much. But you know him better than I do. I only came here by chance about six months ago."

"Is this a large station?" inquired John.

"There are about eleven hundred square miles, good, bad, and indifferent on it, and it all belongs to Mr Cosgrove—at least he pays a nominal rent for a lease of it to the Government for a term of years. Should the Crown require the land at any time—as, for instance, for a gold-field, or to build townships on, or for reserves for any purpose—the present lessee would have to give it up, receiving as indemnification only the price of the improvements he has made,—that is to say, the buildings, stock-yards, fences, and other permanent works. Should the land be required for agricultural purposes, he has the right of pre-emption over a portion of it at the Government upset price. They are always changing and altering the land-laws in Brisbane. They never get one to their mind. There is a constant war between the small farmer and labouring classes—who desire to own small pieces of land—and the squatters. The little fellows want to be allowed to spread themselves all over the country, and pick out any piece of ground they may fancy, no matter how prejudicial to the squatter's interest; and they dab themselves and their families down in those spots to maintain a precarious existence by growing

whatever will grow, breeding a few scrubbing horses and cattle, stealing the rich man's stock, and endeavouring generally to make themselves as unpleasant as possible, with a view to compelling the squatter, in self-defence, to give them a large price for their holdings; and when they have got that, they light, like a blow-fly, on some other choice central piece of ground, or around some water-hole which it is essential for the squatter to possess. So say the squatters. The cockatoo settlers, or free selectors, on the other hand, fight desperately for the privilege; and having numbers on their side, and a certain amount of right, they make a good fight. This run has as yet escaped. It is, if anything, too far away yet; but in a few years, no doubt, selectors will be scattered over it and the neighbouring stations."

"And the sheep are spread over this immense territory? How do you manage with them?" still pursued the astonished new chum.

"We divide them into conveniently-sized flocks, from 1000 up to about 3000, but generally the number is about 1800. It depends greatly upon the class of sheep.[1] Strong sheep may go in greater flocks than the weaker ones, but the great object is to combine economy with the health of the animal. Huts and

[1] Of late years sheep are not often shepherded, but are enclosed in paddocks and left to themselves.

yards are built at selected spots all over the run. Two shepherds usually live together at a hut. Each flock occupies a yard. Food is sent out once a-week to these men. The overseer visits them once a-week, and counts their flocks to make sure that they have not lost any — although they generally know themselves, and come in to give notice when this is the case. They bring in their flocks once a-year to be washed and shorn; the rest of the time they spend in shepherding, and accumulating a cheque, which they will knock down at the first public-house they arrive at after leaving the station."

"And how far away from the head-station are their huts?" asked John.

"It depends upon the country. If the country at the far end of the run is well grassed, it will be occupied by a flock of sheep or two. Some of them are twenty-five miles away; others twenty, fifteen, seven, nine, one, two, five, and so on. I am going out this afternoon to count the sheep at about seven miles away, and if you are not too tired you can come with me."

"I shall be very glad," returned John; "but tell me, have you any head-stations in the immediate neighbourhood?"

"None nearer than fifteen miles. It is a station of the name of Betyammo. A very nice old fellow, who has a very kind wife and two daughters, owns it, and

they will be glad to see you over there. Further round this way, thirty miles away," continued Stone, shifting his hand over about a quarter of the horizon, "you have Barham Plains—a very swell station, owned by an old fellow who lives almost always down in Sydney, hanging about the clubs. He is a member of Parliament, and I don't know what all. He has a swell superintendent,—owner gives him £1000 a-year for doing nothing. The station is so good that the sheep almost manage themselves. The 'super' drives four-in-hand, wears kid gloves on the run, keeps race-horses, and leaves the work to a couple of overseers. Round this way is Ungahrun, a cattle station owned by a Mr Fitzgerald, and managed by his son, the smartest young fellow in this part of the district. He has about 8000 head of cattle. It is distant about twenty-five miles. Then here you have, twenty miles off, Mosquito Creek — a sheep-station with about 10,000 sheep, belonging to two young fellows who bought the place lately. Then, lastly, we come to Bindarobina, twenty-five miles distant — a large station, with about 50,000 sheep and 10,000 head of cattle, belonging to the United Australian Pastoral Co., a London firm. It is a fine run, but expensively managed; and of course the shareholders are far away, and understand nothing about station-work, so the manager does pretty well as he likes. He is a great friend of

the manager at Barham Plains—the two run in couples; and here we are back to Betyammo."

"Now," said John to his friendly companion, "I want to go and look at the blacks I see camped over there in the paddock. Do they belong to this place?"

"Yes," replied Stone, "they are part of the Cambaranga tribe; but I believe great numbers are expected to-morrow. In all probability we shall see them camped a few miles from here this afternoon; that is the road they are coming by."

They recrossed the creek into the paddock, and made their way to a little encampment of small conical huts, made of the bark of trees. A few sticks burnt slowly, and with much smoke, in front of two or three. Inside, dirty 'possum-skins and ragged shirts and trousers lay on the ground, making a bed for numbers of blear-eyed hairless dogs, whose skin showed pink, or blue, or mouse colour. Outside, a middle-aged, not uncomely-looking black "gin," sat roasting a bullock's bone on the embers, and picking off such parts as she conceived were cooked enough, then thrusting it amongst the ashes for a further period. An old man or two, with snow-white hair, completely naked, lay stretched in the sun, and lazily turned over when the new-comers approached them.

"What is your name?" asked John of one of them.

"Me Jacky,—old man," replied darky.

"Where is your country?"

"Heah country belongin' to me; this one—Cambaranga—my country."

"What for bail you look out kangaroo to-day, Jacky?" said Stone.

"Oh, me poor fellow" (sick), returned Jacky, addressing a few words in his own language to his sable brother, and going off into a fit of laughter, showing his strong white teeth; then producing a pipe from the middle of his shock of white curls, and inserting his finger into the bowl, he held it out to John, cleverly detecting his inexperience at a glance, and in a whining tone said, "Poor fellow Jacky! bail got it toombacco—bail 'moke" (got not tobacco—nothing to smoke).

Stone threw him a small piece of Barrett's twist, apologetically remarking to John, "He's a dreadfully lazy old vagabond, but occasionally he comes in handy to shepherd an odd flock for a few days, when there is no one else about."

The old gin and the other old warrior, on seeing their compatriot successful in his appeal, clamorously begged a small donation of the blessed weed; but Stone, disregarding their prayers, walked off.

"What a peculiar smell there is about these creatures!" suddenly said John.

"Oh yes, every nigger has that distinguishing qual-

ity very strong, more especially when hot. Cattle dislike it exceedingly—so much so, that I have known a whole mob stampede merely from crossing the tracks made by niggers a few hours previously. Some years ago, before the blacks were allowed to come in about these stations, they revenged themselves on the white men who occupied their country by killing their cattle, as well as a man or two occasionally. They do so sometimes still, when they think themselves safe from observation, and the cattle never forget it. Even those who never saw blacks before get frightened or enraged at their appearance. It would seem as if they have some way of communicating their hatred and fear to one another."

"What makes the dogs so blear-eyed and hairless?" asked the new hand.

"Sleeping under 'possum cloaks and blankets. Blacks think as much or more of their dogs as they do of their children, and the great heat in the *gunyahs* (bark huts) causes an unnatural perspiration to break forth, which soon deprives them of hair and makes their skin wrinkle up as you saw. A black's dog soon loses the distinguishing characteristics of a white man's dog, and acquires others peculiar to its mode of life; but they are useful to the blacks in hunting the game upon which they depend for a living, and they cherish them accordingly.

"Don't these black creatures wear clothes?" inquired young West.

"Well, they do occasionally, but only when compelled to, or when the fit takes them. The blackboys working about the station like to wear trousers when riding, to protect their legs; besides which, clothes make them more like white men, and some of them have a great idea of their dignity; but when they get to the camp in the evening they take off everything. You may bring them up with the greatest care," continued Stone, "educate them, and show them civilised life, but when they return to their old haunts, off go the clothes and they take to the bush. The wild nature seems exceedingly strong in them."

In the afternoon the two young men saddled horses and rode out to a sheep-station called the Seven-mile Hut. About three miles from the station they came upon some more blacks who were engaged in making a camp for the night. This they did by simply lighting a fire and disposing of their few effects around it: the men stuck their spears in the ground, each in the vicinity of his own fire. Nullah-nullahs,[1] paddy-melon sticks, boomerangs, tomahawks, and *heelimen* or shields, lay about in every direction. The men employed themselves in roasting wallabies, 'possums, kangaroos, and other game; the gins were engaged in bringing up

[1] Native weapons.

water from the creek in their wooden *coolamen*. Piccaninnies of all ages played about: some chopped the bark off trees; others were climbing saplings, or chasing each other about the camp. All were perfectly nude and happy. As Stone and West proceeded further along the road they met small parties all making their way to the camp, hunting as they went. These were chiefly women and children, the men having gone in a body together for the purpose of assisting one another to surround the game. These parties seemed to fill the forest on each side of the road, no party following the path another had gone in. Thus each had a similar chance of finding game as they moved forward. The regular sharp chop-chop of the tomahawks could be heard here and there where some of them had discovered a sugar-bag[1] or a 'possum on a tree.

There were piccaninnies of all sizes. All the very little children were round and fat, big-eyed, curly-haired, and pot-bellied. Some of the younger women and girls were passably good-looking, with bright eyes and white teeth; but their short-cropped hair, flat noses, and small limbs were much against them.

"Where are they all bound for?" asked John.

"Oh, there is a *corroborree* on the boards in the

[1] A nest of honey.

neighbourhood, and these blacks are making to it," returned Stone.

"A *corroborree!* what is that?"

"It is a meeting of the tribes to dance and sing; they are passionately fond of both. Some black fellow at a great distance, it may be, composes a new air, of only a couple of bars most likely, and sets some words to it. His tribe go into ecstasies over it. They send runners to the neighbouring tribes, inviting them to come over and hunt on their grounds, and listen to the new corroborree. Great numbers arrive; the corroborree is danced night after night with the utmost enthusiasm; the game gets scarce, and all the tribes move forward in a direction determined by them in council. These corroborrees travel for many hundreds of miles from the place where they originated. The original tribes fall off and return to their respective territories; but new ones take their place, and the corroborree is carried away to distant tribes speaking a totally different language, and utterly ignorant of, and totally indifferent as to, the meaning of what they sing, provided the air catches their fancy. These composers pretend that the Spirit of Evil originally manufactured the corroborree, and that, owing to their magic arts, they were enabled to get into his vicinity and overhear the air. No corroborree is thought anything of which has not some superstition to recom-

mend it. At some of these corroborrees is held the secret ceremony of the *bora*, to which no white man has ever been admitted, and about which the blacks themselves are particularly silent."

"And what do they do at these ceremonies?" questioned John.

"Oh, they admit boys among the warriors, and girls among the women."

"And has no white man ever seen the ceremony?"

"Never to my knowledge," said Stone. "Many pretend that they know a good deal from the young blackboys with whom they have been brought up in childhood, but the fact is, that until initiated the boys are themselves ignorant. It is well understood that they have certain trials to undergo in order to prove their fortitude, patience, courage, and endurance; but beyond that, little is certain. The blacks select an exceedingly flat piece of ground in a remote locality for the purpose, and take care, by posting circles of sentries around their camp, that they shall not be disturbed. In some districts the neophytes have a front tooth knocked out of the upper jaw."

They now approached the sheep-station, and, meeting the shepherd, Stone signified his intention of counting the sheep. Tying up their horses, therefore, they proceeded to the gate of the yard, which they fixed firmly, wide enough to allow about three sheep

abreast to enter. The shepherd brought the sheep up, and they passed in rapidly, each hundred being called out by Stone, and notched on a stick by John, who kept the tally. The deaths were then given in by the shepherd, and the total number having been found all right, they returned home, reaching the station about an hour after dark, there being little or no twilight.

As they passed the camp of blacks the scene looked highly picturesque. Fires dotted the forest, lighting up the trees, and shadowy forms moved from one light to another, while the gabble of tongues was incessant. The horses they rode seemed to know the way perfectly, and walked very much quicker towards home than they did when leaving it.

During supper M'Duff and the overseer gave an account of how they had searched fruitlessly in different directions for the missing sheep, whose loss had taken them away in the morning. They had been foiled in their endeavour to follow the tracks several times, owing to the fact that some one of the flocks in the neighbourhood (through whose grazing-ground the lost ones were wandering) had passed over and obliterated their footprints. There seemed to be no fear of losing them altogether, it being considered almost certain that some one of the surrounding shepherds would come across them in the course of the next day; still

a good deal of uneasiness was expressed lest the unprotected mob should be assaulted by the native dogs.

M'Duff accordingly gave instructions for poison to be laid by John on every opportunity. The conversation now turned on *dingoes*, the Australian name for the wild dogs so destructive to sheep. They were—so M'Duff said—neither more nor less than wolves, but more cowardly and not so ferocious, seldom going in large packs. They hunted kangaroos when in numbers, or driven to it by hunger; but usually preferred smaller and more easily obtained prey, as rats, bandicoots, and 'possums. Many were run down by men on horseback for the sake of the sport,—the horseman undoing his stirrup-leather, and slipping the iron to the extreme end, knocked out the brains of the animal as he galloped past. Some are caught in traps made of gigantic hollow logs, with hanging doors fitted to them, after the common mouse-trap fashion; but most are destroyed by poison.

Each man on a sheep-station carries, or should carry, strychnine, in order to poison the carcass of any dead animal he may chance to find on his wanderings through the bush; also a pouch attached to his saddle, containing small pieces of meat already poisoned, each bait wrapped in paper. These dingoes break into a fold of sheep at night, and often bite and kill scores of them, generally endeavouring to tear out

the liver. Their bite is poisonous in a great measure, and very difficult to heal. They are usually of a yellow-red colour, with a white-tipped bushy tail. Some few are black.

M'Duff soon left the little company to retire to his own room. He was a man of few words, his taciturnity being rather caused by long residence among the bush solitudes than from disposition. His whole thoughts were wrapped up in his sheep. He seldom took interest in anything except station-work; and as long as he had good lambings, and got rid of his old ewes and wethers at a high price, he cared little about the world. He had a keen eye for a bargain; and certainly Cosgrove pitched upon the right man to put in charge of his affairs when he selected M'Duff, for the old Scotchman laboured and slaved away from morning until night. He never spared himself or others when station-work had to be done. Old Graham, the overseer—a rough, hard-working bushman, though a confirmed drunkard when grog was to be procured—had the highest opinion of the ability of the "old man," as he called him.

"He has been pioneering on the frontier for the last twenty years," he said, "and there isn't his match in the country to judge sheep, or cattle either."

"He must be pretty well off," said Stone. "The old fellow does not drink, and he never goes to town,

so he can't spend any money. What does he do with it?"

"Well," said Graham, who had been on the station for many years, "it was about five years before Mr Cosgrove went home that the 'old man' came here, and he had a good bit of money then, for he once spoke to me about investing it; but it strikes me that he has purchased a share in this station, for you may depend Cosgrove would never go home and leave everything in his hands without having a guarantee of some sort for its proper management."

"Like enough," returned Stone. "That accounts why he has the credit of being such a 'nipper.'"

"Of course, any profit that accrues to the station he has a share in. By the way," continued Graham, "we got a regular 'sell' at the ten-mile sheep-station to-day."

"What was that?" inquired Stone.

"Well, you know how often passing travellers have robbed old Jones of his rations. The hut is close to the main road, and easily found by the sheep-tracks."

"Yes."

"Well, I happened to grow very hungry to-day about one o'clock, and being close to the 'ten-mile' I made for it, to have a search for old Jones's rations, and a feed if possible. When I got there I saw the old man's horse tied up to the door. He had come on

a similar errand. Well, after searching some time in vain, I found, planted away among the sheets of bark of which the roof is composed, a stunning-looking pie —no crust, you know—soft bake. We sat down, and there was only a small corner of it left when we got up, and we put that back in the old plant. The old man liked it A 1, and, says he, 'We'll come back here to-night and count the sheep, to see whether he has picked up any or not of the lost ones, and will tell him to order plums or currants, or something out of the store, to make up for what we've eaten.' So when we came to the hut at night old Jones was growling a hurricane. Before we could say anything he roars out—

"'Them —— dogs of travellers have been 'ere agin, but they didn't get none of my rations this time.'

"'What did they find?' asked I, looking at the boss, whose face grew as long as my arm suddenly.

"'Why,' says he, 'I've been collecting all the rags of meat and chewed gristles I couldn't swaller, ye know—my poor ole teeth ain't as good as they wonst was—and I fried the hull lot up wi' some punkins for the dogs, you see, but there ain't much left. D—— them, these —— wretches, they won't even give the dogs a chance! I'll putt pison in it next time.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the others. "How did the old man like that?"

"Oh, he never said a word, but counted the sheep, and came home as sulky as a bear. Every now and then, however, I could see him shake his head as if disgusted, and say 'Bah!'"

"Well," laughed Stone, "after that I'll go to bed. You must have the stomach of an emu to tell the story."

CHAPTER VII.

OLD JACKY IN A FIX—SHEARING AND WASHING.

NEXT morning John commenced his duties as store-keeper, and found that he had to be up early to get the people on the station served, and all the rations for the various sheep-stations which were to be taken out that day weighed and made up in bags before breakfast. M'Duff and Graham started away, taking with them a blackboy to follow up the tracks of the sheep when they found a difficulty in so doing themselves; and Stone went out with the stockman to get a bullock in for killing.

John had to lay poisoned baits on the roads near the station. Late in the afternoon, on returning, he heard the sound of a whip two or three times, and shortly afterwards a mob of about ten head of cattle came over the ridge towards the stock-yard. They seemed rather frightened at suddenly coming on the buildings, and made two or three attempts to turn and gallop off; but each time they were wheeled back by

the two men who rode behind them, and whose horses seemed to take as lively an interest in yarding them as their riders felt.

As soon as the cattle entered the great stock-yard they were driven into a smaller enclosure, thence up a narrow lane of high fencing into the small square slaughtering-yard. John now came up to look at them. In appearance they were just the same as English cattle, but much wilder, and bore the station brand and ear-mark. They stared and tossed their heads as John advanced on foot, but took little notice of a man on horseback. None of them had ever been handled in their lives except when they were branded and ear-marked, and none had ever seen the inside of a stall. An old red cow, with one horn cocked and the other turned down over her face, seemed to dislike being looked at very much. She was very hot, having run a good part of the way home, as her panting sides and protruding tongue betrayed. Her temper was also of a rather infirm character, for John had not been a couple of minutes at the rails before she charged up in his direction with a savage ferocity which quite frightened him.

However, his equanimity being restored on contemplating the strength of the yard, he waited for a little, observing her motions. Sometimes she would rush in amongst the others as if endeavouring to hide herself;

then she would make her way round the yard as if seeking an opening for escape, when, seeing John, she would again rush at him with her head low, uttering an angry and baffled roar. Then she would back towards the rest, tearing up the dust with her feet, time about, and shaking her vicious black-horned old head.

Now the knives having been properly ground, Stone came up with some men, bringing a bucket full of water, an axe, a clean cloth, and the steel. The blacks, who are always exceedingly active on these occasions, were all ordered to keep away until the bullock was shot, and the rest of the cattle let go, their presence only serving to madden the uneasy animals. Jacky, the old black fellow, who had begged tobacco from John the previous day, and who was a privileged person, was alone permitted to accompany the butchers as a great favour. Accordingly, to be out of the way, Jacky took up a position in a neighbouring yard, leaning against a tree which grew in the centre of it, knowing from former experience that it was not required on such occasions for cattle.

Stone now approached to shoot the beast chosen for beef, but the wildness of the old cow prevented him from obtaining a steady aim; so, calling upon the stockman to open the gate of the narrow lane through which the cattle had been allowed to enter,

he drafted the old cow back. He was, after a few minutes' delay, about to fire, when a wild yell from Jacky caused all hands to look up and shout with laughter.

The cow had managed to make her way into Jacky's yard through a gate which had been left unfastened, and noticing the black fellow, who was unconsciously gazing at the beast which was before long to provide him with an unlimited gorge, she made a desperate rush. Jacky, hearing the noise, and feeling her warm breath on his naked skin about the same instant, gave utterance to the shriek which had startled every one, and making what looked to be Herculean strides up the tree, just saved his bacon.

The disappointed "milky mother of the herd," still thirsting for his blood, kept watch below, no one feeling inclined to alleviate Jacky's terror or spoil the fun. The bullock was now shot, and the other cattle let out into a neighbouring yard. A rope was put round the horns of the prostrate animal, and dragged by three or four white men and half-a-score of blacks, all the piccaninnies tailing on with many a jest. It was soon pulled under the gallows, to which, after being bled and skinned, the carcass was hoisted, and left for the night. The blacks received the paunch, head, and feet as their share. The hide was taken to the hide-house, spread out, and salted. Old Jacky was released

from his lofty position, and the cattle were turned out into the bush.

Mr M'Duff and his overseer returned home that night in good spirits, the missing sheep having all been found.

In this manner the days passed for a week or two, when signs of the approach of the grand event of the year began to make themselves manifest.

Men singly, or in twos and threes, kept arriving, inquiring as to the terms of shearing and washing. The washers were, as a class, considerably below the shearers. They were composed chiefly of what is called in the bush "knock-about men"—that is, men who are willing to undertake any work, sometimes shepherding, sometimes making yards or droving. They are paid about the rate of five shillings per day, besides their food.

The shearers, on the other hand, were often small settlers from some little township, who came up at this time of the year to earn a cheque, so as to enable them to eke out the scanty subsistence their farms afforded—for most of them were but young settlers, and had a heavy expense in getting things in order. Some were what is termed, *par excellence*, bushmen—that is, men who split rails, get posts, shingles, take contracts for building houses, stock-yards, &c.,—men, in fact, who work among timber continually, sometimes

felling and splitting, sometimes sawing—an intelligent, hard-working body of men, who number amongst them some of the very best specimens of Australian workmen. An odd shepherd or two—who shepherded at other times of the year, but were allowed as a favour to make their flocks over to some one else, while they earned rather more than their regular occupation could give them—and perhaps a stray stockman, were to be found among a crowd.

The washers came up in a body, and signed their agreement, "to wash one and all of the sheep on the establishment," without any fuss; but the shearers, being skilled workmen, hummed and hawed about their engagement as being more important. The question as to whether they would accept a certain amount per score and find their own rations, or a less amount and be found by the station, had to be discussed. Then another serious consideration was as to whether the station should find a cook for them during shearing, or whether they would have to provide one for themselves. These matters, however, did not take very long in settling.

A couple of days before commencing, the agreement was signed. Shears had been served out; the cook had his arrangements complete for accommodating upwards of twenty men with seats at a rough table, under a rough shed covered with leaves. Each man

had put himself up a bunk in the large hut specially devoted to shearers; their horses were all driven into some well-grassed quiet "pocket," from which it was unlikely they would stray; and everything was in readiness.

Meanwhile the wash-pool arrangements had been going on with great vigour. Stone and John, occasionally visited by old M'Duff, had got the permanent yards on the big water-hole put in order. Hurdles for gates had been carted down. Parallel poles, resting on forks driven into the bed of the water-hole, were run out on the surface of the stream, forming square soak-holes, a long narrow lane leading out to the dry land. A stage was built, from which the sheep could be allowed to slide easily into the water of the first soak-hole. A Californian pump, worked by horses, and ready to fill a huge tank—the water from which, issuing from two long slits in the bottom, was intended to gush over the sheep, and give them the final cleansing, after they had been sufficiently washed by hand—was erected, and in full working order, and every other arrangement completed.

A cloud of dust and the barking of a dog announce the arrival of the first flock to be washed. They are counted into the yard. The overseer compares notes with Stone, and the number is found to be correct,—none dropped on the road in. Next morning a certain

number are counted out and taken early to the wash-pool. The yards are arranged in a circular form, so that sheep may not get into corners, and remain without moving. They are then plunged from the stage into the water, and are passed one by one through the soak-hole under the poles dividing the soak-holes, and up the narrow lane. The washers, some of whom have taken up positions in the lane, standing up to their waists in water, roughly squeeze the wool as the sheep pass; while others, standing on the poles of the soak-holes, crutch them with a long-handled wooden crutch. Some blacks have also taken their places in the lane, and are in some instances an example to their white brethren in the matter of squeezing out the dirt.

After this process, called "soaking the sheep," has been gone through, they are allowed to stand packed closely together for the purpose of sweating the wool and softening the dirt, when they are once more passed through the water. This time, however, each sheep is thoroughly well washed by each man in succession, until it comes to the tank, where the animal is seized by two men, and turned over and over under the strong head of water issuing from it. It is then allowed to make its way on to the green feed, where, in company of its fellows, it is taken charge of by the shepherd. In about three days' time the sheep are dry, and an oily exudation called the "yolk," which

was washed away by the water, has again risen, softening the fibre of the wool and rendering it more brilliant and heavy.

The sheep are then brought at night to the wool-shed yards; as many as possible are packed inside the building, and the rest in convenient yards outside, so that the shearers may not be kept waiting. The hurry which infects every one during the shearing season is one of its main characteristics. The owner is anxious to get the wool off as soon as possible, in order to shorten the knocking about the sheep receive, and get them back to their quiet pasturages, as well also as to get rid of the expense and trouble connected with the shearers. He is further alarmed in case wet weather may come on and delay the proceeding. The shearers wish to get through with this shed in order that they may proceed elsewhere and get another. The shepherds long to get home to their solitary huts, where they are their own masters, and where their flocks are undisturbed. The storekeeper groans under an increase of work, and longs for its close. So the moment the dawn breaks, all hands are at work, and sheep are seized, denuded of their fleece, let go, and others are caught. This goes on until after sunset, with a short intermission of half an hour for breakfast and an hour for dinner. The noise in the shed is a continuous click-click of the shears, accompanying a running fire

of rude jests and pithy yarns from the men, and occasional shouts of "tar" from some one who, in his haste, has clipped a portion from the skin of the poor animal along with its coat. Boys run about gathering up the fleeces as they come off, and carrying tar when desired.

The fleece, gathered carefully with both hands, is conveyed to a long table-screen, and, with a sudden jerk, is flung out at full length. The roller-up, with a rapidity which is the result of long practice, separates the skirtings—*i.e.*, the inferior portions of the wool—rolls up the rest carefully, and the sorter classes it under its description; a boy then takes it to its particular bin. The wool differs very much in quality, and many various qualities may be found in a flock of the same description.

As the bins fill, the wool-presser packs the press with each particular kind, and compresses it into a neat bale about 5 feet 6 inches long, by about 2 feet 9 inches wide, and the same deep. It is then branded with its owner's name, its description and number, and the date, when it is rolled away and stored for transport to market.

The men, for the most part, wore flannel shirts with short sleeves, their trousers fastened loosely under the knee with a string, and confined round the waist by a handkerchief. Most of them went barefooted, and

wore little caps made of calico, or had handkerchiefs tied round their heads; and many had leather straps buckled round their wrists to strengthen the muscles. They worked hard for their money, which some of them, unfortunately, spent almost as soon as earned.

So the routine of work went on for nearly three months. Sheep came and went daily. Sheep were washed and sheep were shorn, the process being occasionally varied by sheep getting lost. This, with a perversity apparently inherent in their nature, they managed to do generally on Saturdays, so that Sunday, instead of being a day of rest, was usually as hard a day as any other. The shearers' cook had a very bad time. He had many masters, each of whom had a peculiar taste, which imperatively required satisfying. There were so many faults found with the style of cooking (the true shearer being quite a *gourmet* in the matter of doughboys and duff), there were so many demands for food and drink at irregular hours, that, notwithstanding the good pay which this functionary gets (he receiving generally a certain sum from each man, besides a subsidy from the owner of the station), two or three tried the office, and either resigned or were dismissed. No one would take the job. The shearers were getting alarmed. They would have to cook their own food. This was a prospect none of them relished. It was time lost, a waste of mate-

rial, bad prospect for puddings, and no servant to order or complain about. A negotiation was opened with the washers, some of whom, no doubt, tempted by the high wages, would be glad to undertake the office. The shearers were right. A washer—a dogged, determined-looking man—accepted, and commenced operations. That night, on their return from the shed, each pannikin and knife was laid on the long bark table, the buckets with the tea placed handy, and a huge duff and pieces of boiled beef in tin dishes graced the board. As usual, no sooner had the men taken their places than arose cries of, "I say, cook! do you call this duff?" "This tea isn't sweet enough!" "Tea's too sweet!" "Cook!" "Doctor!" The doctor quietly made his appearance. Rolling up his sleeves, he marched up to the biggest and strongest of the bullies, and pointing with his strong stump of a forefinger at the pudding on the man's plate, he said, "Now then, mate, is that 'ere duff the right thing?" The battered prize-fighting look of his bullet-head and flattened nose was quite enough. "I ses it's fust-rate," was the reply. "All right," said the cook, walking slowly along the table, his eye glancing fiercely round to find a victim. "Any one of you gents as ain't satisfied can gimme a lesson outside, you know." It was sufficient. A stillness almost supernatural followed. The cook

afterwards said he couldn't imagine how any one could disagree with such a quiet lot of men.

The eye now got quite accustomed to the flocks of sheep coming in continually: round, with full fleeces, and panting slowly in the heat, to return bare, leggy, roach-backed-looking objects, covered with shear-marks, and the raddled signs by which each man distinguished his own shearing, with here and there ominous-looking patches of tar covering a gaping wound, — racing gladly towards their accustomed feeding-grounds amongst clouds of dust.

John had his hands full. His morning work in the store over, he had to attend at the wash-pool, where he took his place amongst the other men in the water, and worked till evening, when he had some hours' heavy duty attending to customers in the store. Even Sundays were seldom days of respite. Sheep lost on Saturday imperatively constrained every one on the head-station to look for them, or a small unshorn portion of sheep had to be shepherded apart, or a bullock had unexpectedly to be got in for killing, or something interfered with the repose so urgently required; and no one felt better pleased than he did to see the last lot of "monkeys," as the shearers usually denominated sheep, leave the head-station.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DESPERATE RIDE ON A STRANGE STEED—HORSE-BREAKING.

THE shearing was no sooner over than everything took quite a different complexion. Mr M'Duff started on an expedition to look at some new country away in the far north, which he thought it might be advisable to buy, and stock with his surplus sheep. Stone had also left temporarily, having business, he said, in Sydney. Only old Graham remained at Cambaranga, with John, and his time was chiefly occupied in visiting the different sheep-stations and counting the sheep.

This slack season on the station was usually devoted to mustering all the quiet horses on the run, branding up the foals, breaking in the young colts and fillies, and making attempts to get in the wilder mobs on the outskirts of the station. Two horse-breakers were engaged to assist the stockman, and John was nominally in charge of the proceedings. The horse-breakers were slight but clean-limbed active young fellows, having that peculiar look about them by which Australian-

born sons of Europeans are so easily distinguished from people of any other country. Both were very quiet and self-possessed in manner, but an experienced eye could detect in a moment the tendency to "flashness" which seems inseparable from their occupation. They were well known in the district as "Jack the Native" and his mate Charley; and no sooner were the proceeds of one job dissipated than a new one was sure to start up on some neighbouring run, notwithstanding various reports that got afloat taxing them with "planting" horses,[1] and with occasionally taking a few strange ones to a distance, and there surreptitiously disposing of them.

Two better riders could not be found; and the Native was always open to "ride anything with hair on it," as he expressed himself, "for a ten-pound note."

Indeed, not long before this, when engaged on the Ungahrun run, Mr Fitzgerald had brought some very wild scrub cattle into his yard, and amongst them was a savage old scrub bull who had for years baffled all attempts to run him in or destroy him. He had had many a bullet in the most vital places—so said the stockmen on the run; and although he might disappear for six months or so, he invariably turned up again as well and savage as ever. So knowing had he become, that if, in the excursions which he was in

[1] Hiding horses for the sake of the reward sure to be offered.

the habit of making from his home in the scrubby broken country, down among the quiet herds on the plains, any of the men endeavoured to drive him with a mob to the yards, that instant he stopped, then turning his head towards the nearest scrub, he trotted off with a surly defiant air, the huge hump at the back of his head giving him the appearance of a buffalo. How it happened that he came in at all was quite inexplicable: the other cattle gave the men much trouble, but the bull "went like any old milking cow," as Jack the Native, who was one of the party, afterwards said.

Of course all hands crowded to look at old "Razorback Jack," as he was called, after a particular mountain which he usually frequented. Old Razorback did not seem to realise what had happened just at first. The contemplative mood which had betrayed him did not pass off until some one attempted to cross the yard. Then the old outlaw stepped out with a low roar, and desperately rushed at the intruder, who bounded lightly on to the cap of the stock-yard, sitting on which he addressed, in the calmest manner, a variety of insulting and defamatory personal remarks to the infuriated savage, who, kneeling down, tore the ground with his horns, lashed his sides, and roared in impotent fury a few feet below him. A hat thrown into the yard from the opposite side had scarcely

fallen, when Razorback Jack's vigilant ferocious small eyes, which were watching everything, made him aware of the fact. In an instant he was down on it, transfixed it with his horns, and tossed it a dozen times round the yard, leaving it occasionally for a minute to return again and again to repeat the scene. It was now that some one, remembering Jack the Native's favourite boast, asked him how he would like a mount on old Razorback. "Well," said the Native, "I'll ride him for a ten-pound note."

"I daresay you would," said the other. "Rope him, haul him up to a fence, leg-rope him, so that he can't stir. I'd do that myself."

"I'll tell you what I'm game to do," said the Native, quietly: "I'll bet you a £20 note that I ride him without saddle or bridle, loose in the yard."

"Done!" shouted the other. "Remember, if he slings you, you lose the bet."

"All right," returned Jack; "but if he falls, of course that doesn't count to me as a spill."

Young Fitzgerald, who was looking on amongst the others, now remarked that he thought it rather too dangerous a joke; but Jack was determined, and he was allowed to have his own way. First of all, opening the gate of the pound—a small enclosure with several gates leading into other yards—he managed to drive the cattle into it, and separate the bull from the rest.

The bull now rushed round the sides of the strong high pound seeking savagely for some opening. As he came round to the gate leading into the yard in which he had previously been, the Native dropped quickly on his back. The gate was pulled open by one of the men, and the strange pair tore through it. None of the bystanders knew how it was done. So quickly and quietly had it happened, that the first glance revealed the pair flying madly round the yard amid clouds of dust.

The roars of the terrified brute were perfectly appalling, but above them now and then rose the voice of the Native as he shouted to his steed. He was lying on the bull's back, holding a flank of the animal with each hand, his long legs pressing the reeking sides of the infuriated brute like a vice, with a foot under each of its shoulders.

Round they flew, now plunging wildly in the air, now rushing up against the yard, until Fitzgerald feared that both man and bull would be dashed to pieces. Running to the gate, he threw it open, and out flew the ancient scrubber, instinctively making towards his own wild domain, bearing with him the stronged-nerved rider, whose iron sinews bound him as firmly to his grim charger as did the cords Mazeppa to the untamed steed.

Several men jumped on horses, which still remained

saddled and hung up to the fence, and pursued the fast disappearing pair. The bull's fierce rage had now almost expended itself, for when they came up with the chase, Jack was sitting up, using his spurs freely, and chatted gaily with his mates; but how to get him off was the question.

Old Razorback paid no attention to their efforts to make him turn towards the yard. Steadily, his head bent low, his chest heaving, his laboured breathing sounding like choking sobs, he pursued his plodding path; and Fitzgerald, who now came up, began to fear that he would again regain his wind and elude them yet. Shouting to Jack, he desired him to throw himself off, in order that he might shoot the brute, with which intention he had brought with him a breech-loading carbine.

"No, no," cried the bull-tamer; "I should lose my bet! Shoot him; never mind me—I'll chance it!"

Luckily at this moment old Razorback made a rush at one of the other stockmen who had ventured too near him, stumbled, and rolled with his rider in the dust. A fallen log came in very handy for the Native now. He rolled himself nimbly under it, and soon afterwards his namesake's career was ended by a couple of Snider bullets behind the shoulder.

Such was the man who, with his mate, undertook the job of mustering and breaking in the Cambaranga

horses. These men seemed to find a pleasure in mounting the worst horses on the run, and it appeared to give them no trouble to hold on. They led a much pleasanter life than the other men employed on the station did. It involved no hard work or dirt, while their character for pluck caused them to be treated with a certain degree of respect.

John was astonished to find how suddenly a wild untamed colt in their hands acquired a totally different nature; and the Native, who had taken rather a fancy to him, offered to teach him to break horses in, provided he would ride, or at least mount, any horses he might desire him to back. Our hero agreed, well pleased, and his spare time for a month or two was passed in the Native's company. The morning after the bargain, on his going up to the yard, he found the Native and his mate drafting out some horses from a mob they had got in the day before.

"Ah," said Long Jack, "you're just in time. Charley and I are going to start breaking this mob in, and I'll give you a lesson. Charley is going to take those two in hand, and I'll take the black colt here and the chestnut mare."

The horses in question were each in turn driven through various yards until they came to the "crush lane." This is a lane wide enough to permit only a single bullock or horse at a time to make his way up

it. It is used for branding full-grown cattle, and the fences are made of the strongest timber, and are very high. Generally at the end of it there is a bail for the purpose of spaying. Up this lane, therefore, the colt was urged, despite of his attempts to the contrary, until he came to the end. Two or three rails were then fastened behind him, to prevent his making his way backwards out of his close prison. The fences touched his sides. In front of him the end of the lane barred his progress.

Wildly the terrified animal reared and plunged in the confined space when he saw beside him, for the first time, a human being. The beautiful eye, glittering with fear, dilated, and every nerve trembled and shook, while every unexpected motion produced a plunge and kick. With rapid and practised hands Jack and Charley threw the surcingle round the now sweat-dripping body, hooked up the end of it under the belly by means of a bent wire, and had it buckled in a brace of shakes. Standing high on the fence, holding the long sweeping tail, tangled in a huge bush-knot in one hand, Jack put the crupper round the butt and buckled it with the other, explaining to John that in putting the crupper on any horse not particularly quiet, it was the safest plan to hold the tail up until the completion of the operation. A strongly plaited greenhide-halter was now slipped

over the head, after which the headstall with the large breaking-in bit followed. Side reins were attached to the headstall, and loosely buckled to the surcingle, which was once more tightened up. A gate which formed at this place one side of the crush fence, was thrown open, and the now tackled colt allowed to escape into an adjoining yard.

This it signalised by putting its head down to the ground, in close proximity to its fore-feet, and in making, with humped back, a series of active vicious jumps or springs, varied occasionally by a lash-out of its hind-legs, winding up by galloping round the yard, and kicking at the halter which trailed alongside it.

"That's the way, my little boy," said the Native. "That fellow will turn out a nice horse, I'll bet. I like to see them have their fling when first they get into the yard—it shows they ain't sulky, you know. Now, you watch the chestnut mare. She's a sulky devil. She's too old, any way, to break in. She'll never be any good."

The chestnut, a handsome mare about sixteen hands high, now underwent the same process; but with the exception of a vicious kick or two when being crupped, she showed no sign of fright. Her head she held so low that it was almost impossible to put the bridle on. Indeed, so immovable was she when tackled, that the Native, climbing up the rails,

coolly stood on her back and performed various circus antics.

"Now," he said, getting down, "let her out."

The gate was accordingly thrown open, when the mare walked out, and moved away to a corner of the yard, where she stood quietly, bearing all the weight of her rather coarse-looking head upon the bearing-reins.

"That's a bad lot," said Long Jack, decisively.

His mate went through a similar process with his two, which he drafted into separate yards.

The black colt was now driven into a small yard by himself, round which he galloped unceasingly.

"Now," said the horse-breaker, "just sit on the fence there and you'll see me make that colt come up to me when I call him, and follow me all round the yard before long."

John, who had heard of this, but had never seen it practised, did as he was bid.

With his usual calm, self-possessed manner, Jack let himself quietly through the gate and stood in the middle of the yard, causing the young horse to fly round faster than ever. This the breaker permitted it to do until want of breath compelled it to move at a slower pace. Its hind-feet treading frequently upon the trailing halter, and consequently jerking the head back sharply as often as it did so, also contributed greatly to this result.

"Why don't you tie up the halter?" said young West.

"Well, I could make him come up just as well without it," said the Native; "but, you see," he explained, "it's a saving of time in many ways. First, it is handy to get hold of him by—for the halter is so long that I can reach it without coming close to his legs, and can thus always keep his head to me, which is the part I must first get at in order to let him smell me, and be sure that I won't hurt him; and secondly, it is good for him to tread upon it. It teaches him, by jerking his head, to give way to a pull on the bridle. It is the first step in teaching him to lead. He finds that by slackening his head he eases the pain he would otherwise suffer. Now I'll take up the end of the halter and make the colt come up."

So saying, he lifted the plaited hide-rope and pulled sharply on it, causing the colt, whose nose was now rather tender, to stop, on which, getting in front of him, he made him go round the opposite way. This he continued doing for about half an hour, by which time the colt had become so far accustomed to control as to turn and move in the other direction upon seeing his master's uplifted hand and hearing the commanding way.

Now the Native confined the horse's movements in either direction to a few paces, stopping him almost

as soon as he had begun to move, touching him with the whip in an irritating manner, but without severity, whenever the animal presented any portion of the body but his head to him. The colt now learned that upon facing his enemy all irritation and annoyance ceased, he was addressed in soothing terms, the jerking of the halter was discontinued, and also the motions of the whip; but that upon endeavouring to turn away, or gallop round the yard, a severe jerk of the nose, a cut of the whip, and an angry raising of the voice invariably followed. The consequence naturally was, that he preferred standing watching the being who exercised such power over him. But although this compliance was rewarded by a cessation of his trouble for a short time, he was not allowed to enjoy rest for a longer period than about a minute—merely enough to mark approval. The Native irritated him to move afresh, merely to stop him again, at the same time pulling gently but steadily on the halter, repeating the process over and over again until the perplexed animal made a step in his direction, upon which the voice again became soothing, all motion ceased, and the animal began to perceive that in the neighbourhood of the man was peace and rest. Again and again the same operation was gone through, until suddenly the colt trotted up and stood trembling within a foot of its now acknowledged

master, who, gently extending his hand, allowed him to smell it all over.

The same thing was repeated frequently, each time the breaker succeeding in getting a little more into the confidence of the horse, which seemed unwilling to leave the proximity of the man. Several variations of the procedure were now executed. Retiring a little distance, the Native called on his steed to "come up here." The unaccustomed distance producing some disinclination to comply, a shout, accompanied by a rapid motion of the whip, again compelled obedience, when the same method of reward restored the dumb treaty which had been concluded, of petting for obedience, and punishment for disregard of orders. Little by little the Native succeeded in gently stroking the animal over the head and neck on both sides, sometimes startling the creature slightly by touching a new part, but succeeding in restoring his faith by patiently commencing afresh, and repeating every movement anew, taking care to gain ground as he did so. Indeed such a glamour had he apparently cast over the colt, that, walk where he liked, to any part of the yard, the kindly-natured though high-spirited creature followed, and stood patiently waiting, champing the large breaking-bit in its tender gums, and flinging snow-white flakes of foam over its noble breast.

The chestnut mare was now taken in hand, but

with a very different result. She proved, as Jack the Native had foretold, unusually sulky-tempered. She could scarcely be got to move round the yard unless stimulated to do so by a pretty free use of the whip; nor would she show any signs of giving in by the time the men generally went to dinner.

Late in the afternoon the men were again at work, and John could not help admiring the steady patience and gentleness by means of which the Native gradually acquired such an ascendancy over the colt as to be able to handle him all over on both sides, and lift his feet all round.

"There is nothing," he said, "like handling; you can't give them too much of it. All depends on your making a horse know he has nothing to fear from you. Now I could have tied this fellow's leg up, saddled and ridden him this morning, but ten to one he would have bucked all the time, and been bad to catch, hard to mount, and unsafe for all but tip-top riders ever after. Now if he is treated with steady consistent kindness and firmness, and does not get frightened, he will turn out a good quiet horse. He may perhaps buck a little at first, or after a long spell, but nothing to speak of. Everything depends on handling. I shall ride that fellow to-morrow evening. Of course, if it paid me to spend longer time over him I could make him so quiet that

he never would buck at all; but I can't afford to keep him on tackling longer than two days. Horses in England and other parts would buck just as ours do if they were treated in the same way; but there colts are handled from the time almost when they are foaled. I have heard young new chums from England, who sat on their horses like so many bags of flour, blowing how they used to ride the unbroken colts at home. I never see them getting on our unbroken colts—not to say but that some of them turn out pretty good riders after a bit. We'll go now and see how the mare is getting on."

But the mare maintained her sulky, vicious stubbornness, and a couple of hours were vainly spent in trying to make her give in. She allowed herself to be rubbed over with a long stick, kicking occasionally as it touched her rump, but obstinately keeping her head turned from her breaker. It was getting late, and the Native, waxing impatient, thought he would try what effect the whip would have on her.

So flicking first at one hind-leg, then at another, he succeeded, after some savage kicks, in getting her to face him. But his rewards were not acceptable. She turned because she escaped the whip; but her sulky nature would not allow her to give in altogether. Anxious to get her right before dark, and feeling sure that she would soon come up after facing him, Long

Jack gave her another cut or two inside the knee. She came this time, but not as he expected. Throwing her ears back, she rushed fiercely at her tormentor, open-mouthed, and struck furiously at him with her fore-feet. Indeed, nothing but the whip-handle, which he held crosswise in front of him, could have prevented his being knocked down and badly hurt; as it was, she drove him backwards through the gate of the yard, which luckily chanced to be a little ajar. Jack instantly returned; but no sooner had he entered than she once more charged savagely at him. This time he was prepared, and met her with a sharp blow on the nose, stepping, at the same time, quickly on one side. Darkness coming on, the horse-breaker resolved to let her go that night; so, driving her up the lane where he had tackled her in the morning, he took off the breaking-in harness and turned her into the paddock. Very differently did the colt behave. Coming up, he rubbed his head gently on his trainer's shoulder, allowed him to take off the crupper, surcingle, and head-gear, suffered it to be thrown over his back carelessly, and followed him to the slip panel of the paddock, trotting off rejoicingly to find his mates.

"Well," said the Native, "I've seen a good many horses, but I never saw such a determined sulky devil as that mare in my life. She never will be any good.

I knew it as soon as I saw her. However, we'll try what we can do with her in the morning."

They now went to look at the horses Charley had charge of, and found they were both as quiet as the black colt.

"You see," said Jack to our hero, "these two are all right. I scarcely ever came across a horse that this style of breaking wouldn't suit, provided he hadn't been humbugged before; and the curious part is, that the higher-spirited the horse is, the sooner he gets to understand you. The wildest generally become the soonest tame."

CHAPTER IX.

HORSE-BREAKING—RUNNING IN THE YELLOW MOB.

NEXT morning the blackboy, whose business it was to collect and yard all the horses that happened to be in the paddock, reported that one of them was lying dead in a small water-hole. On going down to the spot with his tutor the horse-breaker, John found it to be the chestnut mare which had given so much trouble the day before. She was lying in a shallow pool of water not more than eighteen inches in depth, with her head completely immersed. They had her dragged out, and examined her carefully, but could discover no injury which would account for her decease. Jack the Native declared that she had drowned herself deliberately, and related several curious instances concerning sulky horses which had come under his own notice, some of which John West heard confirmed by other experienced bushmen. However, no one seemed to regret her loss, Old Graham, who had a detestation of unruly horses, remarking that "it was

a good job; it would save some fellow's neck." A new two-year-old supplied her place in the yard, and soon succumbed to the treatment she had resisted unto death.

This morning the black colt, after having gone through his lesson of the previous day several times, was fastened to one of the rails of the yard by the halter. Finding himself fast, he endeavoured to break the rope by straining on it with all his force. In vain: he only compressed his jaws with each struggle. The greenhide-halter was strong enough to hold a bull. He reared and fought with his feet in the air, the halter being judiciously slackened to allow him room, and again tightened on his coming down. Gradually he found that, by coming close to the fence, the rope relaxed and relieved his aching jaws, upon which he gave over struggling to free himself, and remained still.

"Now," said the Native, "after a lesson or two of that sort, you'll never break a bridle, my boy."

All horses, he explained to John, should be thus treated when broken in. They learn easily a lesson then which saves infinite annoyance afterwards. The black colt was now driven about the yard in reins in order to mouth him until he understood how to turn to the right or left when desired, after which, another quiet old horse having been procured and mounted by

Long Jack, he was taught to lead alongside. This he picked up in the course of half an hour. The breaker then rode into the paddack, leading him, walked, trotted, galloped, took him round the buildings of the house, and back to the yard again. In the course of the evening the colt's breaking-in tackle was exchanged for a riding-saddle and bridle; he then received a short lesson in leading on foot, which his previous experience with the trailing halter had prepared him for, and all that now remained to do was the mounting. This was accomplished in the same cautious gentle manner which had distinguished his previous education. First the saddle received a few pats, then it was moved backwards and forwards; then a foot was quietly inserted in the stirrup, and weight put on it, the colt being made to stand still; then the right leg was slipped over, and the rider sat on the back which never before had felt a burden. Dismounting, the same proceeding was repeated again and again. John was now made to mount the other horse, and riding side by side the pair moved round the yard. The colt broke into a jog once or twice, sawing a little at the bit and shaking his head, but one steady firm hand kept him to the walk, while the other caressed him soothingly, his rider addressing him in various terms of horsey endearment. This lesson over, he was again allowed his freedom in the

paddock. Charley's horses were both pretty quiet also. One of them gave a few bucks, but went steadily afterwards.

Next day John found himself called upon to accompany the breaker when riding the young horses; and with the exception of a sudden kick or buck when startled, they behaved very quietly. The men seemed to have a habit of sticking tight to the saddle intuitively when the animal they bestrode gave the slightest indication of restiveness. The saddles they rode on were very well adapted for breaking-in purposes and John did not recollect ever having seen any of the kind in England. They were made of what is called "bag leather," with the rough inside of the skin outwards. They were well cut back on the pommel to allow the withers of any horse plenty of room. The knee-pads were very large and strong, covering the front of the knee completely; and a pad behind the thigh fixed the leg as in a vice. The pommel was also furnished with strong iron dees driven firmly into the woodwork, for the purpose of holding the straps necessary for fixing on a swag. The Native explained that second or third rate riders very often made up a bundle of twigs, rolled up in a piece of cloth, which they bound across the saddle by these straps. This kid, as it is called, pressing firmly on the front of the legs, assists immensely in keeping a rider down in the

saddle when a horse bucks heavily, but is at the same time dangerous. The easy grace with which the Native and his mate sat on their horses was a source of constant admiration to the young Englishman. The inimitable elegance which constant practice had lent to their slender, well-knit figures characterised every motion, especially that of mounting.

John soon learned sufficient of the breaking-in business to enable him to practise it successfully; and stimulated by the Native's praises, he hardened his heart and mounted several of the young horses for the first time. Gradually gaining confidence, he tried his hand at sticking to some of the more notorious youngsters, not without receiving many tumbles in the soft sand of the creek, whither he prudently conducted such animals as were of a lively disposition.

And now an attempt was about to be made to run in a mob of horses whose favourite pastures were in a remote part of the run. This particular herd of wild horses had amongst its numbers many fine animals which had escaped from servitude, and for which a standing reward existed. They had adopted all the characteristics of their wild brethren, and were quite as wary and watchful, and equally hard to turn in the direction of the yards, when they set their faces towards their mountain fastnesses. It was ruled by a stallion of unusual size and beauty, of a peculiar

golden yellow colour, with waving long black mane and tail. He was a thorough-bred horse, son of a horse imported at great expense from England, out of an imported mare of equal breeding, and when a colt of about eighteen months, had by great negligence been allowed to wander from Bindarobina, the station of the United Australian Pastoral Company. For several years his whereabouts remained undiscovered, until a solitary stockman, tracking some cattle into this unfrequented spot, dropped across the tracks of a herd of horses, round a small water-hole at which he had stopped to water his own nag. Following up the fresh tracks for about half a mile, the stockman came suddenly upon a mob of nearly thirty horses, feeding up a pleasant valley, covered with delicate young burnt feed. A loud snort from one of the mares announced their discovery of him; and the yellow steed, galloping round his harem, drew them off to a little distance, and advanced with proudly arched neck and floating tail at a high-stepping trot, to examine the intruder. One by one the rest trotted up, and caracoled in a circle, shaking their heads, plunging and kicking playfully at each other. Most of the foals and young horses were of the same rich golden yellow as their sire, and the beauty of their appearance plainly betokened noble pedigree on the father's side at least. A movement on the part of the man

sent the whole mob flying through the forest glades. Several years had passed since then, and many attempts had been unsuccessfully made to get in the yellow mob as they were called, but in vain. Whether it was that those who first attempted it were inferior riders, or poorly mounted, or mismanaged matters, none had ever succeeded in capturing the fleet monarch of the woods. The frequent attempts to run in these animals had served to make them unusually alert, and the chief difficulty lay in keeping them together, it being their custom to split in every direction when pursued. Most men who had tried their luck with the yellow mob came home unsuccessful, with horses knocked up, or perhaps ruined for life; and those thought themselves fortunate who managed to cut out, and bring home, a few mares and foals,—unable to keep up with the better-winded and lighter-heeled steeds. The Native and Charley had heard many tales of these outlaws during their residence in the neighbourhood, but had never had an opportunity before of measuring themselves with the mob, and both ardently longed to attempt the difficult and arduous undertaking.

The day came, and mounted on the picked horses of the Cambaranga station, the Native and his mate, accompanied by the stockman and our friend John, started to find, and if possible capture, the yellow mob.

John, who was in high spirits, determined that at all events no one should have it to say that he was afraid to ride, and resented highly Charley's depreciatory remark that "he wouldn't see the way they went."

The little party followed a narrow track, which, winding through some scrubby thick country, led them over a small range into the watershed of the creek, on the head of which the horses were usually found. The creek was at this time of the year merely a succession of huge water-holes and beds of sand. The country on its banks for some miles was of an open, ridgy, lightly timbered description; then, as the party pushed further up, it took a different character,—the soil became poor—a mixture of pipeclay and sand; the trees grew tall and straight, while thick underwood and saplings here and there gave a gloomy look to the whole. Further on the creek grew more confined. Ridges came close into it of a stony, broken, difficult nature, and at last, after about four or five miles of this kind of travelling, the country opened out again. Sandy, apple-tree flats, and iron-bark ridges, lined the creek here on either side; while at no great distance ranges bounded the view.

All now became interested in inspecting the ground. Horses' tracks, though old, could be plainly seen everywhere. A mile or two was traversed cautiously, the stockman assuring the party that if "Yellowman got

wind of them that night, they might say good-bye to their chance of getting a run out of him." Accordingly a convenient spot was chosen for a camp, the horses were hobbled and turned out, and matters discussed with the assistance of the pot and the pipe.

John thoroughly enjoyed this camping out. The red sun was sinking behind the dark mountain-range, throwing a warm glow over the western sky. Not a cloud was visible. The horses revelled in good sweet pasture. The fire was lit and pots boiled merrily, while overhead the laughing-jackasses chorussed out in discordant union their strange greeting to the evening. Clouds of white cockatoos flew screeching one after another in the same direction, like flakes of snow upon the sky; gentle little squatter pigeons cooed lovingly in answer to their mates on all sides, or flew rapidly up to a branch of one of the old trees which overhung the pool at which they were accustomed to slake their thirst. Sometimes a kangaroo would come down with measured thud, thud, and drink, and then return without noticing the human beings; or seeing them, would swerve suddenly to one side, and disappear with flying leaps. Certainly it was the elysium of rest. The recumbent position gave thorough ease after the long ride, and the friendly pipe produced a soothing effect on minds free from care, which those only know who have experienced it.

How little sufficed them! — a scanty supper of beef and bread, with a quart of tea; a thin half-blanket apiece under them, and their saddles for pillows. John would not have bartered his peace of mind to be a king.

Presently Charley commenced a yarn, which drew another from the stockman, followed in turn by the Native, after which the entire party dropped off to sleep.

John had not, as it appeared to him, slept more than a few minutes, when he was awakened by one of the others, who, calling to him to get his bridle, started off towards where the horses had been feeding. Hastily snatching it from the ground, he followed, and soon came upon Charley, who told him that a wild mob had come down to their horses, and they feared that their nags might be taken away by them. Now they overtook Jack and the stockman, who had succeeded in catching their animals, and stopping the others, which were hastily bridled. John had not got the sleep quite out of his eyes, but soon the noise of many hoofs awakened him completely.

In the clear starlit night he saw plainly a dark mass circling rapidly round them, while the tramp of the wild squadron sounded like thunder. Suddenly there was a pause, then came a loud fierce snort like a trumpet-blast, then another short interval of silence. Once

more the angry defiance broke upon the quiet night, then a rush—a breaking of saplings, the galloping of many feet—becoming fainter and fainter until lost in the distance. Sleep was now out of the question. The Southern Cross sinking to rest betokened that the night had almost passed. Soon the bright morning-star ushered in the calm sweet dawn. A few birds began to whistle. The laughing-jackasses simultaneously unite once more in offering their grateful but unearthly hymn of praise. Far down the creek, on one of the river-oaks which grow in its bed, a swamp-pheasant utters its rapid coo-coo-coo-coo-coo-coo-cook. Once more the cockatoos fly screeching across the sky towards their feeding-ground beside a distant stream. A huge crow, with a knowledge of their whereabouts truly supernatural, flies up and alights heavily on a branch above their heads, with a loud hoarse caw of satisfaction, echoed a moment afterwards by his mate. And now the glorious southern sun arises above the horizon. The air resounds with the joyous melody of birds, among which is heard clearly the rich full note of the organ magpie.

A hasty breakfast is soon over, pipes are lighted, horses saddled, and the party proceed on their search. How exhilarating is the morning sweetness! a brilliant fresh beauty pervades everything,—the leaves the flowers, the grass, glisten with dew. As they

cross the creek the horses stand with their fetlocks in the clear limpid water and sip it luxuriously, now and then raising their heads to look about them with their mouths full, a little stream escaping from their lips where the bit parts them. Now they follow the tracks of their midnight visitors. Occasionally they pass in close proximity to some old-man kangaroo, who, surrounded by his does, sits upright watching the small party as they go by, until, reassured by the gradually increasing distance, he again drops on all-fours, and slowly hops from one sweet patch of feeding-ground to another, interrupting his breakfast now and then to scratch himself with one of his short human-like arms, much after the manner of a monkey. Frequently they come to a bare patch of ground under a few shady trees, with horse-tracks more or less fresh, and heaps of dung.

"Horse-camp," whispers the stockman to John. "We may come on them any minute now."

John's heart flutters with the excitement caused by the stealthy approach, and the knowledge that the first glimpse will send them all away at a wild racing pace. The others take things more coolly. Now and then one gets down to examine a track which puzzles him. Now the tracks split and look as if going in all directions. At this moment Charley, who is leading, stops short, and holds his head in a

listening attitude, lifting his hand as if enjoining caution.

All stop, and standing in their stirrups, crane their necks to discover the mob they are in search of,—but a patch of scrub lies before them. As they cautiously creep up to Charley, he whispers that he heard a foal whinnying not far in advance. It is fortunate that they are to leeward of the mob. They all alight and settle their saddle-cloths, tighten their girths and belts, pull the chin-straps of their cabbage-tree hats down, and mounting, move towards the scrub. For one moment John caught sight of a mob of horses, some black, a few bays, a grey or two, and a number of yellow or golden chestnut hue,—the most prominent figure, however, being a noble up-standing yellow horse, with a rich golden tint lighting up the otherwise rather ugly colour.

He stood a few yards nearer to them than the rest, gazing with uplifted head. Then seemingly comprehending what they wanted, he snorted and dashed off furiously. There was a confused noise, a few neighs from mares and foals, a huge cloud of dust, a rapid trampling, and John found himself galloping close to a number of mares and foals, streaming in a long line after a cloud of dust in the distance. John now realised what Charley meant by saying he would never see the way they went; but pushing his horse

to its best, he flew on, hoping to overtake his companions. The mares and foals broke behind him in various directions, but still he pushed on; now some broken-looking gullies with huge rocks rose in front, and dashing down them at the imminent risk of his neck, he found still worse before him. This was rather different to sailing over the open level country. Here he was stuck at these gullies, while no doubt his companions were straining every nerve in pursuit of the famous Yellowman. Scrambling sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, he came at last to a standstill, and recognised all his efforts as useless. He was clearly not destined to be the capturer of any of that wild lot.

Turning his horse's head, he followed, not without a good deal of trouble, the broken gully to its junction with the creek, coming upon the tracks of a mob of horses heading down it as he did so. Disgusted and ashamed of his failure, John pushed on with hopes of not getting in very much behind the others. As he passed through the thick country on the banks of the creek, following as much as possible the tracks of the horses, he came to a spot where the broken and bent saplings gave evidence of their furious speed; and on the ground he was shocked to see a man lying. Dismounting hastily, he found it to be the stockman, who had met with a disaster amongst the thick timber.

Recognising John, he faintly whispered "Water." John procured some in his quart-pot, which the poor fellow eagerly swallowed, and coming round a little, with difficulty gave him to understand that he had struck against a large bough, which had knocked him off his horse, and he thought had smashed in his chest. Getting some more water, and propping his head up comfortably, John left him, promising to bring the buggy for him; and pushing his horse along at a gallop, soon reached the range dividing the creek from that on which the station stood.

As he turned round a patch of scrub he fell in with about a dozen horses coming towards him, and by their knocked-up, draggled appearance, guessed them to be part of the mob his companions had followed. Something had occurred to prevent them being yarded, which gave him a chance to distinguish himself, and redeem his failure. Shouting at them, and cracking his whip, he found little difficulty in heading the jaded animals towards home. His own horse was comparatively fresh, and he had nearly brought them in sight of the yard, when Charley came up, overjoyed to find that West had turned up in the very nick of time. The horses were now securely yarded, and to John's intense delight and pride he found that the Native had run in the yellow stallion. Singling out from the mob, of which he was the leader, the power-

ful thorough-bred had stretched himself to his utmost, as he raced along, followed closely by the hawk-eyed active Native, on a steed whose Arab sire had bequeathed to him an iron-hearted stoutness and endurance which a Bedouin might have gloried in.

Alas, Yellowman! the soft, young burnt feed thy soul loved is now telling against thee. Still, with reeking flanks and sobbing breast, over gullies, creeks, and through scrub, the noble animal carried his wearied body, the pure blood sustaining the fearful pace, his wily pursuer edging him nearer and nearer home. A few miles more and a mob of quiet mares and foals are fallen in with, and surrounded by them, the conquered wild steed entered the yard and became a prisoner. It was at this moment that Charley, whose horse had knocked up with him within a mile of the station, made his appearance.

Hastily catching the horse which the unlucky stockman had ridden, and which had galloped in with the others, he started back to try and overtake the horses he had been compelled to let go, when he met our hero bringing them in.

No sooner was the accident made known than the greatest sympathy prevailed among all the station hands. One started at once for the nearest doctor, some seventy miles away, while the others busied themselves in harnessing horses to the buggy, and

in getting it made comfortable for the sufferer, and starting back to the place where he lay. They returned late at night, bringing the man with them. A large poultice of marsh-mallows had been prepared, which was applied at once, and afforded much relief. This simple remedy was used until the arrival of the doctor next morning, he having ridden hard all night; and under his skilful treatment the poor fellow progressed rapidly, and eventually recovered, although a deep indentation in his chest showed how severe the accident had been.

CHAPTER X.

A HARLEQUINADE—BETYAMMO AND THE GRAYS.

THE news of the capture of the yellow stallion and some of his mob soon got about the district, and induced a good many to visit Cambaranga from various motives. Some there were who owned horses in the mob, or who believed, from descriptions given of horses seen amongst the wild ones, that they did; and there were others who were ready to claim any horse for whom no owner could be found.

Among the the former was young Mr Fitzgerald, from Ungahrun station, a tall, fine-looking young fellow, of whom John had heard Ruth speak as a kind friend of her childhood. A short, glossy, black beard and moustache added much to the manliness of his honest open face. Living chiefly in the bush, away from the gaieties and temptations of town, he had retained the simple open frankness of manner and cheery nature which had always made him popular in his neighbourhood. Always ready, as he was,

to afford hospitality and do a poor man a good turn, the working classes spoke well of him; while his skill as a horseman, and his intimate knowledge of bush-manship, together with the influence he possessed as the son of a large proprietor, secured the goodwill and respect of all, both rich and poor, in his district.

Old Graham was not at home, so having hung his horse up to the railings of the fence, Fitzgerald walked up to the stock-yard, where he met our hero, to whom he introduced himself, telling his business in a few words.

A number of men were gathered round the yards, in which were still the captured horses. The yellow horse stood by himself in a small high yard, surrounded by other divisions of fencing.

The dry white prespiration dimmed his golden sides; the want of food and water had tucked up his belly; his huge tail, draggled with sweat and dirt, and matted in great bush knots, swept the ground; his long mane hung in thick tangled masses on either side of his huge bull-like crest. Imprisoned and captive as he was, the wild eyes gleaming with unquenched fire from among the black locks which half hid his fore-head, bespoke an indomitable savage spirit. Proudly, with uplifted crest and arched neck, he trotted around his small prison with grand high action, snorting loudly ever and anon.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Fitzgerald.

"Oh, I believe he belongs to the Company's station," returned John; "they have sent over for him."

"You have a treat before you there, Dick," remarked the young squatter to the Company's stockman, who was looking on. "How are you going to manage him?"

"That's just what I don't know," said the man, who, though a good enough hand among horses generally, seemed rather frightened. "He's a bit of a man-eater, this one," he grumbled, climbing into the yard, and, cautiously approaching its occupant, who wheeling round, and raising himself on his haunches, struck savagely two or three times at him. "I've been at him all day, and that's how he treats me now. He's a regular —— Benicia Boy," he continued rather ruefully; "but I'll put the tackling on him in the crush to-morrow, and see how he'll shape with that."

Fitzgerald's attention was now directed by one of the men to a particular horse in the other yard, which he at once recognised.

"By Jove!" he said, "there's a ten-pound note reward out of my pocket. I've not seen that grey horse these two years. I made sure some one had stolen him." Going into the yard, he endeavoured to drive the grey into a corner by himself, and catch him. In

vain; round and round flew the mob like wild deer, the grey as wild as any of them.

Getting a light, long, greenhide-rope, and asking two or three men to help him, the young man gathered up the slack in one hand, and holding the noose in the other, whirled it two or three times round his head, and sent it circling in the air after the excited horses, who kept flying round. Hovering for a portion of a second over the grey's head, it settled round his neck with wonderful precision, the rope was tightened, and, after a plunge or two, the horse, obeying his old education, made towards them, still straining slightly on the rope.

The rest of the mob were drafted into another yard. Fitzgerald sent for his bridle and saddle, and had his horse turned into the paddock. With a long stick he now rubbed the grey gently over the head and body, then, gradually approaching, he slipped on the bridle. The rope was taken off and laid on one side. Giving the bridle to one of the men to hold, he approached the horse carefully from the shoulder, and endeavoured (vainly for some time) to put on the saddle; but it was not until the animal's fore-leg was strapped up that this could be accomplished and firmly secured. The crupper now caused some delay owing to the plunging of the animal; but all was satisfactorily managed at length, the men all left the yard, and,

seating themselves on the top-rail of the stock-yard fence, prepared to enjoy the coming scene with true bush zest. Fitzgerald, after fixing the reins to the saddle, undid the strap which held up the creature's foot, and allowed him to run loose, in order that, if disposed to buck, he might do so before being mounted.

But Harlequin, as the grey was named, did not seem inclined to waste his energies on pigskin merely, although he moved about very stiffly, with slightly humped back, and his tail held closely to his body.

"You better mind that fellow, Mr Fitzgerald," said the Native; "he's sure to buck a docker."

"All right, Jack," said Fitzgerald; "he looks ugly. I'll give him a few turns round the yard before getting on."

Accordingly the horse was driven at a canter half-a-dozen times round the enclosure, occasionally testifying his disapproval of the unaccustomed harness by humping his back, or lashing out with his hind-legs.

"Way, Harlequin, way, old boy," said the young squatter, stopping him at last, and catching him. "We'll try now whether you or I can hold out longest."

Leading him into the centre of the yard, he gathered up the reins in his left hand, and raising his cabbage-tree, allowed the chin-strap to drop to its place.

Standing close to the horse's shoulder, and catching the stirrup-leather in his right hand, he was about to make a spring when a violent plunge from Harlequin prevented him.

This was repeated two or three times, until Fitzgerald, shortening the reins, and slipping them up the horse's neck until his hand reached the animal's head, seized and held the near-side ear along with them in a grasp of iron, declining all offers of assistance from the onlookers. This plan answered. Placing his toe in the stirrup, he was on Harlequin's back in an instant, — a proceeding which that noble creature instantly resented by making a furious plunge halfway across the yard, alighting with all four feet on the ground at the same time close to each other, his head between his fore-legs, his tail well in, and his back bent like a boomerang. A series of similar movements followed with the rapidity of lightning, the vicious brute squealing all the time like a pig, and confining himself to a small corner of the yard.

Round and round he spun like a top to the right, then with a sudden prop he lashed out and bucked round and round in the opposite direction. Now he flew partly across the yard, bucking from side to side, and leaning over so much in doing so that it appeared to John a miracle how he recovered his gravity. Well did he maintain the title to his very appropriate name,

for seldom did horse buck harder than did the grey that day. Fitzgerald sat leaning well back, his legs rigid, his body above the hips swaying to the motions of his horse. After the first violent shock, which shifted him a little in his seat, he recovered his balance, and John could hear him mutter between his set teeth as he passed near him once,—"No, no, Mr Harlequin, we don't get on the like of you to come off."

But, alas! the best of riders sometimes come to grief. The next time he passed John, the latter noticed a strap flying loose about the cantle of the saddle, and heard the Native remark,—"He's slipped his crupper; he's bound to come off now." And so he did, but not ingloriously. Each succeeding buck shifted the saddle further and further on to the horse's withers, now that nothing held it back, still the young man kept as firmly to his seat as ever; at last a furious buck and rear sent the plucky rider to the ground, still clasping the saddle between his legs, and holding the reins of the bridle, which had also been dragged off, in his hand; and away flew the horse, smashing the saddle with a kick which was intended as a parting salute for his owner. Loud applause and much encouragement had been bestowed during this scene on the young man, who, now picking himself up, examined his tackling. Not a strap was broken, not a buckle undone; the mischief had

all been caused by the animal managing to slip his tail out of the crupper.

"This saddle is done for," he said; "who can lend me one?"

Four or five were instantly at his service.

"Now then, old man," he observed coolly, turning to the horse, who stood watching the proceedings from a corner of the yard, "we will try another dodge this time."

This dodge, which was put in execution upon the animal's being saddled the second time, consisted in tying the crupper to the horse's tail with a piece of twine.

Once more springing to his seat, the contest recommenced, Fitzgerald, whose temper was ruffled, freely using whip and spur. This fierce paroxysm lasted about as long as the former one; then gradually subsiding, the exhausted bleeding steed acknowledged his efforts as useless, dropped into an ordinary canter, and came to a standstill at his rider's bidding.

John gazed with admiration on the handsome, graceful horseman as he leant back on the saddle patting carelessly those hind-quarters to approach which had been so dangerous a few minutes before, and listening to the remarks of the spectators.

"Well," said one, "that fellow went to market like a bird."

"Yes," echoed another. "Bucked a blessed hurricane."

"Buck a town down," cried a third.

"Never see'd a horse strip himself naked quicker," muttered a fourth.

"Good job for you, you didn't catch that kick," congratulated Jack. "It was as close a thing as ever I saw."

"Well, a miss is as good as a mile," laughed the young man.

So saying, he unsaddled Harlequin, and turning him into the paddock, walked down to the house with John.

The pleasant open frankness which characterised young Fitzgerald won our friend's heart at once; and before long, the infection communicating itself, he found himself talking away as if he had known the other all his life. There was also an open simple manliness about John which was agreeable to the other, who begged that he would return with him to Ungahrun for a short visit. There being little to do at Cambaranga, and old Graham offering no objection, the young men started next morning, making a detour by Betyammo station, at which place Fitzgerald was desirous of calling.

Among other topics of conversation, the character of the Cosgrove family came briefly under discussion; and it was easy to perceive that Fitzgerald entertained

no feelings of love towards the father and son, although he spoke very kindly of Ruth.

"She was a dear good little girl before she went to England," said Fitzgerald. "I found her once lying upon her mother's grave, crying as if her heart would break, and I thought I would never get her comforted and taken home. But her brother Ralf was a black sheep. Before he left this he had surpassed in mischief all the blackguard boys in the surrounding stations. He once tried to steal a black colt of ours which had never been branded, and which he had managed to drive into the Cambaranga stock-yard among a mob of wild horses. If he hasn't mended his manners since he went to England, I should say he will get into trouble some day."

John assured Fitzgerald that to his certain knowledge there were no symptoms of reformation visible in young Cosgrove, but warmly re-echoed the other's praises of Ruth.

After travelling for about fifteen miles through a sandy, rather uninteresting, thickly-timbered country, they arrived about mid-day at Betyammo.

Thick timber and wattle-bushes hid the house from view until the travellers were quite close to it; and for a mile or two back, huge trees, denuded of their bark for roofing purposes, held up their gaunt bleached arms to heaven, as if appealing against the

cruelty which had thus condemned them to decay in the full vigour of their strength.

Everywhere were scattered stumps of large trees, mostly sawn down by the cross-cut saw, and their trunks had been split up for building purposes, as the chips and splinters lying about betokened. The buildings were enclosed in a paddock, one side of which ran parallel with the road for some distance. They presented a ragged, patched, rather tumble-down, yet on the whole comfortable, appearance.

The house never had been good, and its constant patching and repairing had probably cost as much as would have built a new one; but the family loved it, and in spite of the fits of new house building which periodically attacked Mr Gray, the owner of the station, they continued to dwell in the familiar old bark "humpy," so full of happy memories. The roof was covered with sheets of bark, held down by large wooden riders pegged in the form of a square to one another. The veranda extended the whole length of the front; but the two ends were closed up, and formed charming, ragged-looking, but exceedingly comfortable little rooms, covered by gorgeous creepers, except where, through the open windows, one caught a glimpse in passing of snow-white mosquito-curtains, and walls papered with illustrations from some of the pictorial journals. The veranda looked out on a pretty

little flower-garden, its bright beds telling of much tender care and attention. A row of large-leaved tropical-looking arrowroot plants surrounded the little enclosure, beyond which the eye took in a considerable portion of the paddock. The greater part of the trees had been carefully felled and stumped; while those remaining, spared evidently with a view to shade and effect, imparted a noble park-like appearance to the view, rising as they did in tall clumps out of the thick short sward of couch-grass, green with the summer thunderstorms. Morning glories wound their graceful stems round the battered old posts of the veranda; and a huge vine spread its large leafy branches over the entire back of the house, tenderly covering from sight the nakedness and defects of the friend who sheltered it from the cold and rain, acquiring itself a double gracefulness in the gentle act. The buildings, nearly all bearing the same time-honoured look which a bark roof so readily bestows, stood, like those of most other stations, in the form of a quadrangle.

The centre of the court was occupied by a large tree, around which a handsome gigantic convolvulus twined itself in many a fold, its large, green, plate-like leaves almost concealing the knotted stem and lower branches, from which long sprays trailed downward, swaying slightly in the morning breeze.

In the shade of this old denizen of the woods sat

a merry circle of young black girls in picturesque though rather scanty attire. They were amusing themselves after the fashion of their light-hearted race, by singing one of their never-ending *corroborrees.*

One or two had gathered a quantity of the golden everlasting flower, with which they were decorating the short, shiny curls of their playfellows, now and then interrupting the singers with some sally, which would provoke an uncontrollable burst of laughter from all, causing a great display of bright dark eyes and pearly teeth.

As the young men approached, three or four fine kangaroo-dogs, which had been lying asleep in the shade, started up, barking furiously.

Exclamations of greeting broke from the girls as they recognised Fitzgerald, whom they had known since their infancy; and as the young men dismounted, old Mr Gray came out bareheaded with a hearty welcome, and a running fire of conversation, orders, and reproaches.

"Ah, here you are at last, Fitzgerald! Pretty time you've been about coming over, after all your promises! Kitty" (this to one of the girls), "you yabber Bobby come up, take 'im off saddle, and give 'im yarraman water. Merry micky now.[1] Mrs Gray was

[1] "Kitty, tell Bobby to come and water the horses and unsaddle them. Make haste now."

talking of you only this morning," he continued, "and the girls are dying to give you your revenge at croquet. You were beaten shamefully last time you played."

Fitzgerald had only time to introduce young West to the friendly squatter, when he was surrounded by Mrs Gray and her two daughters, who welcomed him with an unconstrained warmth which revealed a long and intimate acquaintance.

Not less sincere and scarcely less warm was John's welcome as a new neighbour, and chatting gaily, the whole party entered the house, and going out on the veranda disposed themselves in various squatters' lounges and easy-chairs, old Mr Gray taking possession of a string hammock which hung suspended between two rafters. An animated conversation was kept up by the party until, lunch being announced, they made their way to one of the buildings close to the house, which was used as a detached dining-room.

The meal was plain but good. To John, indeed, after his hard fare of salt-junk day after day, it almost seemed luxurious—and yet it owed all its nicety to a little feminine supervision of culinary affairs.

After dinner more conversation on the veranda was followed by an adjournment to a spot sacred to croquet,

which game had penetrated the forest-depths thus far, and which exercised as great a fascination over the minds of the bush-maidens of that time as perhaps lawn-tennis does now.

The sisters differed considerably from one another, but both were charming, frank, natural girls. They spoke as they felt, honestly, and openly; and while carefully trained by their mother in the usages of society, their fine open air and self-reliant life had done away with all stiff conventionality without bestowing the fast air which those city young ladies who despise its precepts frequently acquire.

Phœbe, the eldest, was *petite* in figure, and a peculiar neatness and deftness characterised her form and actions. She was clever, and had read and understood more than many older women with better opportunities; still with all, there was an innocence and simplicity about her that was most attractive. She was so unselfish, so completely without egotism, that she never seemed to think about herself or her acquirements at all. A humble, guileless, bright, loving little girl she was, and dearly loved by her own people, and indeed by all who knew her. Bessie, who was two years younger, was a little taller, and rather rounder and fuller in figure. A merry, laughing, roguish girl, who found amusement in everything, but with an earnest, sympathetic, true soul beneath

the surface. Perhaps better fitted to withstand a contrary fortune than her sister, her spirits seemed to rise above any difficulty, and conquer it by force of her strong, faithful, loving nature. Both were cheerful, happy girls, with fair hair and blue eyes, learned in the mysteries of housekeeping, fond of riding, loving a dance with all their hearts, and as much interested in the latest fashions as the rest of the female world in general.

They had known Fitzgerald for many years, and were never better pleased than when he managed to ride over for a few days. His appearance was always a signal for some unusual little dissipation, and many a scolding did he undergo from light-hearted Bessie when he delayed his coming.

"Come along, Willy," she called now, addressing him, as she nearly always did, by his Christian name. "I never knew any one so tiresome. You declare you must go home to that horrid mustering to-morrow, and you are wasting the whole of the sunshine; we have only two hours until sundown. Come along, Phœbe, do; Mr West, do hurry them up."

Bessie's energetic commands soon brought the party together, and declaring that Fitzgerald played wretchedly the last time he was her partner, she announced her intention of joining forces with John. Soon the party were engaged in the now disregarded and de-

spised game. Bessie was the life and soul of it, and in spite of all Fitzgerald's efforts, she croqueted her ball through the hoops in a masterly manner, time after time, returning to send his one way, and her sister's the other, while assisting John, who, to tell the truth, was rather a muff with the mallet. Game after game fell to her and her partner; and at last, satiated with victory, she proposed returning to the house.

The utter want of female society had never made itself so apparent to John as now when enjoying it, and he felt quite disgusted with the desolate dreariness of the life which he had lately thought so fascinating. As they approached the house, several black fellows came up expressing delight in their usual demonstrative way at seeing their old acquaintance Fitzgerald, and inquiring as to the whereabouts of friends whose nomadic habits might have led them into his neighbourhood. The girls went in to assist in preparing tea, while Mr and Mrs Gray joined the young men in the garden. Soon Bessie's merry voice was heard summoning the party in, and the evening meal was disposed of amidst much cheerful talk, and pleasant sallies of fun. A smoke on the veranda followed; after which Phœbe, seating herself at the piano, struck up one of Strauss's glorious waltzes, marking the time with much precision; and Bessie,

calling upon John to assist her, cleared the broad floor of the veranda of the chairs and lounges which filled it, and ordered Fitzgerald to come and dance. He pretended lameness. "Can't, Bessie. Bad spill; hurt my knee."

"Oh, what a story!" and seizing his hand, she insisted on his making an attempt. Round and round they floated until Fitzgerald sank exhausted.

"Well, I never did see any one tire so soon," she cried. "I know you are only lazy."

John now begged for a turn, and acquitted himself to the satisfaction of the vivacious girl, who unhesitatingly declared that he was much better fun than her old friend—and "waltzes much better, too," she added, poutingly. She then took her place at the instrument relieving her sister, who was solicited for a dance by Fitzgerald; and John fancied that her quiet manner had a slight touch of shyness in it, and that her colour slightly rose as she smilingly assented.

After some time, Bessie, declaring she was quite weary, ceased her dance music, and striking a few chords, sang a sweet old ballad, and the whole party entered the little drawing-room, which was really surprisingly pretty for such an out-of-the-way habitation. The slab walls were lined with calico neatly papered. A few good engravings, and a couple of old oil-paintings, representing Mr Gray's father and mother, were

hung round, with some local sketches in water-colours, executed by Mrs Gray, who had much taste that way. Magazines and novels lay on the little table, on which stood a handsome kerosine lamp. A book-case, containing a capital selection of standard volumes and works of reference, occupied a corner opposite to the piano; while a sofa-lounge and a few chairs completed the furniture. Tanned native dog skins served as floor-rugs; and tanned and coloured sheepskins looked very handsome on the backs of the easy-chairs.

Fitzgerald, who had a good baritone voice, joined the ladies at the piano, and John and Mr Gray conversed.

About ten o'clock the ladies retired, and the gentlemen withdrew to that apartment in the house specially devoted to bachelors. Brandy was produced, pipes lighted, and conversation returned to the grand staple Australian subject—"stock."

Mr Gray was a pleasant, frank, country-gentleman-looking squatter, with a kind word for everybody, and a keen eye for the merits or demerits of sheep, cattle, or horses. In early life he had served in the army, but seeing no prospect of marrying the girl he was attached to while remaining in her Majesty's service, he sold his commission, and marrying, sailed for Australia, where, after some years of hardship and ill-luck, he bought Betyammo, upon which he had lived ever

since, well to do, if not rich. He was fond of retailing stories of his adventures in early life; and this evening, on John's remarking the gratification he received from the delightful hospitality exercised in the bush, he said: "Well, yes, it is one of the pleasantest features, I think, in a squatter's life, being in a position to afford a welcome to those in want of it; and indeed the favour very often is conferred by the visitor. From him we derive information as to the doings of our neighbours, and much general news which could reach us through no other channel."

"But do you not meet with very strange characters at times?" questioned John."

"Occasionally," answered Mr Gray; "but they invariably behave themselves with propriety. Should they not do so, they would at once be requested to remove themselves to the men's huts."

"When I was much younger," he continued, "I was travelling in the New England district, in New South Wales. I spent a night at a bush inn, and there fell in with a tall, soldierly-looking Irishman. He had served as a soldier of fortune in more than one Continental army, and his conversation was exceedingly amusing. A sort of devil-may-care recklessness seemed to sit on him with a jaunty air, and one felt rather inclined to like the fellow. Our roads lay the same way, and we jogged along together for a couple

of days, when we arrived at a station owned by an old bachelor. He received us very hospitably, and sitting in the evening over our pipes and brandy-and-water, just as we are now doing, the Irishman happened to make some remark about Spain.

"'Have you ever been there?' interrogated our host.

"'Oh yes,' returned the other; 'I served a considerable time in the Carlist army during the war.'

"'Indeed!' replied the old man, with much interest. 'I had a nephew,' he said, speaking slowly, 'a very dear nephew in that army. I wonder did you ever meet him? I have not heard of him for years.'

"'What was his name?' inquired the ex-Carlist officer.

"'His name was Nugent,' responded the squatter.

"'What! Francis de Burgh Nugent?'

"'The same.'

"'God bless me!' ejaculated the soldier, in a tone of surprised and rather curious interest; adding, '*Why, I shot that fellow ten years ago!*'"

"What a brute he must have been!" broke from both John and Fitzgerald.

"How did the old man take the information?" queried the latter.

"He got up," answered Mr Gray, "and without saying a word left the room."

"And the Irishman?"

"Oh, he wondered what was the matter with the old fellow, thought him very strange in his manner to his guests, and could not be brought to see that he had outraged propriety in any way by his indecent and cruel confession. We left next morning at daylight; I for one had no wish to meet our host again; and soon after I lost sight of the easy-minded mercenary. Now I'll show you to your rooms; breakfast will be ready to-morrow at eight, so you need not turn out early. Good night."

"Good night," "good night," returned his guests, retiring to their room.

CHAPTER XI.

EARLY MORNING AT THE GRAYS'—A RIDE TO UNGAHRUN —THE CATTLE-BUYER.

NOTWITHSTANDING that no duty called them forth, both the young men were up by daybreak. Early habits are so general in the bush that breakfast is usually over by seven, and all hands at work. They strolled up to the horse-yard, into which all the horses contained in the paddock had been driven by a blackboy. A yard full of horses or cattle is irresistible to a bushman: if he has the time to spare, he cannot pass until he has examined the animals, deciphered their brands and criticised their merits, and in all probability stowed away in his mind the images of some of them so accurately as to be able to recognise them after months and even years have elapsed. After an hour spent in this manner they returned to the house, where they found the young ladies busy in their morning duties.

Bessie had first come out with a plateful of food for her fowls, and as she raised her voice greeting her

friends, a handsome tame "native companion," which had been stalking about picking up insects, drew near. Opening his large slate-coloured wings, and dancing grotesquely, the interesting bird approached his young mistress, bowing gracefully from side to side as he hopped lightly along; then running up, he laid his heron-like head lovingly against her breast.

"What a nice bird!" said John, who had no idea they made such capital pets.

"Yes; isn't he a dear?" returned Bessie. "Davy, our blackboy, knocked him down with a stick when little, and brought him home to me, and now he will not go away although he has his perfect freedom."

"I don't wonder at it, Bessie," said Fitzgerald; "slavery to such a charming mistress——"

"Now keep your compliments for a native companion of your own, Mr Fitzgerald," said Bessie laughing; "you will be taking one some day, you know, unless you marry an English wife. Come and look at my Joey, Mr West; and oh, Willy, we have got the most darling little humming-birds you ever saw! Phœbe has them in a cage, and she doesn't know what they live on, and she wants you to tell her."

"All right," returned Fitzgerald, entering the house.

The lively girl now opened the door of a small room, and a young kangaroo came hopping out. His pretty head, with its longish ears, and full, soft, lustrous eyes,

looked something like a fawn's, as he sat up and ate bread from the gentle hand of the Australian girl. "There, Joey. Now look, Mr West, he follows me everywhere. I shut him up at night because I am afraid of some of the dogs chasing or killing him. Go away, Smoker, now! go away, Spring!" she cried, as two tall, rich, tawny-coloured kangaroo-dogs with black muzzles jumped up and raced round the terrified Joey, who hopped close to his mistress's skirt for protection. "When he grows a little bigger he can hold his own with the dogs," she said; "for they often seem afraid of touching a tame kangaroo, although they kill great old-men every day."

The native companion and the fowls, which had now flocked up, were fed, and Bessie and John went in and joined Fitzgerald and Phœbe on the veranda. They were standing close together, near a cage which hung half hidden among the foliage of a beautiful creeper. The rising sun was yet low in the heavens, and shone full into the veranda, causing the dewdrops on the short grass to sparkle like innumerable diamonds. A beautiful little blue mountain-parrot flew from spray to spray, alighting ever and anon on the head or shoulders of its mistress, uttering, in a whistling tone, "Pretty boy, pretty boy," and John thought he had seldom seen a lovelier picture. At this moment one of the little humming-birds fluttered out of its cage

to the ground; and instantly, before any attempt at a rescue could be made, it was seized and gobbled up by a great red cock that happened to be prowling about in search of what might turn up.

"Oh the horrid creature! he has eaten alive my little darling humming-bird!" exclaimed Phœbe, ready to cry.

An attempt now made by John and Fitzgerald to catch the marauder and make him disgorge his prey, served only to produce a wild cackle and desperate exertions to escape on the cock's part, which it eventually did by taking to its wings.

Phœbe was inconsolable for a time; and Bessie, though grieving over the loss of her sister's pet, could not help sometimes seeing the comic side of the accident, and laughing at the instantaneous and unlooked-for manner of its disappearance. Mr Gray and his kind wife now came, and the party adjourned to breakfast; after which meal, horses having been brought to the door and saddled, the two young ladies and their father accompanied the young men a portion of their journey, bidding them at last good-bye, with many hospitable invitations for an early repetition of their visit.

"What a nice family!" said John to his friend. "I had no idea that such lady-like accomplished women were to be met with in the bush."

"I believe you," returned his companion; "English people are so conceited. They seem to fancy civilisation cannot exist much beyond London. I suppose you fancied we were a community of convicts?"

"Well, the truth is, I had no very distinct notions on the subject. I always thought that the term 'native' was applied to the aboriginals, and now I find that it really designates the native-born white population."

"It is applied to both. I am a native, and am proud of it. I would not change, even if I could, to be an Englishman. It sometimes surprises me to meet with Englishmen, educated men of the world, who display an amount of ignorance about the extent, resources, and geography of the most important of British colonies, that one of our little schoolboys would be ashamed of."

"Well," confessed John, "I must frankly say that I knew nothing of the true state of affairs. I believed three parts of the people were convicts and bushrangers, and that the rest reared stock in some barbarous way, and picked up gold in the rivers or on the surface of the ground."

"Most of your countrymen have the same opinion when they come out," replied Fitzgerald, who seemed rather sore on this subject. "The fact is that, since the gold-fields were discovered, the convict element

has been lost sight of and almost flooded out by the immense influx of population. You do come across it in various ways, but it is now a considerable time since the Eastern colonies refused to allow transportation of criminals to their shores, since which time most of the 'old hands,' as they are called, have died out; and although the disgrace clings in a certain measure to their descendants, yet they are comparatively so few in number to the bulk of the population, that they are quite lost sight of; and besides, some of the convicted felons were men transported for political offences, and other causes, which carried no degrading taint with them. Others, sent out for very trifling misdemeanours, were probably much honester than many who occupy respectable positions at home. A great number, I am quite willing to admit, were deservedly sentenced for their crimes; but I daresay, could the statistics be procured and published, it would surprise one to find how many reformed under the influence of kind treatment, a ticket-of-leave, and prosperity. And to say the least, the manner in which our society gathers its skirts together for fear of contamination from the children or grandchildren of one who made but a single error, and spent the rest of an honest lifetime in endeavouring to redeem it, is most deplorable, and uncharitable in a Christian people. As for you Eng-

lish people, you don't take the trouble to make any distinction at all. Everybody is either a convict or perhaps some relation to one."

The travellers now emerged from the sandy, wooded country through which their road had hitherto lain, and entered upon a large extent of richly-grassed rolling downs and plains. Herds of cattle grazed quietly about or lay camped under the shade of clumps of trees, which here and there dotted the prairie. A chain of beautiful blue-peaked hills stretched away in the distance, bounding the view; while in the immediate neighbourhood of the road there arose abruptly from the surrounding plain a large, isolated, flat-topped mountain of imposing appearance, its rugged sides clothed with dense scrub.

The way seemed much longer across the plain than it had done through the forest country, and John was not sorry to see a thick belt of timber, which they at first could only distinguish by its blackness, becoming more and more distinct. A couple of miles beyond the edge of the timber brought them to a large gate in a paddock-fence, entering through which they made their way up to the station.

Ungahrun was one of the finest stations in the district. The elder Fitzgerald had taken it up twenty years previously, when the country was

entirely unknown, except to a few hardy pioneers who, like himself, had pushed beyond the frontiers of the gradually extending civilisation, and had braved the dangers of want of food, sickness, and hostility from the aboriginals; and his son, who now welcomed John West so heartily to its hospitality, had imbibed a love of its sylvan beauties with his mother's milk. On the soft flower-strewn sward he had rolled bareheaded, barefooted, a rosy, chubby-cheeked child. On the banks of the creek which flowed past his father's door he had sat for hours watching the finny inhabitants of its waters as they darted to and fro; or plunging head foremost beneath its cooling wave, imitated their motions with almost equal dexterity. Every spot on the large tract of country included in his father's run was familiar to him, and associated with some early memory. Up by that clump of river-oaks he stole quietly, when, possessing himself of a gun for the first time, he slipped out, determined to demonstrate his ability to use it. That was the very tree he fired from. How proudly his heart beat as he picked up his wild ducks, and returned home with the spoil! Down in the sand there he had mounted his first buck-jumper. And as he grew older, action succeeding action, and memory following memory, contributed to endear its scenes to his mind.

The house was the finest that John had yet seen in the bush. It was built, like all the others, of hardwood slabs, but considerable trouble had been taken in the erection. It was one-storeyed, but twice the length of the Cambaranga house, and a splendid broad veranda ran round the whole building. Its doors and windows were of that kind known in the bush as French lights. The iron roof was raised on double wall-plates, to allow a constant current of air to pass through, thus securing thorough ventilation and coolness.

Fitzgerald led the way past the house to a little cottage beside it, covered in bush fashion with roses and other creepers, saying, with a half laugh, "I daresay you will think it funny that we don't live in the *cawbawn humpy* (big house); but you see, after my father built it, he could not make up his mind to quit the little one in which he had lived so many years; and now that he and my mother have gone to live in Sydney, it is too large for my use." Dismounting at the door amongst greetings from dogs of all kinds, and the inevitable blacks, they unsaddled their horses, and after washing their backs, turned them loose in the paddock. A man now came out of the cottage and bade good evening to Fitzgerald, who welcomed him heartily.

He was, as John soon discovered, a buyer of fat

cattle for a boiling down company, which consumed most of the Ungahrun fats.

"Well, Thompson, back for more cattle?"

"Yes; how are you off?"

"Oh, I think we can let you have a draft of a couple of hundred pretty fair."

"Well, I'm glad of that, for we are running short. I was half afraid that you might have disposed of this year's draft as the Bindarobina and Barham Downs people have done. Some of these gold-field butchers have been round, I know, buying up."

"They came here, too," said Fitzgerald; "but they wanted to buy on bills, and I didn't quite like the look of things, so I stuck to the bullocks."

"All right," said Thompson. "Can you go out to-morrow?"

"Oh yes, as soon as you like; but come in now."

The cattle-buyer was a strong, bronzed, intelligent-looking man, with a long beard. He was dressed in moleskin breeches and "jockey" boots. A crimson shirt, open at the throat, completed his attire. His brawny arms, which the rolled-up sleeves of his shirt disclosed, were as black as the dark sunburnt neck and throat.

"Oh," he said, "there's another fellow here also: I don't know who he is; but I picked him up on the

road, and he came with me. He's a queer-looking stick, but not a bad fellow."

The person alluded to now came up, and introduced himself to Fitzgerald by the name of "Williams." He said he was travelling down the country, and begged for a night's entertainment, which the kind-hearted young fellow willingly accorded.

The party entered the little paling-enclosed veranda of the cottage, and discussed matters pending the preparation of the evening meal.

It presented a very bachelor-like appearance. On the floor in one corner lay a saddle beside a heap of horse-hair, intended for the stuffing of its panel. A number of horse-shoes lay in another; straps and surcingles dangled from various pegs; a half-completed stock-whip hung beside the door; and odd spurs and different kinds of bits and stirrup-irons lay about in every direction.

The stranger made himself rather agreeable. He was an Englishman, and had been a few years in the colony. He said he had been employed on a station further north, and was going down for a spell. He looked yellow and unhealthy, and occasionally was attacked with some nervous disorder, which made him contort his face in the most dreadful manner, and throw his arms wildly about—after which he would go on talking as if nothing had happened.

Having betaken themselves outside to inspect the station, John and Williams were immediately accosted by a great hulking black fellow, who, detecting a raw look about them, came up begging for "tombacco." John had none to give; but Williams, who was a smoker, put his hand into his pocket, and was about to bestow a small piece on the sable beggar, when suddenly his infirmity came upon him with great force. Twisting his face diabolically, he waved his arms round like a windmill. The black fellow merely gave one look, then taking to his heels he fled, glancing over his shoulder occasionally, and spitting, as their manner is when followed, as they think, by evil spirits.

In spite of his feeling for Williams, John could not avoid being much amused at the precipitate action which had followed the lazy, listless manner of the aboriginal, — and indeed, on recovering, Williams joined heartily in the laugh. A bullock-bell rung by hand, now announced that supper awaited them; and soon the small party, being joined by a young man, who acted as a kind of overseer on the station, gathered round the table in the unpretending little room.

Boiled salt-junk, with *fat hen* (a kind of indigenous spinach) and potatoes, washed down with copious draughts of tea, poured out of a huge tin teapot,

formed the supper, and was much appreciated. The guests, following the example of their host, sat, as is customary at a bachelor's table, in their shirt-sleeves, or rather with them rolled up.

"I say, West," said Fitzgerald, "we had better luck last night. I don't know how it is, but I can never get a cook to make up anything but salt-junk. Now these Miss Grays, they knock up something good in no time."

Here Thompson, who was on intimate terms with his host, advised him to go in for an assistant manager to look after home affairs. "By Jove! Fitz, it's a shame to see that house empty and you a bachelor."

"Very good advice, old boy," returned the latter; "go ahead with a good example—I'll follow;" so saying, he got up and commenced filling his pipe.

Very soon the little room was filled with heavy clouds of tobacco-smoke, the position of each being only to be guessed at by the voice.

"Did you hear of that murder by the blacks on the Nelson River the other day?" asked Williams, addressing Fitzgerald.

"No," said he; "what was it?"

"Why, they stuck up Wilson's station there, and murdered the man and woman in the kitchen; they then planted inside the house, and waited until

Wilson came home at night with his stockman. Then they rushed out, knocked old Wilson on the head, and drove a spear through the man's side. He managed, however, to jump on a horse which happened to be handy, and escaped to the next station. Some of the men got together and went over, but the niggers had gone, after gutting the store. They found the bodies frightfully mutilated, and buried them."

"They're a bad lot of devils those Nelson blacks," remarked Thompson. "Did the native troopers go after them?"

"Yes, they had started when I left, but I didn't hear how they got on."

"How far is it from here?" asked John.

"About three hundred miles."

"And do the blacks come in about the stations as they do here?"

"Oh dear no," answered Thompson. "After you get out about one hundred and fifty miles beyond this you won't see a nigger unless it be a civilised fellow with his master."

"You see this is the way of it, West," explained Fitzgerald. "When a squatter goes into new country he is very often short-handed, besides which, on a sheep-station, the shepherds are scattered in ones and twos over an immense extent of country. Now the

blacks are numerous. They have nothing to do but to fight and hunt; and if they knew the actual state of the white man's affairs, they would take advantage of it to come down at any moment and massacre all hands. On that account it is highly necessary they should be kept in the dark as to what is going on in the run. They are therefore driven back to the mountains and scrubs; and it is only after ten or twelve years have elapsed, when they have learnt to dread the white man's arms, and have become more tolerant of his presence, that they are cautiously admitted on the stations. Of course there is a constant state of simmering warfare between the two races. The black kills a white man, or a number, when he gets the chance, and the white man revenges it by going out alone, or sending out a force of black fellows, mounted and trained as irregular cavalry, under the command of a European officer, to shoot down as many of the offenders as they can. Every one carries firearms of one sort or another. They may never in their lives have occasion to use them, or they may be attacked on the very day when they have incautiously laid aside the hitherto constantly carried revolver."

"And do the native troopers fire willingly on their countrymen?" questioned John.

"Nothing can afford them greater pleasure," exclaimed Thompson; "and Government takes advantage

of the hatred they bear to one another. For instance, men enlisted in this district are always employed in one at some distance away."

"Do they never unite against their officers?"

"No, I never heard of a case," answered the cattle-buyer. "They sometimes desert singly or in a body; but as a rule, a troop contains men from half-a-dozen different tribes, who, notwithstanding that they may have been comrades for many years, still secretly cherish their old tribal hatred for one another. The officer is, or should be, the friend of all, and in this way comes to the knowledge of any little plot that may be brewing in his camp; and besides which, he has a certain source of information in the police *gins*—*i.e.*, the men's wives; they generally discover what is going on, and, woman-like, cannot rest until they have told it."

"Are there many of these men employed in the country?" pursued John.

"I think," replied Fitzgerald, "there may be from 200 to 250, but not more. Each detachment of eight or ten troopers has a white officer and a white camp-sergeant, who superintends the distribution of rations, has charge of the barracks when the officer happens to be away on patrol, and whose wife usually cooks for him when at home. These detachments are scattered over an immense extent of terri-

tory. The police districts into which the country is divided are enormously large, a patrol having often to travel many hundred miles before it returns to its barracks. On this account," continued Fitzgerald, "it frequently happens that when some aggression has been committed, the police are at a distance from the scene, and much valuable time elapses before they can arrive."

"And how do they proceed when they do arrive?" persisted young West, much interested.

"They inspect the scene of the outrage," said his friend, "and discover the foot-tracks made by the wild blacks. These they follow with the pertinacity of bloodhounds, and almost invariably overtake and punish the offenders. It sometimes occurs that other blacks join the original criminals after the perpetration of the crime, in which case, it being utterly impossible to distinguish the guilty from the innocent, all suffer alike."

"But," said John, "a single black fellow may alone deserve the punishment which, it seems, is inflicted on all indiscriminately."

"Yes; unfortunately it is so," said the young squatter. "In unsettled districts the wild aboriginals are seldom seen except accidentally or in a case of this sort. They, as a rule, confine themselves to those portions of their wilds which, on account of their

barrenness, are useless to the white men as pasture-grounds; and the principle we go on is to make a tribe responsible for the behaviour of its individual members. In truth, their almost communistic style of living utterly precludes the idea that any of their number could undertake any enterprise against the whites unknown to the others. The squatter and native police officer therefore condemn the whole."

"I should think," remarked John, "that under this system tribes are being gradually annihilated."

"Oh, not so much as you would think," broke in Thompson. "The niggers are so active and cunning in making use of trees, rocks, and long grass as shelter, that very many escape altogether, after which the tribe remains quiet, probably for a considerable time."

"Are they very savage in their natural state?"

"They are; and yet when the humour seizes them they can be kind enough," returned the cattle-buyer, who had large experience on the outside country. "I've known men who were well treated when found by them utterly exhausted from want of food and water. I myself," he continued, "have reason to speak well of their kindness, for some of them suffered me to escape once when I had got among them, and showed me all the attention which lay in their power."

"Give us the yarn, Thompson," urged Fitzgerald; "here's West dying to hear some romantic adventures."

"All right," said the other; "it will give him an idea of what may happen to himself some of these days." So saying, he filled his pipe and began his tale.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CATTLE-BUYER'S YARN.

"I WAS 'Super' of a sheep-station up north two years ago, and had got along very well without having come into collision with the blacks. The station had been formed for about six years, and those who had taken it up and managed it before my time had been equally fortunate. Some of the neighbours had had men killed and sheep driven away, but we always escaped. We had grown so careless as to have given up carrying firearms about the head-station; and even the shepherds were in the habit of going unarmed, although living far away from each other.

"Having gone out one evening to count the sheep at one of the sheep-stations, I was surprised to come across a strange flock, evidently unshepherded, grazing, and scattered through the bush in the vicinity of the yard. On examining them, they proved to be a flock which had been shepherded by a man living with his wife and child at another hut eight or ten miles away.

"I guessed that something had gone wrong: the man had gone to sleep perhaps, and the flock had gradually fed away without his knowledge, and on awaking he had not been able to find them; or he had got separated in some silly way from his charge, and they having been shepherded at this sheep-station before, made their way back to their favourite old beat. The thought of blacks being on the run never entered my mind.

"As soon as I had counted the sheep and secured the strange flock in an empty yard, I started down the creek to the sheep-station hut where lived Donnelly, the shepherd of the wandering flock, with his wife and child. It was a calm, balmy, moonlit night, and as I rode through the silent bush no sound was heard save the mournful wailing shriek of the wild curlew as it rose, shriller and shriller, until, fading away, its plaintive cry was lost in the forest-depths; or, when startlingly near, arose the prolonged howl of the dingo, echoed back again on all sides.

"There was something in the air as I approached the hut which caused my heart to sink. A foreboding of evil seized me as I rode up to the little dwelling which looked so weird-like in the ghostly moonlight.

"'Are you in, Donnelly?' I shouted.

"'Oh!' said a feeble voice, inside; 'who are you?'

"'Thompson. Don't you know me, Mrs Donnelly?'

"'Have you seen my husband?'

"My heart felt like a lump of lead. 'No,' I said, speaking as cheerfully as I could. 'Isn't he here?'

"'I haven't seen him since Monday morning' (this was Thursday night), 'and oh, I fear—I fear——' Here her sobs interrupted her.

"I still sat on my horse outside, for the conversation was being conducted with the door barred.

"'Did you hear or see anything to cause you alarm?' said I.

"'No; nothing. Only on Sunday night—the last night I saw him—the dogs howled the whole night through; and I was frightened, and he kissed me, and told me no harm should befall me while he was near. I fear—oh, I do not know what I fear. A snake may have bitten him, or he may have had sunstroke, or perhaps blacks may have been around the house watching him depart on Monday. My dear kind fellow!' Here she broke once more into a fit of weeping.

"'Now, Mrs Donnelly, you must hope for the best,' said I, not knowing well what to say; for the woman was distracted with grief, and half maddened with the weary watching of these awful days. She knew not the way through the trackless bush and over the mountains to the head-station. Her only hope was to sit still and wait; but oh, the agony of that waiting!

"'Oh, there is no hope, no hope! I knew it; I felt it when his sheep came home on Monday night without him, and the dog that loved him so brought them to the yard and went away; and she only came back to-day, wherever she has been. Oh, if she could only tell! I kept the sheep two days in the yard and then I turned them out up the creek, in the hopes that they might go back to their old run, and so give notice of something being wrong.'

"'Now, Mrs Donnelly,' said I, 'if you like I'll ride in for help and be out the first thing in the morning, and track and find your husband; or if you feel frightened, I'll just lie down here and go in the morning.'

"'Don't wait,' implored the poor creature. 'Oh, go at once; it will save time, perhaps his life! Oh, pray, go! Never mind me. I'm not afraid for myself.'

"'Well, good night, and God keep you,' I uttered in a broken voice; for I'm hanged if the whole thing wasn't rather too much for me."

"No wonder," ejaculated his audience.

"'Well, I pushed home that night and roused up the overseer, got fresh horses up and firearms cleaned and loaded. We took a man with us to shepherd poor Donnelly's flock, which we counted when we arrived at the yards. *They were seven short.* From that time I had little hope, although I said nothing.

"We called at the sheep-station hut just to give the

poor woman the comfort of knowing we were doing what we could. Then we searched until we found the tracks of the shepherd as he followed his flock out to pasture on that Monday morning. The sheep in coming home had, as their nature directs them, chosen a different route, so that the tracks were not obliterated. Slowly keeping on the track (for a man does not make much of a mark on hard ground, and we had no blackboy), we followed until we came to a large river, into which the sheep-station creek emptied itself, considerably lower down. 'Ah,' thought I, 'they came here to drink. Yes, here's their camp: they camped here during the heat of the sun.' The tracks now led down to the bank of the river, where I lost them among the hard shingle and gravel. My companion and I searched carefully along the banks, but there were no tracks of the man returning; then they led down to the water's edge, and there we lost them. The river was here broad and rocky; a waste mountainous country lay on the other side. There was no inducement for him to cross. Suddenly the overseer raising his head uttered a short ejaculation.

"'Found anything?' I asked, quickly.

"Silently he pointed in the air. Words could have conveyed no more significance than that gesture. Circling in the air were numbers of carrion-kites, while others sat on trees, either gorged, or waiting to

commence a banquet of horror. What that meant my throbbing heart only too surely told me. A long island, clothed with thick vegetation, lay between us and the other shore; and it was above the furthest channel that the birds of evil omen flew.

"Hastily stripping, and tying up our horses, we grasped our revolvers and forded the first stream. We searched up and down the island, looking for what we feared to find. Nothing was to be seen. At last I cast my eyes on the other stream. *Something* there was there. Yes — *something*. What is it? Is it a sheep? No. O God! now I see. It is a naked body, on its face, jammed in between the rocks, the poor stiff legs moving up and down with the rapid current. I cooeyed. The overseer came hastily. My face told him.

"'Where is it?' he breathed, in a fearful whisper.

"I pointed at the dreadful *it*.

"'The head! Look, it has no head!" he cried.

"I looked again. It was true. The bare neck-bone stood out several inches above where the flesh had been cut. Somehow I felt relieved. It was bad enough to have to view the swollen, festering, sun-blistered corpse; but at that moment I felt that to look on the sodden, water-bleached face, with the ghastly goggle eyes and tangled dripping locks, would have been more than I could stand.

"Well, we cleared out of that fast enough, you may depend. I sent my companion to bring in the woman to the head-station, while I myself rode off to despatch letters calling for the assistance of the native police. I then got a couple of more men, and taking a wool-sack and pick and shovel, we went back to give poor Donnelly Christian burial. We waded out and managed to slip some bagging under the corpse, and brought him ashore. Alas! he was shockingly mutilated. And there, on his left side, the little round hole too surely told where the deadly spear had penetrated. His head we could not find. We buried him under a river-oak of that darkly timbered island. And the dense underwood, amid which had lurked his savage slayers, now shelters the lonely grave where, unheeded by all save One, that disfigured clay lies."

"What became of the poor woman?" asked his hearers.

"The overseer brought her in. She received the news of her husband's death in a dull stupid sort of manner, as if hearing without understanding. She had apparently lost all interest in life. She sat all day by herself, rocking to and fro, with the poor fatherless child clasped tightly to her bosom. We made a subscription for the poor creature, and sent her down to her friends, who lived in Sydney; but since then I have heard nothing of her."

"Now, then, have some more Hennessy," said Fitzgerald, pushing the brandy-bottle towards Thompson, "and tell us how you got mixed up with the niggers; and after that I'll tell you of an adventure which befell me about three months ago."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CATTLE-BUYER'S YARN CONTINUED.

"I TOLD you that I had sent off for the native police," commenced the ex-Super after a deep draught of "three-star," judiciously qualified, though by no means drowned, with water. "Well, they came after about a week had elapsed. I might have followed the trail myself, with some of our men: but in the first place, I feared that we were not strong enough for the natives, who were evidently in large numbers; and in the second, I could not be certain that my own men would not report the occurrence to Government, in which case, supposing any of the wretches to have been knocked over, I would in all probability have had to stand my trial for murder.

"The detachment came at last, and although officers of police are supposed to allow no whites to accompany them, yet being well known to the sub-inspector in charge, he was only too glad of my company for a few days.

"The boys of the troop, on arriving at the spot where I had lost the tracks on the shingle, spread out, and their acute eyesight enabled them to read the characters on the earth as one would a printed book.

"'Here, Mahmy,' said one to his chief—'here that been cut him head off. You mil-mil (see) blood.'

"I shuddered. There, now that it was pointed out to me, on the very stone I had sat down on when stripping to search for the body, the blood-stains were plain. They spattered the dead leaves, and stained the grass-stalks.

"Well, we started on the tracks, overtook the retreating tribe, gave them a sound punishment, and returned home. Other duties soon effaced the memory of the affair, and we concluded that for some time at least nothing would be heard of the offending blacks. The season proved a very dry one, and I found myself obliged to erect temporary yards and huts on the very outskirts of the run, in order to make use of hitherto unoccupied ground. One station in particular I had caused to be built several miles up the river, beyond the spot now known as 'Donnelly's grave.' It was difficult of access. A short distance above that well-remembered spot, the mountains closed so abruptly on both sides of the creek, that the only passage lay among the rough boulders and shingle of the river-bed. I had been up counting the sheep, and left the

hut at dark on my road home. The distance before me was about sixteen miles. I rode along, my mind occupied with conjectures as to the best disposal of my sheep during the trying drought. The road now turned down into the river-bed, and picking his way the best he could, my horse cheerfully jogged on his homeward path. The mountains towered in shadowy gloom on either side above me as I rode along the side of the river, which, although considerably shrunk by reason of the summer droughts, churned and foamed as its rapid current forced its way through its rock-barred channel. Occasionally the track led through clumps of river-oak saplings and bushes, emerging from which I could discover a bare patch of sand, and beyond that shadow. My horse knew the road, however, and I cared not; half my time was spent in similar lonely rides, and I was not nervous. I was getting mightily hungry, however, besides which, the mail-man was expected at the station, and I longed to read my home letters. My horse's shoes clattered against the stones as I stuck my spurs into his sides to urge him onward. A sudden turning in the road now showed me a number of small fires glowing ahead. But that they were stationary, I should have been inclined to think them caused by fire-flies. On my left there were more. The sudden turning of the river had placed some in front and some behind, and

hitherto the thick groves of flooded oak had hidden them from my sight. On my right frowned an overhanging crag. I drew my rein; perhaps (for blacks often chatter loudly in their camps) they had not heard me. I listened. Not a sound save the rushing, tumbling, river-current. It was, after all, perhaps only the remains of a bush-fire. Some of the logs were still alight, and the night air had fanned the embers into a glow. Again I listened intently. If blacks really were in the camp, they must have heard me coming; no doubt they had barrred the way ahead and behind. The broken river-channel forbade my trusting to flight. What should I do? Not three miles away lay poor Donnelly their victim, in his cold grave of wet river-sand. What was his fate then, might be mine in a few minutes. I determined to keep still and wait for what might turn up. Presently I heard bushes rustling some distance behind, and the voice of a black fellow, uttering, in that strange tone in which the wild savage first pronounces English words, 'Boodgeree;' and again 'Boodgeree, white fellow' (good, good white fellow). The sound startled me. They were here, and looking for me. I drew my pistol. Some of them should have daylight through them, I inwardly vowed, if it came to a final struggle. Now I heard their low rapid utterances, in various excited tones, in front, behind, and above me,

— the word 'white fellow' being repeated often. Escape was hopeless. There was one chance for life in the inconsistency of their behaviour. I determined to put a bold face on the matter, appear at home, laugh and talk with them, and if the worst came, sell my life as dearly as possible. Accordingly I shouted, 'Hey! come on boodgeree you, my boys, come along!' and a great deal more nonsensical talk, which they could not have understood, but which served as well as anything else to show the confidence which I tried to gull them into believing I yet possessed. The effect was magical. A simultaneous shout came from those nearest. All around, in fifty different places, as many voices broke into an unintelligible jargon; while from the camp, the noise of women's voices could be heard as they shrilly inquired what was going on, and tendered advice or admonition.

"Knowing how useless it was to do anything else, I sat still on my horse, and in a few minutes was surrounded by a dense crowd of dark, savage-eyed, wild men, all fully armed with native weapons. More kept coming. There was a perfect Babel of sounds. The gloom was so great that I could only distinguish the dark moving figures and the long spears, or occasionally the glint of a pair of fierce glittering eyes, shining out of a paint-bedaubed visage. Now they felt me all over. On feeling the pistol, which I had returned to

my belt, the man who discovered it said something to the others, who became still more excited. They now led me, still sitting on my horse, across a ford of the river to their camp. And now for the first time I could see the faces of my captors; and wild and devil-like they looked as the fires threw their light across them. Thick masses of curly black hair, low foreheads, short noses, large white teeth, and short beards on the upper lip and chin, seemed to strike me most; their eyes gleamed in the fire-blaze like burning coals. A tall man, looking at me earnestly for some minutes, now commenced an animated harangue; pointed to me several times, then pointing up the river, imitated the sound of a gun being fired, pointed to himself, and finished by addressing me rapidly at great length. From his manner I guessed that he was friendly to me for some cause or other, why, I could not make out, but I determined to take advantage of the turn in my favour. My tall friend now made signs that I should dismount: this I did at once. I had made up my mind to trust my protector implicitly, and at any rate not to show fear. I was by no means easy, however, as my sable friend led me through the scattered fires, surrounded by a number of blacks, who, as far as I could guess, seemed to coincide with him in his views regarding me. Most of the mob had departed to the fires

which appeared behind me when I first came upon the natives.

"I found that there were two camps at a distance of about two hundred yards apart, and my people belonged to the small camp. We now arrived at a fire which, from the signs made, I found was owned by the tall fellow with me. He made a series of gestures, by which I understood him to intimate that I was to partake of his hospitality. The only word of English he knew was 'white fellow.' This he repeated many times. Sometimes he pointed to me, then to himself, patted his breast and smiled; then he would point to the distant camp, and shake his head, and frown. Sometimes he pointed to himself, imitated the sound of a shot, pointed to my pistol, then up the river, then again to me, looking eagerly at me to see whether I comprehended him or not. I knew not what he meant, but I feigned to understand him, and nodded, smiled, patted him, and repeated the word 'boodgeree' two or three times. He at once caught up the word and pronounced it distinctly, and seemed much pleased. Things now seemed on a much more satisfactory footing. My entertainer produced some black-looking kangaroo-meat, which he warmed on the hot ashes, then tearing off a piece with his strong teeth, he offered it to me. Knowing how necessary it was to keep up the terms of friendship,

I accepted it with much cordiality, and though almost sick, managed to eat a portion of the dirty-looking food. A drink of honey and water was now offered me in a *coóleman*, which I also politely accepted. After the repast a number of aboriginals from the neighbouring fires gathered around me, and from their language seemed to be making fun of me. One fellow especially seemed a great wit. The slightest word of his sufficed to set the others in a roar of laughter. Still it all seemed to be of a good-humoured nature. Presently my tall acquaintance, pointing over to the other camp, made signs that there was a *corroborree* to be danced. I understood, and nodded. Then he gave me to understand that he and I would go together; to this I also assented. Soon after this a long clear cry arose from the other camp like pir-r-r-r-r-r-r. A general movement now took place among the men and women of the camp in which I was. They gathered in a body, each one covered from head to foot in a 'possum-skin cloak. I arose with my host, who bestowed on me a cloak, and we took our places a little on one side of the rest. Another signal arose from the distant camp, and, as if in obedience to it, my neighbours commenced to march slowly forward towards whence the sound proceeded. Slowly, silently, solemnly, they marched, their bodies bent almost double, which position my friend signed me to observe. There

was something very unearthly in this phantom-like procession,—the dusky, indistinct, muffled forms gliding noiselessly forward through the midnight woods, sometimes entirely lost in the shade of a large tree, and again emerging, to be lost again.

"Fears began to take possession of me. Why was this singular method of approaching the *corroboree* ground observed? I had heard of ceremonies of a dark and secret character being practised amongst those tribes at which no white man ever was present. Was such a one to take place now? Was my life only spared before that it might be sacrificed now? My blood began to curdle, and my flesh to creep. I thought of flying, forgetting for the moment the utter impossibility of getting away from the nimble-footed sharp-eyed savages. My tall friend, however, seemed to divine my intentions, for he patted my breast, then pointed to himself assuringly, then to the large camp of natives which we were nearing, and shook his head, spitting with apparent disgust, and once more patted himself and me. I could not exactly tell what he was driving at, but it seemed to indicate friendly intentions towards myself, and that the other camp was occupied by a hostile tribe. This I afterwards learnt was the case. We had approached within about a dozen yards of the dim fires towards which we had been making our way,

when a similar signal to that already given was uttered by some one in the other camp. Upon this my companions, still retaining their bent position, turned their faces towards their own camp, and remained waiting, and of course I followed their example. Another cry succeeded, and almost immediately a bright blaze followed, illuminating the dark woods in a ruddy circle. Flinging off their coverings, and turning simultaneously round, the crowd of blacks about me gave vent to a general deep 'Ah!' of wonder and surprise, not unmixed with a superstitious fear.

"I understood it all now. The tribe were being initiated in a *corroborree* they had never seen before. At the same time it commenced. A half-circle of fires burned brightly in front of us. Between us and the fires were seated rows of women, across whose knees were lightly stretched their 'possum cloaks. They held boomerangs in their hands, which they beat together as they sang, keeping the most exact time, occasionally varying the accompaniment by beating on the skins, producing a drum-like noise. On the far side of the fire a row of forked stakes had been driven into the ground, and poles laid on the forks, about six feet above the ground. About twenty savages, painted in the most grotesque fashion, were seated all round this rail. Their long hair

was tied tightly in a knot on the top of their heads, from the middle of which rose a tuft of cockatoo crests. The soft white down from the breast of the same bird clung to their eyebrows, moustaches, and beards. A red fillet passed round the forehead and encircled the head. Their bodies were painted with pipeclay to imitate skeletons. Boomerangs, stone tomahawks, and knives hung from their girdles. Holding their elbows close to their sides, they moved their forearms and hands in a segment of a circle from their waist to their ears, first the right, then the left, in time to the barbarous chant. Beyond these, the chief figures in the assembly, stood a dense crowd of fierce-eyed sable warriors leaning on their spears. Looking round, I found that the men of my party had assumed the same attitude, while the women had taken up a position a little apart.

"In spite of the feeling of insecurity and alarm with which my position filled me,—for I knew that all present would think nothing of knocking me on the head if the whim seized them,—I felt rather amused at the absurd climax of their preparations, and its monotony soon got tiresome to themselves. Jumping down from their perch, the painted savages cleared away their posts and rails, and commenced one of the usual *corroborree* dances of the country,

in which they were joined by many others, who had taken no part in the first performance.

"My tall friend, spreading his rug on the ground, planted a spear at each corner and sat down, motioning me to take a place beside him—all the others following his example. The dance was now most vigorously prosecuted, and it carried with it a certain amount of dramatic effect. Issuing from the dark background of solemn gloom, the mass of vague dusky shadows danced their way into the circle illuminated by the fire, their hands held in front of their breast, after the manner of kangaroos, their bodies bent, and their feet stamping. As they got nearer the fires which divided them from the orchestra, the singing and dancing became more energetic, till at last a brilliant blaze having been produced, by means of dry leaves kept on purpose, the whole culminated in much stamping, quivering of legs and shaking of heads, winding up with an almost instantaneous disappearance of the whole party into surrounding darkness. This was repeated for hours, and I thought they never would leave off. At last all seemed to weary, and my tall friend and his followers returned to their own ground, taking me with them. Here I found my horse ready. After a good deal more of talk, and many gestures, he signified that I might go. I stripped myself almost naked

in making presents. Then seizing his weapons, he called on a friend to accompany him, and both came with me as an escort. I had little difficulty in persuading them to proceed all the way; and they were so much pleased with their treatment that they asked permission to bring their tribe in, which they did, and we had no more difficulties afterwards."

"That was a capital fellow, that long nigger," said Fitzgerald. "Did you ever find out why he took a fancy to you?"

"Oh," said Thompson, laughing, "that was all a mistake on his part. It seems that when up the river in pursuit of the tribe which killed poor Donnelly, he happened to be among the crowd we attacked. He had hidden himself under a log upon which I had taken up my position. He said that I kept looking at him, but allowed him to escape, and it was in gratitude for this supposed service that he saved my life."

"Then you did not know that he was under the log?" asked John.

"Not I," returned the other. "It would, I am afraid, have been a bad day for both of us had I done so. And now, Fitzgerald, give us your yarn."

"It's getting late," the young man said, "and you know we must be up early; but the story is a short one." So saying, he narrated as follows.

"I suppose you know that I'm a beak—I mean, that I'm on the Commission of the Peace. I was appointed about two years and a half ago. Shortly after my appointment I was over in the little township of Yering, not far from here, and a desperate row occurred between two men. One of them seizing an axe struck the other on the head, causing instantaneous death. I happened to be near the scene of the fatal struggle, and made one to seize the murderer; and being very zealous in the discharge of my duties, like most young hands, made myself perhaps too officious in the matter. At any rate, on leaving the court, after committal for trial by my brother magistrates and myself, the murderer vowed to be revenged on me for the share which I had taken in the business. I thought nothing more of it, and time passed on. About four months ago I was obliged to start from here up north on some business connected with a station belonging to my father. It had been only recently formed, and the natives had the reputation of being very treacherous in the district. My business led me to a neighbouring station, and as I believed that the way by the road was very much longer than the actual distance as the crow flies, I determined to hit out straight across the bush. It was nearly dinner-time when I set out, and I had about forty miles to go. I had gone about twenty miles, when I got into a nasty intricate coun-

try, with a good deal of thick scrub, in which I got entangled, and it was a couple of hours after dark before I got clear. I now pushed on as well as I could in the dark, but got so very sleepy that I had made up my mind to lie down until morning, when the sound of voices made me prick up my ears, and on moving forward a little, found myself close to a large camp of niggers. Well, I was luckier than you, Thompson, for I managed to get away without their hearing me, and I pushed on, for sleep had fled. I had gone about ten miles further when my horse struck into a little path, and the smell of sheep convinced me that I was near some sheep-station hut, or *bark gunyah*. Dogs now barked furiously, and a man shouted, which I immediately answered. I rode up, unsaddled and hobbled my horse, and walked in.

"Who do you think the man was? It was my friend the homicide. The meeting was startling to both. The wild look of the man, with his gun in his hand (he had seized it on hearing the noise made by the dogs), at first led me to believe that he meant to fulfil his vows of vengeance; but suddenly flinging it into a corner, he sat down, covered his face with his hands, and wept. When he grew calmer he told me that he had been sentenced to nearly two years' imprisonment, and had come straight here from prison; but he begged my forgiveness, and said I had only

done my duty. I camped with him that night, and next morning made the station."

"By Jove!" said John, "I think it must have been horrid to meet that fellow in such a lonely place."

"Well, yes, I didn't like it," returned his friend.

The party now separated to obtain some sleep before the arduous work of mustering commenced.

CHAPTER XIV.

MUSTERING FATS FOR THE BUTCHER—DRAFTING ON THE CAMP.

THE dawn was barely visible when our hero was awakened by hearing a sound of conversation near him. It was Fitzgerald giving orders to one of the blackboys.

"Horses in the yard, Peter?"

"Yohi."

"Bugler and Gaylad in?"

"Yohi."

"All right. Take down my bridle and the bridle which belongs to that gentleman who came with me last night, and send them up."

"Yohi, Missa Fitzgell. Me ride 'im, Charcoal. That fellow boodgeree kallopp."

"Very well; and tell one of the other boys to catch Forrester for Mr Thompson."

John now jumped out of bed, and hurrying on his things, made his way outside. The sun had not risen, but everybody was astir. Blackboys were bringing up

horses from a yard in the paddock, into which they had all been driven. Breakfast was being carried in, and every one was preparing for the day's work. After a hasty meal was disposed of, the horses were saddled. The little court in front of the houses was crowded with horses awaiting their riders. The party consisted of Fitzgerald, Thompson, West, two white stockmen, one of whom was Fitzgerald's lad Tommy. Besides these and their horses, Mr Williams's saddle and pack horse swelled the number.

A general mount was now effected, and, bidding good-bye to his entertainer, Williams started on his way down country.

"Now, Tommy," said Fitzgerald, speaking to the youth just mentioned, "we are going to divide. You, with Mr Thompson and Billy Barlow, can go up to the Peaks, then start down, bringing all you see worth taking along with you. Send Billy over to Oakey Creek, and let him meet you down at Plumtree Camp. You can clean out the middle branch of the station creek, and then bring all you find down to the main camp, where you will find us."

These directions, which, perhaps, may seem unintelligible to the general reader, referred to the manner in which the young squatter proposed to gather together the cattle among which he expected to collect the bullocks he required.

The two parties now separated—Fitzgerald with his assistants to examine the southern branch of the main creek, together with the country lying between the many tributaries which flowed into it; while the others were to direct their attention to the opposite side and the surrounding country. It was most exhilarating riding along in the cool morning air. How pleasant the fresh smell of the grass! Now they pass through a small patch of Brigalow scrub. Some one has split a piece from the trunk of a small tree. What a scent the dark-grained wood has! What numbers of wallabies! They start out in every direction, and flying across the path swiftly disappear. We are in grass once more. Whirr-r-r-r— a covey of quail start from under the horses' feet, fly a short distance, and alight on the thick grass. There are some cattle standing in their camp on a small patch of scrub. We don't want them, however—we can get them any day. Here is one standing by himself. It is a two-year-old steer—a white one. He stands perfectly still; his hanging head and tucked-up body betray his want of health. As we ride past he shows the white of his eye, and gathering up his strength, he gives a deep hollow cough which rakes his whole frame. "Pleura," said Fitzgerald, reading John's inquiring glance; "we always have it more or less on the run."

"Does it not carry off immense numbers of cattle?"

"Well, it has done so; but for some years past we find its ravages have been nothing to speak of. A great deal has been written on the subject. Some have proposed preventing the attacks of the disease by inoculation; others, again, laugh at the idea. For my part, I am convinced that pleura lurks in every herd in the country, and that it only wants favourable conditions to make its appearance."

"What are these conditions?" asked John.

"Much knocking about invariably produces it; for instance, it often breaks out amongst cattle on a long journey, or that have been herded long. It is also much more severe among cattle feeding on rich swampy pastures than on the high hilly stations. Besides which, there is no doubt, I think, that it is both contagious and infectious, and, of course, some constitutions have a hereditary tendency to it."

Now they emerge on a plain bounded by scrub, with openings between the patches, and vistas of plains and more scrub in the distance. On the plain, about half a mile away on the right, a large herd of cattle are scattered, gently feeding towards their camp. What a delightful spot for a gallop! How fresh the horses are! Gaylad feels as if he could devour the space between him and that beautiful blue chain whose distant peaks glitter in the morning sunshine. "Way, horse; steady, Gaylad,—you'll have your work

to do by-and-by." See, there is a plain turkey, quite close; he walks steadily along, keeping his head up and his eye fixed on us. He is quite within shot. There, there, unobserved before, but almost under your horse's feet, is his mate. Startled by the horses, she quickens her pace, breaks into a run, opens her large wings, beats the air two or three times, and rising, wings her way heavily off, followed almost immediately by her companion, uttering a kind of hoarse croak. There they light again, not a quarter of a mile away. Now we come to a water-course. It is a succession of longish holes filled with clear water. Trees, with drooping branches like willows, fringe its sides. The broad leaf of the lotus, amid which rises here and there the beautiful flower, floats on the surface. Look at the wild ducks swimming in twos and threes. Stay for one instant. There, on that broad lotus-leaf, two or three little mites of wild ducklings are sitting. Their mother, with the rest of the family, is floating calmly beside them. Her quick eye notes us; she moves away, her little brood following. Now those on the leaf plunge in and swim bravely after her, shaking their little tails. The other ducks, catching the alarm, at once detect the cause. A sudden splash, a few frightened quacks, and away they fly, the water dripping brightly from their webbed feet as they rise, with the sunlight glinting on their

dark-brown bodies and blue and bronze wings. There they go, out of sight in a minute. The mother and her brood have vanished in the same instant. You may search, but you will not find them. The little things understand diving as well as their mother, and the banks of the creek are one mass of sedges and long grass. Watch, here come the ducks back again.

High in the air they approach, following the course of the creek with the rapidity of lightning. Here they come, right overhead; a confused whizz denotes the speed they are travelling at, and down the water-course they take their way to alight in some undisturbed spot.

As you leave the water, pigeons of all kinds, from the strong beautiful bronze-wing to the gentle squatter and little dove, fly from under your horse's feet, with strong rapid flapping noise, or sit crouching on the ground, humbly hoping that their insignificance and homely plumage will not attract attention. A white crane, and a few dark-feathered water-hens, at the far end of the water-hole, seeing you moving, conclude to stay. Here is the half-dried carcass of a beast. It died here on the camp near the water. Whew, what a smell! Any one who wants more than one whiff of that is a glutton. Look at that "booming 'guana!" He has been feeding sumptuously on the carrion. He is watching us with his "glittering eye," his head up,

his vicious tongue darting out now and then like a serpent's fangs. He knows we are observing him; off he scuttles at an incredibly swift pace, making for that big iron-bark tree. Gallop after; hit him with your whip. Ah, you are too late! he has reached it before you; he is away up lying flat on a high branch. You can just see the end of his tapered tail hanging over, or his head, the tongue still striking venomously.

Now we emerge on still larger downs, dotted prettily with cotton bush. Cattle-tracks converge from all points to the water. They are quite narrow, like little footpaths. The ground bears on its surface the impressions of many feet. You cannot find a foot square without the print of a hoof of some age or another. The grass must be sweet here, the cattle keep it cropped down so closely. That long line of tall white-stemmed gum-trees marks the banks of the main creek; here is the junction of the southern and northern branches. We must cross and follow up this branch next us. Yonder is a mob of cattle; they are not so quiet as those we have already seen. Two or three old cows nearer us than the others lift their heads, smelling our approach. They turn and run. The old brutes, they know quite well what it is to be rounded up; they have been hundreds of times in the yard; it is all roguery. Now that some of the rest notice them running, they run also: had the old cows

remained quiet the others would have been stationary too. Now they are making off in a body. Sam, the white stockman with the party, and Peter the black fellow, mounted on Charcoal, spur after them, get in front, and heading them, bring them to a stand-still. There are a dozen nice bullocks in the mob. After making them stand a little to cool them, Peter is sent to take them over the river to a camp, where they may be picked up by the party on their return down the other side. The party divide once more in two. Sam and Peter go one way; John still remains with his friend, and they have two or three exciting gallops after different mobs. Gaylad is sweating now. What a little stunner he is! It will not be his fault if the cattle get away. He watches their every movement with a personal interest. Fitzgerald and John have got a good mob together. They have taken them across the creek, and are bringing them down the other side to pick up the cattle on the camps there. The bullocks and steers and heifers go along without much trouble; but some of those old cows with calves try all sorts of dodges to get away. They fear that we are mustering for branding. It will come soon enough. Let us get through with these fat cattle, then we shall set to work branding. There, that cunning old wretch of a cow has managed to to slip away with her calf, and she is making off for

some scrub in the distance. Now, Gaylad; now, boy, fetch her back. Indeed Gaylad wants no bidding, but is flying over the ground at his best. Now he reaches the cow and her calf, a good strong six-months-old bull. She swerves away as the horse approaches. Now is your time, John; close on her, turn her, keep her head to the mob; give her a cut or two with your whip, and she will be amongst them once more. Ah! you do not know how to manage your rein: your bridle-hand is fumbling with it; it is too loose; your whip is in your way. Gaylad flies past the cow about twenty yards; she once more makes off in her own direction. Once more John charges her with the same result, only that this time, as he holds the rein tighter, Gaylad, obeying the check, props round at the same instant the old cow does. John finds himself sitting on his horse's neck; it is a miracle how he holds on. He manages to get back to his seat, and confining operations to a trot, succeeds in heading the chase back towards the mob. He will punish her at any rate for the trouble she has given him. Two or three desperate cuts at the cow fall harmlessly, another only gets the lash under Gaylad's tail, who resents the indignity by kicking once or twice, humping his back, and nearly upsetting his rider. Now is a good chance; hit her hard. A vicious cut follows. Something catches the fall. "O heavens, my eye!" shouts

John, with one hand up to that organ, which has suffered instead of the guilty animal.

Now a camp with a good many cattle on it has been reached. Sam and Peter have evidently been here, and are away after more. The cattle stop of their own accord, mingling with the rest, uttering many bellows of greeting. Fitzgerald proposes to wait for a little. What a thorough master of his work he looks, as with careless ease he sits side-saddle fashion on Bugler, his long whip hanging festooned round him! Hark! there goes a whip! The cattle on the camp recommence bellowing. Here they come down this gully—the bullocks and young cattle ahead, running towards those on the camp, roaring as they run. A mixed lot, with many cows and calves bring up the rear, after which come Sam and Peter, riding side by side. There are so many cows and calves, it is not advisable to drive them as far as the main creek. We don't intend taking them home for branding to-day. We cannot draft the bullocks out properly here though; we require all hands for that. Let us keep as many as we can of the others back on the camp, therefore, when they start. It is not quite easily done either; for with stranger perversity those even who wanted to stay behind previously now desire to go along with the mob, and insist on following up, until they are effectually driven back to their camp. We

have yet a large number, and still pick up more as we go along. Gaylad makes himself very busy in assisting to drive. Should any beast in his vicinity lag behind to crop a sweet morsel he marks him; then laying his ears back, with outstretched neck and open mouth, he rushes at the offender, inflicting sometimes a rather sharp bite. The loud pistol-like report of a stock-whip is heard again, this time ahead. The leading cattle quicken their pace. Bellows in the distance are answered by bellows from the mob. We come in sight of a large number of cattle standing close together on an open yet shady camp; and some distance apart, under a shady tree, are three horses. Their riders are lying on the ground. The two mobs mingle now, amid terrific roaring, as we ride up to the little party under the tree.

"Well, Thompson, had much luck?"

"Got about sixty or seventy head, I think."

"There are forty or fifty in our lot," said Fitzgerald; "we had better set to work at once. It will take all our time to get them drafted and yarded before it gets late."

Now they prepare for work. John, with the lad Tommy and Billy Barlow, is told off to ride round the cattle, and prevent them straggling off the camp. Peter is to look after the bullocks when separated from the main crowd; and Fitzgerald, Thompson, and Sam,

are to draft. A few very quiet animals are driven out, and placed at about one hundred and fifty yards from the rest, to form a kind of nucleus mob for the bullocks to run into. Peter is in attendance to receive them when they come, and prevent their making back, or running away.

Now, threading his way through the masses of cattle, Fitzgerald selects one which his practised eye tells him is of the kind wanted, and, riding behind it, urges it quietly to the edge of the mob. Bugler knows his work, and loves it with all his heart. His undivided attention is given to the animal in front of him. He is aware that it is his duty to separate him from the herd, and he is determined to do it. Any dodging movement on the part of the bullock, as, looking from side to side, he approaches the outside ring, is met with a corresponding motion to balk it on the horse's part, revealing the intense interest he takes in his work. A slight raising of the bridle-hand, and Bugler makes a desperate rush. Startled, the beast singles out from the rest, but immediately tries to double back, and mix up with his fellows. In vain—Bugler's quick eye watches him too narrowly; he has turned in the same instant, and is racing alongside, between him and his bellowing mates. Now, so suddenly as to be almost instantaneous, the determined brute has stopped, wheeled round, and is going at a headlong

pace the opposite way. But it is all of no use. The practised stock-horse props at the same moment, and still at speed bars the way. A few sharp cuts from Fitzgerald's whip decide the question, and the conquered creature joins a couple of his mates who have been taken out respectively by Thompson and Sam, and who are now running to mingle with Peter's charge.

Riding back slowly to breathe their nags, the drafters single out more of the particular class wanted, and the scene is repeated. The ground resounds with the rapid battering of the horses' feet, as, stretched at their utmost speed, the intelligent creatures assist their riders with all their might. It is a stirring scene, full of healthy enjoyment and wild excitement.

"How these Australian fellows do ride!" thought John, as he notices the sudden dead-stop and sharp wheel, the rider sitting unmoved in his saddle. Look, there is a bullock which has proved too much for Thompson single-handed. He is a large roan bullock, with a red neck, and long, sharp, cocked horns. He is six or perhaps seven years old. He is one that has been missing from the run for the last year or two, and has been seen to-day for the first time during that period. Most probably he has been away in the scrub with a wild mob, and in an evil hour has taken it into his head to revisit his old haunts. His temper has not been improved by his association with the scrubbers.

See, he turns on Thompson. What a narrow escape! Forrester manages to get out of his way, but receives an ugly scar on his thigh, which he will carry while he lives.

Sam now bears down to Thompson's assistance. Roaney is once again cut out of the mob. Watch—now—here! here! here they come! The wild-looking roan bullock endeavours to break back, while Sam races alongside, his body bent forward, uttering short, fierce, quick shouts, as, waving his hat in his hand, he seeks to intimidate the savage scrubber into sheering off from the main mob. What a pace they are going at! There they pass side by side between two trees, that barely allow them room. The leg of Sam's white moleskins brushes the fire-blackened trunk, and adopts its colour. A sudden fierce prop, and Roaney has shot behind Sam's horse, and succeeds in burying himself among the many-coloured bellowing herd. Sam rides slowly back, and, dismounting, slackens the girths of his steaming horse, who, with hanging head and quickly-heaving flanks, betrays the exertions he has made.

Thompson and Fitzgerald come up. "That's a nut," remarks the former.

"He's the dead finish—go right through a man," rejoins Sam, rather sulkily. "Blessed if he didn't —— near skiver my hoss!"

"Well, Sam, as soon as your horse gets his wind, you and I will tackle him," says Fitzgerald. "Our horses are the handiest. I wouldn't lose that fellow for a trifle. Ten to one, if we don't get him, after this knocking about he'll make back for the scrubs again."

In about ten minutes' time Sam and his master ride side by side through the crowded camp. At last they notice their savage friend pushing his way through a thick mob of cattle some distance from them.

"Now, Sam," says Fitzgerald, "as soon as we get him fairly out, I'll ride alongside and shoulder him, and you must keep close up and play on him with your whip."

"All right," growls Sam.

One or two essays are ineffectually made to rush out into the open the huge beast, whose hot blood is now boiling within him. At last he is out, and is again racing, with Fitzgerald alongside this time, to get back into the mob.

"Now, then, Sam!" shouts the squatter, as the clever bold horse, in obedience to his accomplished rider, closes on his horned antagonist, and, leaning over, presses all his weight against the scrubber's shoulder, edging him towards Peter's mob as they fly along. Sam, galloping at the creature's heels, has been waiting the word, and now commences a flagella-

tion with his long twelve-footer, which compels the red-necked savage to keep his pace up, and gladly seek refuge among those already out.

It is now time to be making homewards, and the selected fat cattle are driven steadily in, and yarded for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

OUT AFTER SCRUBBERS—THROUGH THE BUSH—THE SOLEMN SCRUB—CAMPING OUT.

DAYLIGHT once more saw the Ungahrun household up and busy. Once more there was saddling in hot haste; a hurried meal; blankets and provisions strapped on to the pack-horse's saddle. Thompson was starting down with a draft of 110 head for the pots—prime fat cattle. Fitzgerald and John, with one of the men, accompany him for a few miles. The cattle are going quietly; even Roaney, who made one or two determined efforts to break away on his road in the previous night, is marching along steadily, now that he is off his own beat.

"I think you can get along all right now, Thompson," remarks the squatter. "I'll leave a man with you for to-day, and you can send him home to-morrow. Your own man and blackboy will be sufficient then."

Good-byes are exchanged—arrangements as to further drafts once more hurriedly gone over, and the

Australian and his guest turn their horses' heads homewards. And now there is nothing to hinder the commencement of the usual half-yearly muster to brand. Fitzgerald is most anxious to try his luck amongst the scrub cattle, of which great numbers infest the vast scrubs which clothe the steep sides of the distant blue ranges. He has information that at one point many of these scrub cattle come out at night to feed on the open plains, and he is desirous, if possible, of making a haul amongst them.

He explains to John that the scrubs are pieces of country, thickly covered for the most part with a luxuriant vegetation, affording an almost impenetrable shelter to the wild herds. Some of these densely timbered tracts enclose within their recesses a sufficiency both of water and feed to pasture considerable numbers without rendering it necessary for them to seek a livelihood outside its limits. It often happens, nevertheless, that, driven by drought, or tempted by the young and tender burnt feed, these denizens of the wood are found grazing on the clear country, but never at any great distance from cover, to which they can make on being disturbed.

These cattle are invariably part of a herd, or the descendants of a herd, which, neglected by its owners, was suffered to stray over the country at its pleasure, gradually becoming, owing to the absence of the re-

straining influence of the white man, and the onslaught of the black, as wild and fierce as the untamed bison-herds of America. Their instinct teaches them to select the most inaccessible fastnesses of the forest as their favourite haunts. Caution and cunning develop hand in hand with ferocity and fear. Their very appearance changes; and the second or third descendant of the well-bred, quiet, symmetrically-shaped favourite of the milking yard is almost always a long-legged, big-headed, coarse-horned runt.

These wild herds are justly considered as being a constant source of nuisance in the proximity of a cattle-run. Numbers of ill-shaped, badly-bred bulls wander among the quiet cattle, and the presence of the wild herd induces the desertion to the scrubs of many of its members. The raids made by the owners of stations on these outlaws depend very much as to the vigour of their prosecution on the value of cattle at the time being; and when the market price of ordinary quiet stock is low, the scrubbers have little or no value; but should a demand arise, every cattle-owner makes desperate exertions to capture them. These clean-skins, as they are often called, to distinguish them from the branded cattle, are supposed to belong to the cattle-owner on whose run they emerge from their shelter; but when a large scrub is situated in the centre of several cattle-stations, they may be the property of

any one. In fact, it seems to be a recognised axiom that "the smartest man gets the most." They are, nevertheless, the frequent cause of many heart-burnings and much jealousy.

Neighbours who have only sheep-stations, and therefore can have no right or interest, make descents on the scrub when out of beef; or perhaps, more trying still, an unprincipled publican, who has only been permitted by an act of courtesy on the squatters' part to erect a so-called hotel on the run, takes advantage of his being allowed to keep a few milkers, to claim an interest in the unbranded ones. The result is almost always the same. A few dashing, reckless, unprincipled horsemen, lured by his strong waters, collect about the house. Moonlight expeditions are organised; a herd of cattle is formed; and the almost penniless publican eventually finds himself in a position to lease land from the Crown and start as a squatter himself. Many different modes of operations are required in this kind of work, and much strategy and fearless horsemanship in the execution of them. This is occasioned by the nocturnal habits of the scrub herds—as they almost invariably remain concealed in their woody strongholds during the day, and only venture into the open after sundown, making good their retreat by earliest dawn. It is therefore a favourite plan amongst the bold scrub-riders to take advantage

of the bright moonlight nights, when, shrouded in the misty light, and undistinguishable from the surrounding shadows, they burst on the unsuspecting mob; then urging their horses through the trees with utter recklessness as to the safety of life or limb, they gallop between their prey and the dark scrubs. The riders understand their work; each one carries out his part, and, from long experience, knows exactly when to shout or to keep still, when to drive the captives on or to round them in a ring. They, on the other hand, are taken by surprise; they are frightened and confused. The start caused by the sudden appearance of the shadowy horsemen, the fear of man, the clattering hoofs, and the suppressed shout, are all against them. A few of the fiercest bulls break away, and are allowed to go; the rest rush forward through the gap purposely left open for them, and are skilfully steered into a herd of quiet cattle which has been stationed at a convenient spot. Once among the couchers, as they are called, it is comparatively easy to bring them home.

Our hero, who was much fascinated with the delights of a cattle-station life, willingly accepted his friend's invitation to join him in the projected expedition. It was still early when they returned home, and the men were waiting. Mounting fresh horses they start for the scrubs. The day was one of those

glorious bright days of which nature is so lavish in Australia. The skies were without a cloud, and the air balmy and pleasant, notwithstanding the heat, which had none of that tropical moistness so productive of languor. What an exhilarating effect it has on the spirits! Even the horses feel it. They know quite well that sharp work lies before them, and they step forward to it with pleasure.

All hands are anxious to try their luck with the clean-skins. "The Barham Downs people were out for a whole month lately, and didn't get as many as would pay for the rations used by the party. But what can you expect from a kid-glove super that isn't game to let his horse out at speed on the bush? We'll show them a dodge this time. It takes us to wipe their eyes."

It is Fitzgerald's intention to intercept the wild mob as they seek cover at earliest dawn. By doing this he will have the whole day before him to take them home; besides which, the moon doesn't answer yet for night work. The party, therefore, carry with them a light blanket apiece, stowed away in the folds of which is each man's supper and breakfast. Hobbles and Jack Shays[1] hang from the saddle-dees. The bush is as full of life as ever. Hark to the ceaseless

[1] A tin quart-pot, used for boiling water for tea, and contrived so as to hold within it a tin pint-pot.

singing of the cicala! It almost drowns one's voice. How the grasshoppers rise and fly in front of our horses! Wallabies hop swiftly past. Mobs of kangaroos sit watching as the party pass, or bound away, their long thick tails beating heavily on the ground, and acting as a counterpoise to their bodies. Swarms of bright noisy parrots of all sizes dart from one tall tree to another, or play among the branches, sometimes chasing one another, anon hanging head downwards and holding on by one foot, or watching us with their bright eyes, as with saucy mien they sit, their heads on one side, discussing sweet morsels held up in pert little claws.

We pass through timbered country this time—short, sweetly-grassed iron-bark ridges ; then over some box-tree flats, and again over more ridges. Here and there red clay mounds, made by the white ant, alternating with the little, conical, inverted, funnel-looking nests of the soldier, meet the eye. Fitzgerald stops suddenly, and points out two emus to John. They are stalking along very quietly, about one hundred and fifty yards away. They resemble ostriches, but are not so large, and the tail droops more. One of the black-boys whistles in a peculiar way. The emus crane their necks and listen. Their curiosity is excited. See, they are approaching slowly! They come within about thirty yards, and John can distinguish every

point about them, from their black cast-iron-looking legs, to the bare neck and small head, with its bright eye and strong flat beak. One has a white ring of feathers around the throat. How they run! Ah, they have stopped again, and gaze once more! Come along, we have no time to wait. There they go, their feathers rustling like dried grass. Yonder is a native dog. What has he been up to, eh? He sees us, and, standing, looks for a moment. Hey, Ginger! here, boy! That startles him. He takes to his heels, his tail between his legs, looking quietly over his shoulder every minute. Let us ride up and see what he was after. Here it is. Just like him. A dead calf newly born. Its mother must have hidden it here in the long grass. She has gone to slake her feverish thirst at the nearest water, and the cowardly brute has awaited her departure to tear the helpless little innocent to pieces. Fitzgerald swears vengeance; and producing his little bottle of strychnine, he baits the calf in various places. That will settle the murderer, he says, with venomous satisfaction. A quarter of a mile farther on we met the poor mother. She is quite a young heifer. She is running back to the spot where her little treasure lies, mooing tenderly as she hastens along. Her drawn sides and bedraggled coat betray her exhausted condition; but she cannot spare herself, she must hurry back. Poor thing! her heart

will be torn with grief when she discovers the fate of her little pet. How faithfully she will watch over the mangled remains for days—yes, even when they are black with ants and flies, and offensive with corruption!

Once more we get into plains and scrubs. A half-grown kangaroo flies past, making for the scrubs with incredible swiftness—and never had he more need. A few feet above his head sails, with black outstretched wings, with fierce relentless beak and talons, a large eagle-hawk. His consort skims the ground in a parallel line between him and the timbered country. Should their prey once reach cover, they will lose their expected repast. It is now close at hand; the straining animal is almost at it; but, alas! it is already too late. The swoop is made. The talons sink deep in the lustrous eyes, the black pall-like wings are flapping wildly about the gentle head, and the strong remorseless beak sinks deep into the brain. The hunt is over, and now comes the gorge—days of inert repletion and listless torpor—and then another glorious cruise in the bright blue sea of heaven overhead. But Nemesis once more follows on the wake of murder, and the little poison-bottle again prepares a banquet of death for the destroyers.

The plain we are crossing is covered with old tracks. When this old feed was young, it also was a favourite feeding-ground of the scrub mobs. Look at the small

paths leading up to the scrub; they are still quite distinct. Now we approach the scrub. It is necessary for us to make our way through a belt of about two miles in depth, so that we may take the clean-skins in rear, without disturbing them, should they be preparing to feed out on the plains. We enter along one of the cattle-tracks, riding one after another. It runs out in a short time, and under Fitzgerald's guidance we make the best of our way. How close the trees grow to one another! It is quite dark overhead. The soil is a decayed vegetable deposit. What an earthy smell! Fallen trees stop the way everywhere; bushes and undergrowth mask the view. How the vines twist round the trees, or hang festooned from the branches! Ferns, mosses, and lichens, with fungi of all sorts, are to be met with on the fallen logs and old stumps. Look at that gigantic bottle-tree! It is small below, then, widening gradually, it contracts at the top. It is something like a huge radish. The inside is soft pulp, and when very young, can be eaten. Hark! there goes a "wonga-wonga," high up in the topmost branches of that great cedar. How solemnly quiet it is here! It puts one in mind of a Scottish Sabbath. Listen to the bell-bird! Ping, ping, sounds through the last hushed temple of nature. Now one hears the pat-pat-pat of a wallaby. That is the coach-

whip bird. There again. Whew-ew-ew-ew-*whit*. How sharply the last note comes! Look at this immense mound! It is a scrub-turkey's nest. Thirty or forty lay their eggs in it. One could hardly imagine they could gather such a huge pile of sticks and earth and leaves. They bury their eggs, and heap up the nest until the laying-time ceases. The moist heap heats and incubates the eggs. The young turkeys spring out of the shell, covered with a thick warm coat, and scratch their way into daylight, strong and able to provide food for themselves.

What numbers of cattle-tracks there are? This place must be swarming with cattle. Look, high up in the branches of that tall tree is a native bear! It sits motionless. It has something the appearance of a solemn old man. How funny his great ears and Roman nose look! He sits on the branch as if it was a chair, holding with hand-like claws the surrounding twigs.

At last they succeeded in making their way out, and emerge on a little creek which runs close by the edge of the scrub. Small plains intersected by strips of scrub lie in front of them. Fitzgerald determines to fix his camp here. They will be near enough to hear the lowing of the cattle during the night, and in a good position for intercepting them at dawn.

Asking John to accompany him, he starts to reconnoitre. The others build a small fire inside the scrub, and turn out their horses. The two scouts ride cautiously along the edge of the scrub for about a quarter of a mile, keeping well out of sight. A large plain lies before their gaze, but as yet the sole tenants are a few kangaroos. It has been lately burnt, and the tender young grass growing on it shines between them and the great red ball of fire, sinking in the western horizon like a sea of emerald. Down at the far end of the plain a few white and dark spots appear on the edge of the scrub. They were not there a minute ago. Keep your eye fixed on them. Yes, they are cattle; they move, they increase in numbers. It is a mob coming out of the scrub. A bellow is now heard a couple of hundred yards off. Hush! keep still. A heifer makes her appearance, looks around, and feeds slowly and quietly out on to the open burnt feed. A few young cattle follow. Now comes an old cow, with long, black, many-ringed horns, and many a scar on her dingy white skin. Close behind her issues an old bull. He is an ancient warrior. Gracious! what a hump there is on the back of his neck! He is of a dark brindle and yellow colour, with a white face, and curly hair on the broad truculent-looking forehead, on each side of which depends a little loose snaily

horn; large yellow circles surround the small savage eyes. Now come a number together. There are some branded ones. Several have Fitzgerald's brand FGD on the near-side rump. They number in all about fifty head. It is quite dark by this time, and the two spies return to the camp, and turn their horses out for the night.

All are anxious to hear the result. Every one speaks in a whisper. Supper is partaken of almost silently. The water the tea is made of tastes of the smell of cattle. Put a sprig of sweet marjoram in the boiling tea—it will improve the flavour. The little fire in the dense thickets, with the dark forms gathered round it, gives one the idea of a robbers' encampment. At last all hands turn in for a few hours' sleep. John closes his eyes in vain. He is too excited; he cannot rest. How picturesque the vague undefined forms look in the dim firelight, rolled up in their red blankets!

What a noise the opossums make chattering and squalling up above! Hark! that was a child crying. It startles him: he gets up. Sam is also awake, and, lighting his pipe, sits crouching over the fire with the blanket drawn round him. Again the wailing cry of the child: "What on earth is that?" asks John. "Oh, one of them native bears," says the stockman, carelessly.

Distant bellows come from the plain. In the immediate neighbourhood of the camp the horses are heard feeding as they jump along with difficulty in their shortened hobbles. "Hadn't you better turn in?" suggests Sam. "We've good three hours yet by the Southern Cross." John lies down close to the fire, and is lucky this time.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SPURT AT DAWN—A FAIR HAUL—CUTTING AND BRANDING.

Our hero slept sweetly, with his head on his saddle; so soundly, indeed, that when awakened he can hardly believe he slept at all. It is still black night, but the air is cold with the dews of morning, and every one is up. A hurried breakfast is hastily eaten, blankets are strapped in front of saddles, and the horses are sought for and saddled in the dark. They shiver with the cold. The morning star has been up some time. The leaves are stirring with the morning breeze.

Now they mount and ride along the edge of the scrub. Presently they come in view of the large plain. It is nearly quite light now. The darkness of night is fast hastening away, and the bright pale dawn pursues it with incredible swiftness. The zodiacal light is beginning to show. Far away at the lower end of the plain a long string of cattle are disappearing within the black line of scrub. Are we to be unlucky after all? No! Hurrah! A mob of about

fifty or sixty head appear from behind a patch of scrub in the middle of the plain and make their way at a steady walk towards shelter. They are nearer the long, dense, frowning scrub-line than we are by a good deal. Now is the time. "Come along, boys!" shouts Fitzgerald, as he dashes along at his utmost speed, followed closely by his men, Indian file. What a glorious burst! The cattle see us, and start at a gallop for the nearest cover. It is an exciting race, winding up with a dead-heat. Horses, men, and cattle plunge into the dark thicket at the same moment, with a noise of crashing branches and smashing saplings, and are instantly lost to view.

John arrives at the scrub as soon as the rest. He is determined to keep up with them. He will not lose sight of the cattle, even if he cannot do much towards getting them. "Way, way!" he shouts. His horse has run him into a clump of lawyer-thorns, and he tears his shirt and his hands and face in getting clear. Never mind—push on. The cattle are smashing everything before them in front, and he can hear the voices of his friends shouting to them and each other. "Heavens!" he nearly got dashed against that tree. "Confound it!" a vine has entangled itself round his neck, and he has to draw his knife and cut it. Now he nearly tumbles over a huge fallen log. "What an infernal place!" "Which way did they go?" Pull up an instant and

listen. Not a sound. They must be ahead. "Get along, horse." "Holy St Denis!" he utters, as a long dead sandal-wood stake, with a hard sharp point like a bayonet, drives itself between his saddle-flap and the panel, and, breaking short off, remains there. It is a mercy that it did not enter his horse's chest. "In the name of goodness, where *have* they got to?" "Which is the way out?" Everywhere the scrub looks the same—fallen timber and thick undergrowth, and trees growing close together. The smell of cattle is very strong, as is also the scent of the sweet marjoram, which, growing in vast abundance, has been trodden on and bruised by the hoofs of the hurrying crowd. Listen! there is a whip away behind in the opposite direction. "How did they get there?" Hurrying back, sometimes jogging, sometimes trotting a few yards — stopping here to tear himself through the vines and thorns, lying flat on the saddle there to pass under an overhanging bough—John succeeds in getting on to a cattle-track, along which he travels a little faster, till at length, to his great joy, he finds himself clear of the scrub—scratched and torn, indeed, but glad to come out with his eyesight intact. A whip is heard faintly ahead, and spurring his horse, he tears over the plain towards the sound. The plain is full of deep melon-holes, and the ground is rotten and undermined by rats. Should his horse put his

foot in the wrong place, it will be a case of smash; but he doesn't care, and at last pulls up beside his companions.

They have succeeded in running out about forty head. Fitzgerald and Tommy the white stockman ride ahead, keeping back the furious crowd as much as possible. A man rides on each wing, allowing plenty of room, and another brings up the rear. It is in vain to think of steadying them just yet. "Just keep them together, and do not close on them." Now they are well away from the scrub. "Round them up if possible, and let them stand a few minutes to breathe." They will not steady. Again they break and dash off. "Keep them back in front." "Use your whips." Gradually they drop into a steadier pace, and at last, with panting chests, lolling-out tongues, and glaring eyes, are driven into a mob of quiet cattle, which are found feeding handy. "Ring them up." "Mix them well with the quiet ones, and let them stand a little."

"How did you manage to get the cattle out of that awful place?" asks John of Fitzgerald, who happened to be next him as they sit, forming a ring around the captives.

"Oh, that was only a belt about half a mile thick," replied the young man. "After getting through that we came upon another plain. We headed them there,

and driving them down it, we found an opening through the scrub on to this side."

"How *do* you manage to gallop in that frightful thicket of trees and logs?" questioned West, with wonder. "I was nearly dragged off a dozen times."

"Practice," said the squatter, laughing. "I thought you would find it a little stiff at first."

Now they move along once more. "Keep them well in the quiet cattle," shouts Fitzgerald. "Round them up every time they seek to break. They'll soon steady."

How delicious is the bright summer morning! The horses' feet are wet as they brush away the shining diamond-like drops of dew in front of them. The men light their pipes, and the little blue clouds of smoke float daintily on the soft breath of the morning. What a fragrance the air is filled with! Now the watershed into the creek is crossed, and the party halt at a camp, while Peter and John go up a neighbouring gully to search for cows with calves to brand. There, among the wattles, almost hidden from sight, is a small mob. The sweet-scented yellow mimosa-blossoms fall like rain as they push their way through the grove, and drive the lazy quiet cattle down towards the large mob. Many cows with unbranded calves are drafted out on the various camps, and they approach the yards with a considerable number. Near home they pass a small mob of horses, amongst which Fitz-

gerald points out to John an exceedingly handsome and well-bred-looking black colt, saying, rather drily—

"Your guardian's son, Mr Ralf Cosgrove, admired him once very much."

The tone struck the young Englishman as meaning more than the words conveyed, although he could not have conceived that Ralf when a boy had made an unsuccessful attempt to steal the animal. He remembered that on several occasions Fitzgerald had evaded criticising Mr Cosgrove or his son, although he had inquired after Ruth in a kindly and even affectionate manner, and John made up his mind to ask his friend's opinion about them. However, the hurry and bustle of the mustering caused him to forget his intention. After a good deal of shouting, cracking of whips, and galloping after odd breakaways, the cattle were yarded amid clouds of dust, and all hands betook themselves to supper and bed, it being imperatively necessary that the next day's duties should commence by daybreak. A loud cooey awoke John from dreams of chasing scrub cattle, and turning out hurriedly, he found all hands down at the drafting yards. Blackboys were cooeying to one another instructions as to the carrying down of brands and ropes, and the noise of the imprisoned herd was terrific. Following the example of the rest, John entered the great receiving yard on foot, and assisted in driving the cattle

into a lesser yard. This was not accomplished without much shouting, and throwing of sticks. The cattle breaking back in a body once or twice previously to entering, rushed to the far end of the yard, raising dense clouds of dust, through which occasionally could be seen forests of horns, and hundreds of quickly moving feet, or the dim outline of a beast or two. Now and then an infuriated animal would single out and charge down on one of the men, amid a shower of sticks and stones from his fellows—the assailed one meantime making his escape in the best way possible. To assist in this as well as for shade, trees had been left in the centre of the enclosure. At last they draw into the other yard. Once they start there is no stopping them. What a crush! Some of their ribs must crack between the posts. "Stand near the gates and keep them back if possible." "Fill up the yards ahead." "Now put up the heavy rails, and shut all the gates."

Each successive yard up to the pound is full of cattle. Drafting now begins. Three or four are driven into the pound. They are all cows whose calves are to be branded. They are let out into another yard, through one of the numerous gates in the little pound-yard. This time, four animals take their place. Two are unbranded calves, and are let out into the branding-pen. Of the other two, one is of the same class as the

first lot, and is allowed to join them, the fourth is a full-grown scrubber. It is drafted into a different yard, reserved for that description of animal. So the work goes on.

The beasts passing through the pound are then divided according to their various classes. Meantime all hands are busy. Some are filling up out of one yard into another, others keep the cattle from crushing each other in corners. Fitzgerald stands in the lane leading up to the pound, near the gate, with a stout stick in his hands, and regulates admission into it, shouting his orders to the men in charge of the various other gates. His work is by no means a sinecure. The cattle are rushing and crowding. Many of them, more especially the scrubbers, are maddened at being cooped up in the yard, and charge at every one with the greatest ferocity. Now he slams the gate in the faces of a squeezing crowd, that would fill up the little yard entirely, did they enter. A moment afterwards he opens it, and dexterously admits a couple of the proper sort, and shouts out their class, as, jumping on one side, he eludes the desperate charge of an infuriated animal, dealing it in the same moment a couple of rapid blows with his stick. Now he opens the gate once more. Every one is active, and every one is on the look-out. It is surprising how coolly they work among the

furious animals. Every now and then, some one makes a couple of strides to the top of the fence, leaving a disappointed enemy below; and at last, after two or three hours' hard work, the calves are all drafted into a yard by themselves. The large scrubbers occupy another. Fitzgerald intends keeping them in one of the large paddocks on the run, until he can sell them. Their calves will be put in the weaning paddock along with the rest, and in the course of time will forget all their wild habits.

An adjournment is now made for breakfast, after which branding commences. The young stock were in two yards adjoining one another,—that devoted to branding purposes being considerably the smaller; the other served to feed it with calves as required. The branding-pen was half filled by a number of rushing, squeezing, kicking, charging, calves of all ages, from about fifteen months old downwards. The larger unbranded cattle are kept in reserve to be branded at more leisure. Fitzgerald and Sam jump quietly into the yard. The former takes the noose end of a long, thin, but exceedingly strong, green-hide rope, and dexterously lassoes a yearling scrub bull, who, from his colour and general appearance, must be a son of the animal they saw coming out of the scrub the other night. The rope after passing through two or three pulleys is fastened round the

barrel of a windlass outside. It tightens. The Micky feels the strain, and gives a great leap.

"Take in the slack there," shouts Fitzgerald. Now comes the tug of war. Straining, roaring, jumping, dashing violently against the rails, the yellow brindled Micky is dragged up, in spite of a determined resistance, to a corner-post of the yard. Meantime Sam has caught the tail in one hand, and with the other lassoes the creature's hind leg, passing the end of the rope at the same moment outside, to a man whose duty it is to hold it. "Pull up there," he shouts. The fore leg is served in the same way. The leg-ropes pass under the lowest rail, and are held outside. The struggling, bellowing animal is now sideways to the fence, its head held close to the corner-post by the head-rope. Sam again seizes the tail and gives a sudden jerk; the leg-ropes take the creature's legs from under it, and down it comes on its side with a heavy flop. Red-hot brands are now brought from the fire, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the whole affair has been begun and concluded. Another is caught and hauled up at the instant when, jumping up, the first victim rushes with blind rage at his tormentors. The branding-pen is getting particularly lively now. There are three or four Mickies and wild heifers who are determined to have their owner's heart's-blood. "Open the gate

there," shouts Fitzgerald. Sam cleverly avoids a sudden charge, and obeying the command, allows a singed and blood-streaming Micky, followed by two or three other raging spirits, to dash past into an adjoining yard, in the seclusion of which, they may safely indulge in any amount of bellicose demonstration. The smaller calves are scruffed,[1] and soon finished, and a fresh batch takes the place of the first detachment. In this manner the whole of the calves are soon got through. The larger clean-skins pass through the same ordeal; but it is a work of more time, not unmixed with serious risk.

All now bear about with them an indisputable testimony of ownership. The cows belonging to the quiet herd are turned free into the bush. Such as have young calves are allowed to take them away with them. Any calves over six months old, however, are kept back for weaning. This causes much grief on both sides. The bereaved mothers hanging about outside make day and night hideous with their bellowing lamentations, answered every now and then by a plaintive chorus from the yard. So passes the day, and preparations are made for a fresh day's work on the morrow. It is, however, necessary that John should return to Cambaranga; so bidding farewell to

[1] Caught by hand.

his kind entertainer, and after promising another visit when possible, he started for home.

How much more self-confident he feels now than when he first landed in Brisbane! He cantered along the road as if he had been accustomed to the surroundings of a bush-life all his days. Half-way to Cambaranga he met the "Bindarobina" stockman on his road back, leading the yellow stallion. He was in high spirits at having brought him so far. A pair of draught-horse winkers kept the animal from observing what occurred around him, and had a considerable effect in cowing his temper; but notwithstanding the unsightliness of the head-gear, his presence was most stately. The simple surcingle and crupper served to set off his finely-shaped proportions in a manner far superior to what any more gorgeous trappings could have done; while the reins, though loosely buckled, kept the noble neck with its waving mane in a superb arch.

"Mind you don't loose the rein off him yet," said John, warningly.

The man, satisfied of his ability to take him home in safety, boastingly remarked that it would take a better horse than "Yellowman" to get away from him. But he hallooed before he was out of the wood; for John learnt, to his great vexation, some days afterwards, that he had not proceeded more than a few miles

further on his road, when, falling in with a mob of bush-horses, the yellow steed set to work rearing and pulling on the halter, and in spite of the efforts of the man, who was dragged out of his saddle in the struggle, he succeeded in getting free. All attempts to recapture him proved unavailing.

It may be as well to mention here, that the animal in question has been since then occasionally seen by a stray shepherd or stockman, in some of the most inaccessible parts of the wild broken country between the Cambaranga and Bindarobina runs. The surcingle and crupper remained buckled on his body long enough to produce an abrasion of the skin,—their places being now indicated by a growth of white hair, producing a remarkable effect. He is invariably attended by a harem of mares, as wild and untamable as himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAMBARANGA AGAIN—A WET ADVENTURE—A HOSPITABLE REFUGE.

On his return to Cambaranga, John found that Mr M'Duff had come back from his northern tour, and did not appear over-well pleased that he had taken a holiday in his absence. M'Duff was one of those men who think they never can get enough work out of their subordinates. A hard worker himself, urged on by the stimulus which the immediate prospect of making money usually confers, he required that none of his people should do less than himself. John was kept at work from morning to night; and very often midnight saw him returning from business at one of the far outlying sheep-stations. For these exertions he received no pecuniary return, it being the opinion of Mr M'Duff, as well as of many other proprietors of "Dotheboys Halls" in the colony, that the acquisition of a knowledge of bush-life, or "colonial experience," as it is termed, amply compensated for the arduous labours performed.

On one occasion when he had spent the whole of the morning and forenoon in the saddle, he was requested by Mr M'Duff to count the sheep on a distant station, and return that evening. A dull uninteresting ride brings him to the sheep-station. It is just time to count the flock: they are correct. The rainy season has begun—and the sky is heavily overcast. It will be a black, dark, and possibly very wet night. He hates the idea of riding home, but he knows that M'Duff makes a point of his returning in order to have him at work early.

This is the black swamp, only seventeen miles distant from home. Still eight miles to go. It is spitting rain as he canters along. It must now be sundown. It will be a frightfully dark night; now it sets in for heavy, settled rain. There will be no moon to illuminate, however opaquely, the heavy, dense clouds. It becomes quite dark. Still he jogs along, looking for the welcome light, longing for the music of the dogs. He feels his horse is crossing deep, sharp gullies,—surely he cannot be on the road. Now he passes a stream of water, and the animal's hoofs crunch the stones and gravel. There is no stream to cross on the road. He gets off and alights in *grass*. He knows now that his horse has left the track. He leads his horse, feeling for the hard smooth road with his feet. Is this it? He takes out his match-box and strikes a light.

The sudden glare in the dark causes his nag to throw up his head with a jerk, and all the matches fly out on the ground—not one left. His horse has travelled this road hundreds of times—perhaps he was only taking a short cut. He mounts again, loosens the reins, and makes up his mind to trust entirely to the animal.

On they go slowly. The creature, finding the reins loose, walks away readily, tearing up large mouthfuls of grass. He must evidently have some place in view, he goes so cheerily in one direction. Perhaps he is making back to Cambaranga! How cold it is! Where on earth can he be going to now? He is climbing up steep ascents—so steep that John has to hold on by the mane; now he is descending a slippery, steep bank, and he slides yards. The trees and bushes have been very thick for some time past, and long wet branches drag themselves across John's face and neck.

He is so wet by this time that he makes no effort to keep himself dry. The ground is streaming with water, and there is a continual sound of swush, swush, in his ears. What a night! Even the native dogs and the curlews have shelter. What would his mother think, were she alive, and did she know of his condition? He is crossing flat country now. The heavy rains have saturated the poor soil,—it is quite rotten, and the horse bogs deeply at every step. Oh, he is down, and struggling violently! John frees himself

from the saddle. His feet sink in the soft mud up to the ankle. He extricates the animal, and leads him, bogging heavily, for some time. The mud splashes over his back and head. The country seems to be quite flat: occasionally the ground is hard, and he rides a little; then comes more bogging. He is fairly worn out; and on arriving at the next hard patch he makes up his mind to camp, in spite of the rain. Here is one. He gets off, and ties his steed to a tree. He has no hobbles, but a stirrup-leather answers as well. The ground is two inches under water, but he is so knocked up he cares not. He spreads the saddle-cloth and lies down, with his saddle for a pillow. How his teeth chatter? All around there is heard one continued croak, croak, croak, from the throats of countless frogs. Fatigue nevertheless compels sleep, and when he awakes it is breaking day. Saddling up his shivering horse, he prepares to start, not to Cambaranga now, which he should have reached last night, but towards the overseer's station, whither Mr M'Duff had asked him to follow him that morning. Which way shall he go? The country is a dead level; he cannot tell north from south, east from west. The sky is one vast leaden cloud. He recollects hearing of a vast box-forest between the Betyammo run and this part of the Cambaranga station.

The horse he is riding was bred on it. Now it dawns on him why the brute left the road: he wanted to make back to his own old beat. What course shall he steer? He endeavours to follow back his tracks of last night, but the water is so deep in places as to prevent his seeing them. He keeps on in the direction he started in, and gets along at a pretty fair pace, considering the soft ground. In about two hours he falls in with fresh tracks. He is relieved. Some one passed this way not long ago. The tracks of the bogging horse, though filled with muddy water, are distinct enough. On he goes with spirits quite refreshed. Holloa! there are tracks of two horses now, both about the same age. He passes a bent tree and thinks he has seen it before. Now he comes to a fallen log which he remembers. Heavens! he is following his own tracks in a circle. He begins to get frightened: he has heard of men perishing in the box-forest before. He carefully selects a tree ahead of him and makes for it, noting the place he started from. On arriving at the tree he selects another in front, keeping the last tree in a line with the first, and by repeating the plan he succeeds in travelling pretty straight. He has at least the satisfaction of knowing that he will get out of the forest eventually. The sun glimmers faintly, a pale round spot in the clouds. It is pretty high; it must already be the afternoon.

"Chop, chop, chop, chop," in the distance, faintly. John pulls up and listens eagerly, but there is no sound. He must have been mistaken. There again! He stops immediately, and pricks up his ears. Yes, he hears it distinctly. Blacks. Now he will find out where he is. Guided by the sound, he rides up and discovers a black fellow of the Cambaranga tribe, who rejoices in the, at present, very appropriate name of "Stick-in-the-mud."

"Gooray, Ginty, Ginty. Which way you have come up, Missa Wess?"

"Me loose em road," returned the latter.

"Tut, tut, tut," responded the black, with a piteous look, shaking his head.

"Cambaranga close up?" inquires West.

"Bail good way."

The same answer is returned as to the distance from the overseer's place. Betyammo is described as "little bit, good way," and Stick-in-the-mud promises to show him on to a track leading there. John, who is faint with hunger, asks his sable friend to procure him some native honey, of which the bush is full.

"Too much big fellow water, bail ply (fly) come up bail pind (find) him," answers the aboriginal, adding, however, the question, "You patter (eat) potchum?"

"Yohi" (yes), said John, rather doubtfully, for he is not sure how his stomach will agree with the strange meat.

"All righ; me look out." He now went from tree to tree examining carefully the bark, and at last, after inspecting a large gum-tree he remarks, curtly, "Potchum sit down." This he seemed to detect by the fact that there were fresher scratches on its trunk, of the kind made by the animals when ascending than descending. The tree was a very large one. Its bark was smooth like glass. Cutting a notch in the bark, and embracing as much of the huge trunk as possible with his arms, the black fellow mounted the height of the step, then standing with his toe in the notch, with his tomahawk he proceeded to cut another, about the height of his waist, which he also ascended, keeping his body flat to the tree. Step by step he gradually rose, looking like a fly walking up a window-pane, until he reached the first fork, nearly forty feet above the ground. A sudden twist enabled him to surmount this difficulty, after which he walked among the branches with the activity of a monkey. Selecting one with a hole in it, he dropped two or three small stones which he had carried up with him down the hollow, listening intently as they rumbled down the pipe. They all stopped at a particular place. Descending to the spot, Stick-in-the-mud cut into the hollow, and inserting his hand, drew forth a large opossum, its eyes blinking in the daylight.

A few knocks against the tree deprived it of life, and throwing it down, its captor descended, grinning

from ear to ear his appreciation of the white fellow's compliments as to his dexterity. Blacks never move without a fire-stick; and soon the opossum, divested of its fur, was roasting on a fire, emitting a most inviting odour under the circumstances. It makes Stick-in-the-mud, who has only lately despatched an immense meal, hungry again; and John has some difficulty in persuading him not to seize the half-roasted creature and bite out a piece.

The black fellow looks astonished; the prohibition is quite against the customs of his race; however, he gives in, contenting himself by throwing the entrails on the fire for a moment, and soon, to his guest's horror, he commenced despatching yards of the scarcely-warmed intestines, at the conclusion of which operation his face presented a sickening spectacle.

Were it not that he is almost fainting with hunger, the Englishman could not touch the black rat-looking animal, roasted in its skin, its tail curled round and round, and its paws drawn up by the heat.

Stick-in-the-mud fancies the delay is caused by ignorance as to the proper method of carving, and once more stretches forth his wet and highly odoriferous fingers towards the "plat." Shuddering, John snatches it away, and dividing it, presents him with half. On tasting his own he finds it by no means to be despised, and even longs for a little more.

Stick-in-the-mud watches him. With the acuteness of his people he had noticed the fastidiousness which characterised the first few mouthfuls, and he roared with laughter as he saw it disappearing. "Cawbawn potchum boodgeree, bail gammon. Black fellow, cawbawn patter, my word."[1]

They now started for Betyammo. With wonderful instinct the black fellow found his unerring way through the bush. The country was still the same flat forest. No water-course intersected it which could act as a guide; no mountain rose for a landmark. Mile after mile the same interminable box-forest was traversed. Overhead the clouds hung blackly, but with unhesitating confidence the child of the woods walked ahead in the direction which he felt within him to be the right one. Now and then he stopped to ascertain whether or not a bandicoot was in its nest; and once in passing he gave two or three cuts with his tomahawk to a tree, out of which he dragged an immense maggot, which he swallowed with great relish, after politely offering it to John, and laughing heartily at his face of disgust. Now they fall in with a small track, and Stick-in-the-mud halts, saying—

"This one wheelbarrow yan 'long o' Beetyammo[2]

[1] Literally: "'Possum very good, no gammon. Black fellow plenty eat, my word."

[2] This road goes to Betyammo.

intimating at the same time that he himself is a "postman black fellow," travelling on a special mission from one tribe to another, and that his business will not permit him to go any further. Our friend rewarded his guide by giving him a handkerchief which he wore round his neck, and promised a liberal supply of tobacco on his coming to Cambaranga; and setting spurs to his horse, pushed along smartly, striking at last the main road near Betyammo.

Here he overtook Mr Gray, who was returning from a visit to a sheep-station.

Guessing the young fellow's plight, the kind-hearted old gentleman hurried him home, made him drink a couple of glasses of hot grog, and brought him in dry clothes. John West had grown very much since leaving home. He was now nearly six feet high, and a strong, active, muscular fellow. Mr Gray, on the contrary, was short and very stout; and his guest could not help laughing as he surveyed himself in his host's short inexpressibles, the legs of which failed to cover his ankles, and were a world too wide around the waist. A coat to match completed his equipment; and he joined the ladies, who welcomed him with much pleasure, wicked Bessie slily complimenting him on his appearance.

Once more the rain deluges the country, and John congratulates himself upon having met Stick-in-the-

mud. As the party are about sitting down to dinner, horses are heard trotting up, and soon a drenched individual, enveloped in a huge oilskin poncho, is standing at the door, shaking hands with Mr Gray. It is our friend Stone. His horses are turned out, his swags brought inside, and in a short time the good-looking, honest, careless fellow joins the party. He is an old acquaintance. He has just come up from Sydney, and he has news for every one.

He describes the cattle at the great Agricultural Show to Mr Gray, and relates with much enthusiasm how the black and yellow colours of "Old Tait" were once more borne to victory by the little Barb; and, for the ladies' benefit, he gives an account of a ball at Government House, and other gay festivities in which he took part.

He describes the appearance and breeding of the latest imported horses and cattle, and the shape of the greatest novelties in fashionable dress. In fact, he is a fund of information and amusement. He is acquainted with the probable price of store wethers in Victoria this coming season; and the gossip of Sydney and Brisbane is at his finger-ends. Moreover, he interests Mr Gray very much by giving him some information about new country. When in Sydney he met some fellows who had been out exploring lately, and they gave him an account of lands away

to the northward which must ultimately be of great value; and he himself has an idea of joining a party which is about to be formed in order to examine and secure some of them.

And in the room at night, which they shared between them, he told John of a small windfall which came to him lately in the shape of a few hundred pounds.

"I'm going to turn over a new leaf," he remarked. "I'll go out with this expedition, take up some country, and either sell it and go out again, or try and get some one to join me in stocking it. I wish you would come too, West," he continued. "You have got some cash. You can easily double it this way, without loss; and you will pick up colonial experience in shifting for yourself far sooner than in working for others."

"I wish I could," said John; "but my money is in my guardian's hands, and I have no command of it."

"That's a pity," returned Stone. "Well, it can't be helped; but just let me give you a bit of advice. Get hold of your money as soon as you can yourself, and stick to it. Remember it is very hard for a gentleman to get along in the bush without capital. As for the labourer, he is a thousand times better off. He lands here, and he is sure of better wages than he could expect at home. His food is found. His expenses are reduced to a minimum. Every step he makes is one in advance. There are openings here for him

which do not exist at home. In a couple of years he buys a horse-team; next year he has two. A small farm or a public-house follows as a natural consequence, and he is almost immediately a moneyed man, *provided he does not drink,* which is the rock he splits on too often. I consider that when an intelligent, sober, and hard-working young man lands in this colony, it is as if he had a legacy of £500 put into his pocket at home; but the gentleman's son, without capital and without a profession, is in a far different position. He works often for less wages, in a highly responsible position, slaving hard to amass sufficient to make a start. He is in charge of valuable herds, and a vast property. He cannot begin in a petty way. His mind revolts from making a commencement as a carrier, or a travelling hawker, or a publican, and associating with the people that kind of work would cause him to live amongst. Should he commence business as a storekeeper even, he is dependent upon favour for custom; he must conciliate the lowest classes often, and always on a digging township. The masses cannot bear to find any man with more refined thoughts or manners than themselves. They will not tolerate independence. It is not enough to give value for money. To succeed, he must slap 'Jack' on the back, and be poked in the ribs in return. He must drink a nobbler with 'Tom,' and be ready to 'shout' for all hands at least once

a-day. Nor must he be annoyed if he finds 'Bill' lying on his bed, with his dirty boots, scrutinising his most cherished photographs, and commenting on them in his delightfully brusque, frank style. It is not," continued Stone, "that a man wants to keep himself aloof from a snobbish feeling of superiority, —no sensible fellow would; but at the same time, one likes to be independent, and live among one's equals if possible. That is the reason why you find so many fellows go away down to town and spend their money. It seems so utterly hopeless, that what they can manage to save out of their small screws will ever grow into a sum large enough for them to make a beginning with, in the way they have been used to, that the natural desire for a visit to town after the seclusion of the bush, with its constant hardships, merely affords them an opportunity of spending what they have earned. They know few towns-people. They have no pleasant houses to visit at. They take up their quarters at a hotel frequented by squatters—men in whose society they have lived in the bush, and whose habits and ways are like their own, but whose purses are longer. They go from one place of amusement to another, longing for the rest of a pleasant home, sighing for the society of well-bred women in vain. Their own homes are like mine, in most cases, away across the water in Old England, and so they get into a

fashion of spending their money and their holidays in this manner as a matter of course. There are, however, many who like nothing better; and some young Australians, with happy homes to go to, choose rather to spend their time in a rowdy, fast way, than among their own circle, but three-parts of the bush-fellows would be glad of the chance they throw away. It is jolly enough while one is young, but it can't last for ever, you know, West; so when I dropped into this little thing I put the drag on, rolled up my valise, and took my passage for Brisbane. I was sorry to leave, too. A number of northern men were in Sydney at the time, and came to see me and two or three others, who were cleaned out, off. As we steamed away from the quay, by Jove! I envied them all standing in a body there, shouting and chaffing remarks about 'Old Queensland,' and sending messages to chums up in the bush; and when I thought how they would return to a good dinner at 'The Royal,' or 'Petty's,' or 'The Metropolitan,' and then stroll on to the theatre, and so on, while I had to cut away back to hard work, I almost felt inclined to stay; and indeed, an hour afterwards, as we passed through the Heads, and the old Clarence snorted away northwards through the dirty black night, and over a chopping cross-sea, if I could have returned I believe I would. I don't think," said Stone, ruefully, "anything can be

worse than coming out of Sydney Heads on a squally, dismal evening, a little upset after a spell in town. That feeling, however, soon goes off; and as Fortune seems inclined to do the right thing this time, I'll give her every opportunity before she has time to change her fickle mind."

So saying, he turned over, and was asleep almost immediately, leaving John to ruminate on what he had said with regard to his money, about which he somehow could not help feeling uncomfortable.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAMBING—SWINDLING A NEW CHUM.

NEXT morning John returned to Cambaranga, leaving Stone, who had accepted Mr Gray's invitation to pass some days there, to spell his horses. In a fortnight's time, however, he passed on his road north, accompanied by a Betyammo blackboy, driving a number of Betyammo horses.

During the night he spent at Cambaranga he acquainted John with the fact that he had, since last seeing him, entered into a partnership with Mr Gray, who had agreed to stock any good country which he might eventually secure, and meanwhile share his expenses, and the profits on all country he might take up and sell.

It must not be thought that during this time John West had forgotten Ruth, his guardian's step-daughter, or his affection for her. He had not long been at Cambaranga when he sought out her mother's grave, and found it a mere mound of earth—forgotten, uncared

for. The cows browsed over it, and the rats burrowed into the soft soil. No stone or cross marked the spot where that gentle heart slept peacefully, but a great *currajong* waved its beautiful leaves lovingly as a shelter from the fierce noonday sun and the chill night dews, its perennial greenness emblematically showing forth the eternal life into which the soul of the sleeper had entered.

He asked permission of Mr M'Duff to enclose it and put it in order, and received from him a rather coarse reply, that he might, if he chose, make a stock-yard round it. His finances were by no means in a flourishing condition, but he gladly expended the greater portion of them in causing a neat fence to be erected around this spot, so dear to the little friendless heart.

One of the men, a mason by trade, had managed to cut a neat headstone from a flat block of sandstone found in the creek, and John very often made a pilgrimage to the place, which recalled the one love-romance of his life.

It surprised him a good deal that, although he had written two or three letters to Ruth, she had never taken any notice of them, and he puzzled his brains often to find out the reason. He had always taken a brotherly care of her, and he knew she liked him. What could be the cause? Mr Cosgrove wrote once or twice, but his letters were harsh and cold—mere

exhortations to work. And of work he had enough. Sometimes John had to go out and assist in cutting down trees, and making bough-yards; at others, his assistance was needed in sinking post-holes and putting up fences; or he had to drive bullocks and bring in firewood.

It was perhaps fortunate for John that he learnt these rough experiences while still young; and in a great measure they kept him from dwelling on his lonely lot. His happiest moments at this time were those passed in slumber, when his mind reviewed the most cherished recollections of his more youthful days, and revealed to him again the loved features of his sainted mother, his grave father, and Ruth, with her wavy brown curls, and sweet sad face.

At last lambing-time came round, and he received instructions from Mr M'Duff to join a party of three men who were being sent out to take charge of one of the flocks. Their destination was a distant creek. The spot selected for a lambing-ground is always chosen with the object of having plenty of green feed for the ewes, so as to produce abundance of milk; but even to John's inexperienced eye this one did not at all look promising. Part of the grass had never been burnt, and the remainder had been set on fire so recently, that it looked like a mere black waste. Surely a better place could have been found than this.

If rain fell immediately, the grass would spring; and although at this time of the year the cold would keep it back considerably, still one might manage to get along; but there was no prospect of a change from the bright, cold, sunny weather. A black look-out, indeed, for a good lambing.

If the men grumbled at the wretched pasture, they broke into open mutiny when they saw the condition of the flock they had to attend to, and the want of comforts for themselves and necessary articles for their work. The hurdles which are required to make folds for holding sheep, and small pens to imprison such refractory ewes as will not own and "mother" their young, were few in number and of bad quality. The bark *gunyah* the men lived in was made of poor and rotten bark; and as for the ewes, they were enough in themselves to insure the failure of a lambing, even on plentiful feed.

"Toothless, ragged, old grannies," muttered the hurdle-man.[1]

It is customary to divide a reward of sixpence per head for all lambs reared over 80 per cent of the total number of ewes sent to the lambing, among the men whose exertions have contributed to the result. This sum is in addition to their wages. Besides this, at a

[1] The man who has charge of the young lambs for the first three days after they are dropped.

lambing where the sheep are fat and the grass abundant, very little trouble is required to make things go smoothly; whereas a bad lambing makes every one working at it discontented, listless, and dissatisfied with himself, his mates, the sheep, the grass, and above all, the boss or super, whose the responsibility or loss is.

It certainly did not look like M'Duff's good management sending this large flock (over 1500) to such a wretched spot. John had often heard him speak of the necessity of parting with old sheep. What could he mean by sending them here? A younger flock could stand it better. He was aware that good grass was scarce just then, but it surely was more necessary for these poor creatures to have something to lamb on than stronger ones. The overseer who attended to the wants of the men seemed glad to get away from the desolate spot as soon as he could, and M'Duff never came near it. There was clearly no hope of a percentage, or even of a tolerable lambing, and the men, disheartened and disgusted, took no interest in their work.

Day by day matters grew worse. Lambs were dropped in numbers; but so old, and weak, and hungry were the mothers, that they rather ran seeking food for themselves than "took" to their helpless offspring. Piles of lambs lay around the hurdle-yards each morning dead—with their eyes picked out, often

long before death, by the cruel crows, of which, and carrion-hawks, hundreds could be seen sitting on the neighbouring trees. All day long numbers of motherless, deserted, helpless creatures, with tucked-up bodies and humped backs, baa'ed with faint weak voices their desire for a little food. Dead sheep lay everywhere. Not one ewe in a score cared for and nursed its lamb. Those were lucky who recovered the prostration of lambing. They had no love for their young, and no milk to give them if they had. Still lambs kept increasing by hundreds. The men did not know what to do with them. It was a mercy to kill them. There were lambs everywhere, and almost all without mothers. Lambs in the yard—lambs down at the water-holes—in the bush—in the hut,—everywhere.

It distressed John to see such a loss of property, apart from the misery of the poor, weak, starved mites that cried their little throats so dry, and their mouths so sore, as to be unable to swallow the nourishment which he sometimes procured for them from ewes who had a little milk.

It was impossible to do anything for the whole body, yet he could not sit with his hands folded; and many were the different plans which, under the guidance of the experienced old shepherd, he adopted. He made little pens of hurdles, into which any ewe that showed signs of having milk, and that would not

fondle her lamb, was put with it—both being marked with raddle in a similar way, in order that they might be detected easily in the crowd, when allowed to feed, and imprisoned again—until at length the mother got, by very force of habit, to love her young. Others, whose lambs had died, were penned up and respectively accommodated with a motherless one, on whose back was fastened the skin of its foster-mother's deceased little one. In many cases this met with success. Numerous plans were tried, some mothers being coaxed, others cajoled, and others intimidated. Some were kept on purpose to feed the poor little hungry orphans, who had been deserted by their own parents after suckling them for a few days, and who tried their puny utmost to prolong existence.

It was throughout a most painful business. Often during the night John would be awakened by a thin treble baa from some little lost waif, which had fallen asleep during the day, and which, unsought for by its mother, had lain in the bush, unnoticed, by itself. This appeal he never could withstand; and, seeking the homeless solitary one, he would endeavour to assuage its young grief by giving it a drink from one of his penned-up milkers.

At length it was over, and the last ewe had lambed. All the mobs of different aged lambs which had been hitherto kept apart were boxed up together, the sheep

were made over to their shepherd, and the men rolled up their swags, and tramped into the head-station to get paid.

The latter part of the lambing had not been so trying as the first half. Rain had fallen, and grass was comparatively plentiful; but the poor condition and age of the mothers had operated fatally against its success. There were about a hundred lambs saved, but over six hundred of the mothers had left their bones to bleach on the fatal spot. It was indeed a bad business, and John was thankful it was over; but he did not care to face the old superintendent with the fatal tally of survivors.

On describing what had occurred, however, Mr M'Duff did not seem to take it very much to heart, merely remarking that John was exceedingly unlucky with his first lambing.

Rather surprised to find his boss in such a gentle mood, the latter added a remark, to the effect that had the sheep been on better pasture the result would have been more favourable.

"It is not likely," returned his superior, "that your sheep are to have the pick of the lambing-places. They are hard enough to find of any sort this year."

"My sheep!" ejaculated the young man, wonderingly.

"Yes, of course, your sheep. You were looking

after your own ewes lambing, and you are fortunate in being allowed to keep them on the station at a time when we require all the grass there is for ourselves."

"How did they become mine?" inquired the surprised new chum, bewildered about his new property.

"Become yours! Well, I—I—I——" stammered M'Duff, who, notwithstanding his greed and selfishness, had the grace to feel ashamed of the cheat which, under the direction of his unscrupulous senior, he had unhesitatingly played on the trusting lad. "The fact is, your guardian invested your money in them nearly a year ago, just after last shearing. I've got the receipt somewhere; I'll find it and give it you."

"You do not mean to say that Mr Cosgrove has sold me that flock of ewes which are dying so fast, and paid himself with my money?"

"That is the flock he chose for you, and he cannot help the seasons. He received you on his station; invested your money for you. You have been taught colonial experience" (John laughed bitterly); "and you have had the use of the run for your sheep."

John had not sufficient knowledge of business to understand the nature of the transaction thoroughly, but he knew enough to feel alarmed.

"Will you show me the account against me in the station books?" he said, desperately, as if doubting the evidence of his ears.

He had worked so faithfully—his whole soul had been in doing his duty—that he could not believe so true an adherent and so enthusiastic a servant could have been treated so treacherously.

They proceeded to the little office, and John read against his name, in M'Duff's scrawling characters, a blotted, jumbled-up statement, which gave him to understand that almost immediately after last shearing this flock had become his. The original number (1700) was charged to him at the unusually high figure of 15s. per head. Two hundred had died during the cold, wet season.

John knew too well the enormous number of deaths during lambing, and he found himself now with 900 old ewes and a few lambs, at the mercy of his untrustworthy so-called guardian, or his managing partner, for grass to feed them with. Another glance at the books showed him that, after payment of passage-money, shepherds' and lambers' wages, there stood but a slender balance in his favour.

He said nothing: his soul was too sorely hurt to say much. Truly he had fallen among thieves; and those who ought to have protected him had made prey of him. Verily M'Duff had known how to get rid of his old ewes with a vengeance.

Mechanically rolling up his receipt for "money received from Mr John West, price of 1700 ewes, aged,"

he left the office, his breast swelling, more with grief at the base duplicity of the transaction than for the loss of his small fortune, which, as the money never had been in his possession, did not come home so acutely to him as it might have done. That he, who had worked so honestly, whose thoughts and energies day and night were how he might best please the man under whose roof Ruth lived, should have been made the victim of so vile a swindle, so cowardly a deception! Now he understood Stone's hints about getting his money into his own hands. Now he knew the meaning of the sneers which were coupled with the names of many squatters as the proprietors of "Dotheboys Halls."

At last he believed the stories of Australian wool princes, living in England, graciously undertaking the charge of young men of capital who desired learning the art of making a fortune by sheep-farming, in order to be able to charge them an exorbitant premium for the pleasure of acting as a grocer's apprentice in their stores, combined with that of a butcher's boy at their slaughtering-yards, and finally winding up by selling them their surplus stock at prices above just rates. He had heard that the pin-money of some ladies travelling in Europe with their spouses, the lords of cattle on a thousand hills and of flocks innumerable, was derived from this source.

As he lay awake all night on his hard bunk, he

passed through a "colonial experience" which opened his eyes wider to the ways of the world than they had ever been before. He had cherished the hope of rendering himself so useful to his employers as to make it worth their while to retain him in their service, under a salary which, saved with care for years, might, joined to his own little inheritance, make him an independent man,—and now that dream was over. The next feeling was one of bitter anger and hatred to all concerned. He recollected his dislike to Mr Cosgrove, on first seeing him. He remembered the continual drudgery of his life under M'Duff. How differently he had been treated by kind old Mr Gray and his friend Fitzgerald! He would not stay another hour under the roof of the men he hated. He felt inclined to throttle the first of them who came in his way. And he consigned to the depths of eternal punishment Cosgrove, and M'Duff, and the hopeful Ralf, and Ru—— No, not Ruth,—he could not include her. His fierce emotion softened as he thought of her: she was virtually alone like himself; she had none of the cheat's blood in her veins: and then his father's image rose up before him; and the thought of how he had striven to secure the boy's future welfare, and that he should have died, trusting to the assurances of a wolf in sheep's clothing, nearly choked him. A fierce burst of tears relieved his pent heart; and he calmed

down, wondering at the violent sobs which shook his frame and the bed he rested on.

He was resolved now—that very morning, as soon as light should come—he would go over and ask Fitzgerald's advice; but whether he advised it or not, he would stay no longer on the Cambaranga run. Sooner would he travel his sheep from one station to another than be under any obligation to his robbers.

Accordingly, avoiding M'Duff, who, to tell the truth, was not very desirous of meeting him, the lad saddled a colt, which he had bought some time before, and rode to Ungahrun, getting there about luńch-time

Fitzgerald was not in when he arrived; and he had time to cool down a little before his host came home, which he did about sundown.

"Holloa! West, my boy! awfully glad to see you! I've been looking for a visit this good while; but I suppose lamb—— But I say, old fellow," he broke in, concernedly, as he noticed John's twitching features, "what's the matter? eh? anything wrong?"

John stammered out some unintelligible, broken, excited words about M'Duff, old ewes, and Cosgrove. Fitzgerald perceived that something must have been radically wrong to disturb the lad's generally quiet spirit in this fashion; but he could not as yet understand what it was all about. So bringing out some brandy, he made John swallow a large glassful, and

then, sitting down beside him, he gradually mastered the details of the affair.

"Just like that fellow Cosgrove. Couldn't have expected anything better from him. As for old M'Duff, he is a tool—a willing tool—and will be used by Cosgrove until he has grown useless, when he will have to pass under the harrow himself. I feared something of this sort before; but having heard that Cosgrove was your guardian, I was inclined to think that he would be manly enough to act fairly by you."

The honest young squatter sympathised deeply with John, more especially as he knew himself how much interest the latter had taken in his employer's service. They talked over the affair that night, and it ended by Fitzgerald's inviting John to bring his sheep over to Ungahrun until they finally made up their minds what to do in the matter.

Gladly did our friend accept the kind offer; and a week afterwards he arrived at Ungahrun with his four-footed property, like a patriarch on a small scale.

Old Mr Gray, whose judgment on matters relating to sheep was very sound, rode over, at Fitzgerald's request, and on examining the little mob, gave his opinion that they were "culls"—that is, sheep drafted out of other flocks for some fault, or on account of age. They were not a very bad lot, which he put down to the fact that the worst of them had died; and lastly,

he thought they might, in the present state of the market, bring five shillings per head, and considered that it would be advisable for John to part with them after shearing, offering him, at the same time, the use of his wool-shed for the purpose.

This view of matters having been also adopted by Fitzgerald, our hero succeeded in getting his old crawlers stripped of their coats, about a couple of months afterwards, by Mr Gray's shearers, in the Betyammo shed, and eventually had the pleasure of parting with them to a buyer who, having sold his station at a high price per head for the sheep on it, was on the look-out for stock at a low figure to increase the purchase-money.

A letter which West wrote to Mr Cosgrove, prompted by Mr Gray, merely drew forth a reply to the effect that all business matters were in the hands of Mr M'Duff, who had been commissioned by him to invest John's capital. This both Mr Gray and Fitzgerald translated into watching the means by which he might, at the most favourable opportunity, appropriate it to the station use. Young West was now offered a home by both of his kind friends; but he decided upon choosing to stay at Ungahrun, having taken a great liking to its open-hearted young master.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAND-FEVER—RALF COSGROVE RETURNS TO THE COLONY.

THE next three years of John West's life passed with a rapidity unequalled in his former experience. Trusted and esteemed by his friend Fitzgerald, he set his mind to work on the one great object of making himself useful to his employer, and of fitting himself to play his part in life; and so thoroughly did he succeed, that he soon learnt to manage the station as well as the young squatter himself. He speedily became a good judge of stock, and an excellent bush-rider, if not a first-class rough-rider—for there were few horses he dared not back with a fair chance of remaining in the saddle.

Emigration had in these years immensely increased the population of the colony; and the eager desire to become landowners on the part of all who had saved enough to take advantage of the very liberal terms which the land laws of the country offered, had caused most of the squatters to exercise their pre-emptive

privileges largely, and Fitzgerald found himself obliged to sink all his available capital in the purchase of those lands which were his pride and boast, and of which hitherto he had only been a lease-holder. The same reason, and the higher price which wool had maintained so long, caused the eyes of the Queensland squatters, and of those of the still more crowded-out southern colonies, to turn to the great unexplored and unoccupied lands of the far west and north, and exploring parties were being constantly organised and sent out.

Among the explorers none had done better than our old friend Stone. His push and reckless cheery nature, joined to an unusual development of the organ of locality, fitted him especially for the work of a pioneer. It was fortunate for him also that his exploring fell in the comparatively early days of the land-fever. Under the Crown Land Regulations which then existed, it was possible for any one riding over land which had never before been occupied, to obtain a lease of it from the Government on giving a rough description of the boundaries, and paying a trifling rent. This lease was sufficient to secure the tract of land, no matter its extent, against the intrusion and claims of all others; and explorers having taken up much country in this manner, found the sale of some of it to stock-owners in search of "pastures new" a most profitable business.

Stone had been down staying at Betyammo once in the course of the last three years, and during his visit, which lasted several months, had managed to secure the affection of pretty lively Bessie, among other pieces of good fortune. He had again gone out on an expedition towards a river, on whose banks he was under the belief that magnificent country was to be met with, and he intended securing some of it for himself and his future father-in-law, if possible.

John would sometimes ride over with Fitzgerald to Betyammo for a day's amusement, or to spend Christmas; but the other was so much engaged with difficulties about land and his business generally, that his recreation time was limited. Occasionally John would chaff his friend quietly about his feelings towards Phœbe; but it was plain that, much as he liked her and the rest of the Betyammo party, he had never thought seriously of her as a wife. He had clearly never looked down into the depths of that transparent and pure nature, nor had he the slightest idea that Phœbe regarded him in any other light than that of an old friend,—almost, indeed, a brother,—for, despite his many advantages of person and station, Willie Fitzgerald was not a vain man. Meantime the Cambaranga station had received a temporary addition to its staff.

This was Ralf Cosgrove, the scapegrace son of

John's unprincipled guardian, who had at last been sent out by his father to the colony, but who spent more of his time in the congenial atmosphere of fast life in Sydney than in looking after business on the Cambaranga run. Although still little more than a lad, he had been initiated in England into the ways of "flash" society. He had felt it indeed an honour to be on familiar terms with some of those celebrated individuals whose evil fame rested upon an ability to maintain a balance, with one foot on either side the line which divides the square from the cross sections of humanity. He felt pride in clapping the shoulder of Jack Pelham (who was credited with having several times "got at" horses before the race they were entered for came off) and taking a drink with him; and he was on the best of terms with Captain Poole, the notorious billiard-player, whose success had estranged all his old companions.

He gratified his father by picking up a betting intimacy with Lord De-la-Turf and the Hon. Mr Ringbone, the latter of whom speedily managed to ease him of £1000 at one fell swoop, which his father, with many conflicting feelings of anger and pride, paid, and for some months afterwards walked about with the stump of the cheque in his pocket, as a proof of the pluck his boy had exhibited in gambling with a real nobleman.

It was not long, however, before claims of a similar sort showered in on all sides—for Ralf, taking a one-sided view of the case, looked upon all gains as being exclusively his own, while his debts were as entirely his father's.

The scamp who had been his father's stable-boy, and whom John West had once soundly thrashed, was his most favoured companion. Mr William Cane had long ago discarded his earlier profession as being unworthy of his genius, and had adopted the more congenial one of living on what he could pick up in general, and from Ralf in particular, who was cajoled and sneered at, bullied, and coaxed or flattered, as best suited the purposes of the leader under whose guidance his career in vice had been fostered and furthered. In outward appearance there was much dissimilarity between the two. Ralf, about two or three years the younger, was of the middle size, slight in figure, with sharp features, and a long, prominent chin; his forehead was low, and he wore his straight black hair long. Cane, on the other hand, was stout and broad, rather short, with a thick bullet-neck, a remarkably heavy, lowering expression of countenance, and a square, thick jaw. His manners had acquired a certain amount of flash polish from contact with his betters, but his vulgarity and brutality of speech and mind clung to him like a garment.

As may be imagined, the elder Cosgrove found that this drain on his purse was by no means desirable. In vain, however, he stormed and swore,—the calls became only the more urgent. Debts privately accumulated, to be found out when their magnitude no longer permitted concealment; and at last he decided upon sending his son back to Australia, hoping that station life and new duties would induce him to adopt a more sober style of living.

One of the chief objects which Mr Cosgrove had in view in shipping his son back to his native country was to break the various connections which the young man had formed. And he was so far successful. Even Mr William Cane, who was at that time much immersed in business (having two or three good lays on hand), suffered his patron and dupe to depart unheeded.

Arrived in Sydney, young Cosgrove at once plunged into the same sort of society as that from which he had emerged in the mother country; and he found the capital of New South Wales so much to his taste, that it was not until his money was spent, and further advances from Messrs Bond and Foreclose became necessary, that these gentlemen were able to persuade him of the propriety of paying a visit to his father's station.

At Cambaranga, Ralf did not increase his popularity. He avoided Fitzgerald and John, and sought congenial society in the little township of Yering, where he

managed to while away a few days in the company of Mr Dowlan, the sub-inspector of white police stationed there.

Dowlan was an Irishman, rather well set up in figure, but with a coarse vulgar face, and a snobbish, sneaking nature. He fawned on any one who was possessed of money or influence, and felt no more shame in turning his back on those to-day whom he had helped to drain dry yesterday, than he did in filling himself with drink at the expense of any one fool enough to pay for it. Even Ralf soon got sick of his fulsome toadying and constantly repeated yarns, and at last, on the plea of ill-health, once more took his departure for Sydney, where he entered upon a lengthened career of dissipation.

CHAPTER XX.

AN IMPUDENT INTRUDER.

Some six or eight months after this, on a hot afternoon, several horsemen, with a number of pack-horses, arrived at Cambaranga. They looked like gentlemen, and as Mr M'Duff and Graham were from home, the woman in charge of the cooking department went out to meet the new-comers, and ask them inside. By their dress and inexperienced ways they seemed late arrivals in the colony, and a good deal of fuss and bustle was the immediate result of their unsaddling and unpacking.

People living in the bush get quickly into the habit of forming a very correct idea of the breeding and social status of those applying for hospitality, from outward appearance and manner; and the kitchen-woman soon settled in her own mind that one at least of the strangers did not come up to the mark. His habiliments, &c., were the same as the others', though perhaps a trifle more *outré;* still she was accustomed

to such variety of style, that her attention was more attracted by his contemptuous, overbearing manner. He had remained sitting on his horse, and on seeing her approach, struck an attitude meant to convey an idea of much dignified authority, and asked—

"Hi say, mistress, his M'Duff hin?"

"No, sir," replied the woman, resenting a little the familiar address, "Mr M'Duff is not at home. Who shall I say has called?"

"Never you mind, hold girl; 'ere, take hoff my saddle" (alighting).

"Me take off your saddle!" said the woman, feeling her dignity much hurt. "No, sir; ladies doesn't do sich things in this yer country."

"—— your —— pride! Tell the groom to come hand hunsaddle my 'oss," he continued, marching coolly past her into the house, whence he issued shortly afterwards, and invited the rest of the party to walk in and make themselves at home.

The "haughty stranger" was our former acquaintance, Mr William Cane, who, having been engaged in professional business—which, while it filled his pockets considerably, at the same time imperatively demanded that he should, for a season at least, relieve the mother country of his valuable presence—had turned his attention towards the home of his friend and pupil.

On board ship he had given out that he was the

part-owner of a considerable station in the bush,—and the scraps of information which he had picked up from Ralf, and his knowledge of horse-flesh, materially assisted in the lie.

Some of the greenest youths, on their way out to the land of promise, admired and courted this knowing man of the world, and paid for their admiration accordingly—for Mr Cane understood tricks of cards and dice, as well as other descriptions of gambling. He had heard nothing of Ralf since parting with him, but determined to go to Cambaranga on the chance of finding him there, or, at any rate, of getting reliable information as to his whereabouts.

A short stay in Brisbane impressed him with the dignity and importance of the larger squatters. He found that Mr Cosgrove was a considerable personage in the colony, and accordingly his own influence over Ralf induced him to take quite an authoritative interest in the Cambaranga station. There was only a superintendent there, while he was the intimate friend and tutor of the heir. He had some intentions of managing the place himself. He might perhaps, for convenience' sake, retain the old manager as overseer, but that would depend on circumstances. Such was the general purport and tone of his meditations and conversation to all who would listen. It afforded amusement to those who knew the true state of things; but

the boundless arrogance of the man deceived himself as well as some admiring greenhorns. On the whole, he made a considerable sensation, and at last started up country, in company of a few young friends who were *en route* for their various destinations, and who were invited by him to "spell" a few days at Cambaranga. Mixing worldly shrewdness with the most consummate ignorance, blending the grossest vulgarity with a certain experience of manner, something of a coward, yet not without a kind of bull-dog pluck and ferocity, he was by turns admired, laughed at, and feared; but on the whole, as a man of influence in the country, his fellow-travellers regarded him with deference.

No one appearing to unsaddle his horse but an old black gin, who had not as yet mastered the art of undoing a buckle, Mr Cane was forced to do the degrading work of taking off his horse's accoutrements himself, relieving his feelings by swearing volubly at the ancient black female, who kept begging "toombacco" in the most pertinacious manner.

Re-entering the house, and ringing the bell, he demanded that dinner should be prepared; and as the servant banged out of the door, by no means pleased with the liberties taken by the stranger, he called after her—

"Hi say, you, what's yer name? Mother Igh-anmighty, 'oose 'ouse is that one hover there?"

"If 'ee speaks civil, sir, I'll answer 'ee; but I ain't agoin' to put up with imperence from 'ee or any other pusson, I ain't, and so I just tell 'ee," replied the woman, indignant at being "called out of her proper name."

"Well, don't go hand get yer back hup hover it. Hi'll 'ave a look myself. Hi'm at 'ome 'ere, you know," —and so saying, he marched over to the large house and entered M'Duff's room.

"Ah! 'ere we har', what's this? Hold boy's papers, rubbish; my eye, what a lot of hold 'ats hand 'elmets! I think a 'elmet just suits me" (trying one on and looking at himself in the glass). He then amused himself by tumbling the various simple toilet articles over, snapping the Colt's revolver which lay on the table, and suddenly observing a bath, decided upon indulging in that luxury, which the state of his cuticle rendered highly necessary. With his usual free-and-easy habits, he helped himself to two or three different towels, leaving them lying on the floor when done with, and also coolly exchanged his own tarnished socks for a fresh pair, the soiled articles keeping the used towels company. He next proceeded on a search for liquor, and in one of the toilet drawers came upon a key which opened a small closet in the room containing M'Duff's private store—for, as may be imagined, Mr Cosgrove was not the man to supply any luxuries

free of charge to those employed by him. While engaged in this manner, the kitchen-woman came over to see what he was about, and she could hardly believe her eyes when she met the stranger carrying out some bottles from the sacred store—for M'Duff was a perfect autocrat on the place, and his room forbidden to all.

"Doan't 'ee take they bottles, sir," she cried; "they be Mr M'Duff's; he woan't like 'ee touching 'em."

"Now mother Igh-an-mighty, clear out o' this, or maybe you'll get the sack, and M'Duff too. Hi'm agoin' to be master 'ere. Hi'm Mr Cosgrove's friend."

The astonished woman, not being able to do otherwise, therefore allowed the audacious stranger to pass, and he was soon the centre of a thoughtless and boisterous circle.

Just before dark M'Duff rode up. The travellers were gathered in a group outside, and his authoritative manner at once intimated who he was, and even Cane felt a little awe of him. Bronzed, weatherbeaten, and "bearded like the pard," he dismounted from a very noble-looking steed, which he commenced unsaddling, after bidding a cheerful good evening in his gruff voice to the strangers,—for he rather liked the prospect of hearing the news of what was going on down below. Advancing with as dignified an air as

he could assume, Mr Cane opened conversation with a remark about the horse,

"Hi say, mister, that's a right 'un. 'As 'e hever *done* hanything?"

Now M'Duff knew quite well that the question referred to his horse's performances on the turf; but taking in the appearance, and measuring the experience of the group at a glance, he pretended innocence, and replied simply, "Oh yes."

"Ah! wot 'ave 'e done?"

"He has carried me for the last ten years," answered the bushman, chuckling, as he bore his saddle past into the harness-room, and then made for his own apartment. Amazed at its condition, he called the female attendant, who volubly described what had happened. Keeping his temper, although much enraged, M'Duff was about returning to his guests, when he once more was accosted by his cool visitor.

"Hi say, mister, perhaps you don't know 'oo hi ham?"

M'Duff now had a shrewd guess, for in several letters the elder Cosgrove had warned him to keep a look-out for his son's acquaintances. Nevertheless, he shook his head, not trusting himself to speak.

"Hi thought has much. Well, hi ham a most peticklar and very hintimate friend of your master's, hand hi hexpex you to show me hevery hattention."

The grim Super's choler was only kept down at this stage by the bitterness of the surprise with which he meditated overwhelming the self-sufficient snob.

"Oh, indeed, sir; I beg your pardon. You have not given me the honour of your name."

"My name his Cane—Mister Cane."

"Very good, Mister Cane, we'll attend to you," said the Boss, walking over to the bachelor's quarters, followed by the "peticklar friend."

Graham shortly afterwards came in, and was surprised at the comedy which was being enacted before him. A coarse, vulgar-looking, youthful stranger was doing host, entertaining his audience with stories of his intimacy with celebrities of doubtful reputation, and patronising M'Duff, who seemed determined to allow things to take their course.

This strange farce was carried on until bedtime, when M'Duff, whose fierce rage had nearly choked him, got up and proposed to retire. All rose to prepare, with the exception of Cane, who, pouring out another glass of spirits, asked—

"Where ham hi to be disposed?"

"Come here," said M'Duff, gently, and leading him to the door before the company, he pointed to the bright moon and the dusky bush. "There," he said —"there is your candle, and that is your bed."

"What do you mean?" asked the surprised youth.

"I mean this," said M'Duff in determined tones, "that you don't sleep under this roof, and that you had better never show yourself here again, if you don't want to be arrested on a charge of housebreaking."

A scene now ensued, Cane furiously indignant, cursing and swearing, protesting his influence, and at last offering to fight everybody. Every one, however, supported grim old M'Duff, who adhered to his policy of the moon and bush.

"Hi can't sleep there," expostulated at length the mortified and humbled boaster.

"Then you may go to the blacks' camp, where you will find society to suit you," growled out the ruffled "old man," as he assisted Mr Cane outside.

Whether he passed the night there, or caught his horse and rode away, none of them learnt; but next morning no traces of him were to be found, and considerable amusement resulted from a comparison of his speeches and the real state of the case. Cane found his way down to Sydney, where he was not long in discovering his friend among the associates they both delighted in, and soon the old influence reasserted itself stronger than ever.

Mr Cosgrove, senior, still remained at home. His crafty counsels, together with M'Duff's vigorous management, and a favourable state of the wool market, contributed to keep his affairs in a prosperous state.

He had got into a kind of society which he enjoyed —money-making sporting-men, among whom the possession of money and worldly experience gave him a position.

He had never married again. He did not care for domestic life, and his step-daughter Ruth saw but little of him. Nevertheless he was fond of her in a way, and always left some means at her disposal. Perhaps it was the memory of her gentle mother; perhaps the cold, unscrupulous man sometimes felt a sting of remorse when he remembered the bitter agony of that passing spirit leaving behind her the unprotected little one. Whatever it was, he never was unkind to his step-daughter, who would willingly have loved him in return had he given her the opportunity. She had grown exceedingly pretty, and promised a further development of loveliness; but her chief charm lay in her gentle composed manner. Early thought and suffering had much to do in bringing out the better part of her self-reliant nature, and the lady under whose tuition she was placed had skilfully trained that which she found so ready to bend to her will. She had few companions, and the greater part of her time was occupied with work and reading.

It was a great relief when her step-brother Ralf took his departure for Australia. His irregularities and coarse ways distressed her, and the scenes between him

and his father often rendered the house unpleasant. Her thoughts often reverted to the happy hours she had passed with John, but she had never heard anything about him since he left, except through Mr Cosgrove, who had mentioned his safe arrival at the station, and his having heard once or twice from him. After a time he replied to her inquiries rather gruffly, that John had behaved very ungratefully, and had taken his departure from the station. Since then his whereabouts had been hid from her, and she feared to ask her step-father further; but the memory of John's gentle brotherly attention and manly kindness were among her most cherished recollections. She much wondered that he had never written to her. She would have done so herself, but she feared he would think her forward. Yet she was not without hopes of seeing him again; for often when he received reports of his son's unsteadiness, Mr Cosgrove would threaten a return to Australia.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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