

THE
BUSH RANGER

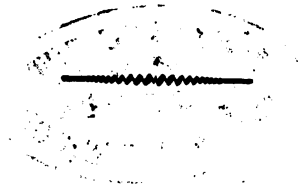
OF

VAN DIEMEN'S LAND.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

It is well known to those who have the opportunity of observing the actual condition and the opinions of various classes of society in England, that a dangerous notion is prevalent, among those especially where a misconception of the truth is most mischievous, that a transportation to the penal colonies is not, as the law intends, a punishment, but rather a change of country to be desired, from the opportunity which it is supposed to afford for the rapid acquisition of large fortunes in many ways ; and for the sake of the licentious liberty of action which the wild wilderness holds forth the promise of, and which, to restless minds, presents so fascinating an attraction.

The publication, therefore, of the following narrative, taken from the oral communication of the facts by the party principally concerned in the adventures to which they relate, may perhaps be useful, at the present time, in counteracting the pernicious tendency of the false ideas which prevail in respect to the penal arrangements of the Australian settlements ; and the circulation of the history, inculcating the certain punishment and remorse which follow crime, may assist in repressing that morbid craving after notoriety, which of late years has increased with such lamentable rapidity. With respect to the curious psychological phenomena developed by the peculiar condition of solitude to which the modern Cain, of which this history treats, was exposed, they cannot fail to interest deeply all those who think that

"The noblest study of mankind is Man."

BUSHRANGER OF VAN DIEMEN'S LAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARRIVAL.

It was on a fine spring morning in the month of September that a vessel was seen to thread her way through D'Entrecasteaux channel, at the mouth of the river Derwent, on the southern side of Van Diemen's Land. The sky was clear and bright, its usual aspect in the early spring in those salubrious regions, and there was scarcely wind sufficient to fill the sails, so that the vessel was able to do little more than make headway against the tide, tantalizing those on board with the sight of the land on either side, while the vessel remained provokingly stationary mid-stream.

The passengers in the vessel, which was a small brig of not more than a hundred and twenty tons' burthen, were a gentleman, with his two daughters. Major Horton had resolved to mend his broken fortunes in a new world, where there was verge and scope enough for enterprise and exertion. It was the hardihood, perhaps, of his previous career as a military man, that had prompted him to dare in his humble bark, with a scanty crew, the dangers of the seas for a distance comprehending the half of the globe, and to approach fearlessly the coasts of a new country, of the points of which no seaman on board possessed any previous knowledge. His daughters were young girls of remarkable beauty, and with all the delicacy of appearance which, it might be supposed, would be impressed on them from a former life of ease and elegance, and from the habit of frequenting the high society in which they were born to move. They both partook of their father's adventurous spirit and of his courage, though their outward exhibition of those soldierly qualities was modified by their respective dispositions.

Helen, the elder of the two, was tall and slight; strikingly handsome; of a mind bold and prompt to execute her resolves; full of ardor and enterprise; a fit heroine for a romance; fearless of danger, and confident in her own resources. Louisa, on the contrary, was mild and retiring; possessing almost the ideal perfection of that amiable softness of woman which poets love to fancy, and lovers fondly doat upon with affection the most abiding. Being only in her sixteenth year, and two years younger than her sister, the gentle Louisa had learned to look up to the more energetic Helen for advice and assistance on all matters relating to the difficulties to which their present course exposed them; and the love which the high-spirited Helen bore to the affectionate girl was

increased by the feeling of the protection which her more masculine mind afforded to her less intrepid sister.

The only other passenger on board was a personage of a very different grade; and how he had come among them, and with what imaginable object he had set forth to brave an adventurous life in the Australian colonies, had more than once puzzled himself, as well as those with whom he had become accidentally associated. This aspiring emigrant rejoiced in the name of Silliman, which singularly accorded with the character of the man, so that the name of Jeremiah Silliman seemed to have become attached to the individual by some mysterious process of elective attraction, exhibiting in his person an illustration of the harmonious principle of nature which ever strives to amalgamate together things congenial.

This young gentleman had first seen the light, or rather the smoke, in Ironmonger Lane in the city; which fortunate circumstance, as he was sometimes inclined to boast, conferred on him by birth, the rank and dignity of a citizen of London, invested with various privileges and immunities, and with the inchoate right of exercising the regal away over that *imperium in imperio*; all of which advantages, however, he had sacrificed in his insatiable thirst of romantic adventures. Having already made frequent dangerous voyages to Putney, Richmond, and Gravesend, and on one occasion as far as Margate, he considered himself a finished sailor; and when he first appeared in a blue jacket and white trowsers, and with an exceedingly diminutive round straw hat aboard the *Nautilus* before she set sail from the port of London, he quite imposed on the unsophisticated natures of the young ladies, who flattered themselves that they had the advantage of being accompanied by an accomplished mariner whose skill and daring would form a valuable addition to the small crew which had been engaged to navigate the vessel.

It was true that the mate regarded him with an extraordinary and significant grimace when he appeared on deck at Gravesend in his sailor's rig; but it was not until the vessel had reached the Downs that the false pretensions of the cockney were made manifest by his most urgent vociferations for the "steward." This little imperfection was overlooked, however, during the voyage, as he had immediately fallen in love with both the sisters, and as his services were found convenient by the ladies, in performing many little offices, which he did with invariable good-nature, and with an intelligence, as Helen remarked to her sister, of a lap-dog who had been taught to fetch and carry.

The major, who had in his youth been a member of the yacht club, considered himself quite competent to take the general charge of the vessel of which he was the owner, and over which he presided as captain, trusting to the mate, an excellent seaman, for the management of the vessel and for assistance in its navigation. One boy for steward, and another as "the" boy, whose prescribed duty was to be perpetually in motion, with an immense swab in his arms to sop up the water which the little vessel was continually taking in, from the proximity of its deck to the surface of the water, and nine sailors, one of whom acted as the carpenter, formed the whole of the crew; but thus slenderly equipped, the good little ship had arrived in safety, over fifteen thousand miles of the ocean, at the entrance of the channel which led to the promised land.

There was just sufficient wind to fill the sails and enable the vessel to stem the rapid current of the channel. The mate examined the chart; scrutinized the shore; heaved the lead; sounded the bottom; looked over the side, and took a sight at an object on land, to ascertain if they made any the least progress. But the vessel seemed riveted to the spot, and presented the appearance of active motion without making the slightest advance.

"We shall have to anchor at last," said he to the major, who, with his daughters and the assiduous Mr. Silliman, were assembled on the deck, surveying the new country of their adoption with eager interest; "there is seldom much wind, Horsman says, in this season in these parts—except when it comes in squalls and gales—and what there is seems to be dying away. We had better hold our ground, and wait for the turn of the tide."

"We do hold our ground for the present," observed the major; "how far are we from the shore to the left here?"

"Larboard;—why, I should say about couple of miles, not more."

"It is my opinion," said Mr. Silliman, who, on nautical matters, considered himself an authority, in virtue of his sailor's jacket and trousers, and supported in his assumptions by his little round hat, which had grown excessively tarry during the voyage; "it is my opinion that we had better send the boat on shore and examine the country; we may, perhaps, make some discoveries, or meet with some of the natives, or something. How I wish I could see a kangaroo!"

"I can see smoke," said Helen, who was looking through the ship's glass, obsequiously held by Mr. Silliman, "just under that low hill yonder."

"Some of the natives, perhaps," said her father; "there are no settlers, I understand, so low down as this. I see;—I can see a curl of smoke quite plainly; but now it grows less; and now I can see no more of it. It seems to have been extinguished suddenly."

"We are making lee-way now," said the mate, "that's certain; the wind has quite gone down, and the sails stick to the masts. Shall we let go the anchor?"

"You know best, Mr. Northland; it is very annoying not to be able to get up before dark; but I suppose there's no danger in these parts;

we are quite out of the way of pirates; and the natives don't know the use of boats, the books say."

"Pirates and natives! major; no fear of them; I wish there was nothing else to fear in this channel; you see it is very intricate, full of shoals and headlands: and if it was to come on to blow, it might be an awkward matter, weakly manned as we are."

Presently the grating of the cable against the davits informed all on board of the resolution that had been formed, and in a brief space the little vessel lay quietly at anchor in the stream.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLOT.

THE detention of the vessel, which gave rise to so much mortification on board, excited very different feelings in the minds of a party, who were watching their proceedings from the land.

This party consisted of seven men, of whom six were clothed in the government dress of convicts' suits of yellow; but the seventh appeared in the ordinary garb of a gentleman, or rather of a merchant or storekeeper; for there were too few idle gentlemen in those times, to allow of the latter distinctive appellation. They sat round the remains of a fire which had been hastily kindled, and as hastily extinguished, as if in fear that the smoke from the burning wood might betray their resting-place. The cause of their appearance in a spot so remote from the dwellings of the colonists, may be best collected from the following conversation:—

"I wish we had some grub," said one of the yellow jackets; "it's poor fun being in the bush without anything to eat; suppose we go aboard that brig and ask for some provisions? we can say we are shipwrecked seamen."

"And get grabbed and strung up," interposed another; "as if they would be taken in with that gammon! Haven't we got our canary-bird feathers on us, and won't that let 'em know what we are?"

"Curse on this livery!" said a third; "it doesn't give a man a chance. If one does give the overseer the slip, these confounded rags, that brand a man wherever he goes, betray us. I wish I could go about like a native, without clothes. By-the-by, they say there are lots of natives down this way. What shall we do if we fall in with them? We have not so much as a pistol among us."

"We must use our clubs; one white man is enough for half a dozen natives, any time."

"But their spears, man! Why, they will riddle you through in no time! What can you do against long shots? And then, as to trying to come to close quarters, why, you might as well look for a needle in a hay-stack, as hunt for a native in the bush."

"You can't tell the devils from the black stumps of the trees; but, for my part, I don't see what we are to do, now that we have got off, without arms, and without provisions—"

"But we have a boat," said a strong deep voice, which had not hitherto joined in the conversation.

"And what's the use of that? What's the

use of a boat like that to go to sea in! We can't get back to England in a boat. I begin to think we have not got much by our venture."

"We have liberty," said the same voice which had checked the complainings of the men; "we have liberty; that's worth all!"

"But what can we do with our liberty, Mark! We can't live on gum and opossums like the natives! And we can't eat the natives, neither; though they say they eat the white people when they can catch 'em; and that's not such a pleasant thing to look forward to.—I say, Mark, what's to be the next move? As you're our captain, it is for you to give us a lift out of the mess you have brought us into; and we want it bad enough; for my very inside seems stuck together with that lot of gum that I tucked in just now."

"I've heard say," said one of the party, "that the grubs of the blue gum-tree are very good eating. I know the natives eat 'em. They take them up by one end, and let them fall down their throat, as we do oysters. A nice dinner for a gentleman—gum and caterpillars! But I can't stand this! we must do something. I say, Mark, what's to be done?"

The man thus addressed said nothing, but pointed to the little brig riding quietly at anchor in the channel.

"Ah, yes; I see that craft plain enough; but what's the use of it to us, unless they would give us something to eat, and, better than that, something to drink?"

"Suppose we asked them?" said their leader.

"Ah! and get some handcuffs for answer."

"Suppose we entreated them to give us food?"

"And suppose they wouldn't?"

"Suppose we took it?" quietly replied their leader.

"Eh!" said several voices at once; "suppose we took it! why, you don't mean by force?"

"Why not?"

"Why! what could seven unarmed men do against an armed vessel?"

"Nothing," said their leader, "by open force; but, when force cannot be used, we can use stratagem."

"I tell you what, Mark, you are a clever chap, no doubt of that; and you have a tongue that would almost carry a jailer out of his keys—that's the truth—or you never would have talked us over to make our escape without arms or provisions. But if you will show us how to get some rum out of that vessel yonder, you will deserve to be captain of the island."

"I will do more than that."

"More!" cried out all, excited by their leader's air of calm and fixed determination.

"I will get possession of that vessel," said the leader, in a firm and resolute voice; "and in that vessel we will make our escape from this accursed place of shame and punishment."

"Well, that beats all! And how will you get possession of that tight little brig, captain! Talk 'em over, and persuade them to make us a present of it?"

"May be so; and if you are the man that I take you to be, and have coolness and courage, and will follow my directions implicitly, I will show you how to set about it."

"What, without arms?"

"Yes, without arms."

"And without fighting?"

"Perhaps."

"Mark, you're a regular trump! Don't let us lose any time. Depend upon it, that craft is as full of rum as an opossum of peppermint leaves; settlers always think it the best investment they can bring out to pay their men with. Now, captain, what are we to do?"

"You see," said the man who, by the common consent of his companions, and by the force of his superior intellect, had been unanimously raised to the had eminence of their leader, "that the brig is now lying at anchor, becalmed, with the tide against her, and with little chance of wind till the sea-breeze sets in, in the afternoon. She will not venture to float up with the tide in this dangerous channel; so that she will be there, safe, for some hours. Now, she would, no doubt, be glad of a pilot, and I dare say is now looking out for one."

"What's the use of that to us?"

"This use: I will be the pilot. Two of you shall go with me—only two, to avoid suspicion; those two will pass for my government men; that will account for their yellow dress. Fortunately, you see, my own dress may serve for a pilot's; and in this way I will get on board the vessel and look about me."

"And what's to become of us who remain behind?"

"We shall return for you, on the pretence that more hands are wanted to work the vessel. My first visit will have disarmed suspicion of our real object. Besides, I can say that the governor has established a settlement on the other side of the hill, where the look-out is towards the sea, for the purpose of lending assistance to strange vessels; and—in short—leave the rest to me."

The band of desperadoes looked inquiringly at one another; each man tried to read in his fellow's countenance his secret thoughts; for on such occasions distrust, and suspicion, and jealousy, soon sow the seeds of disunion among them. Every man is in fear of the treachery of his neighbor; and, being conscious of his own individual selfishness and knavery, he naturally suspects their existence in others.

"Who are to be the two to go first?" asked one of them, with a doubtful air.

"You may cast lots for that," said their leader; "but they must be careful to act up to their characters, because it is likely I shall have occasion to call them thieves and rascals, and perhaps worse. You will not mind that, I hope?"

"Not a bit; we're used to it: besides, hard words break no bones. But it's a bold scheme, Mark; if they suspect you, you're done."

"It is our only chance," replied Mark; "and fortunate it is for us that luck has thrown this opportunity in our way. Did I not tell you that brave men are sure to succeed when they stand by one another?"

"Hurrah!" cried the men, their courage and expectations raised by the animating words of their leader. "We will stand by one another to the death! Now, captain, get on with the work. Here are six rushes; the two that draw the shortest go first; the rest remain."

The choice fell upon the grumbler of the party and another man who had not taken much part

in the conversation, and who was of a meek and quiet look.

"Now, Jemmy," said the former, "let us see which can make himself look most like a government man."

"I could not compare with you, Roger, no way," replied Jem; "your father and mother have given you such a gallows, hang-dog look, there would be no mistaking you in the best long-tail's togger that ever came out of store."

"Now," summoned Mark, "if you are ready, come along. And remember your characters."

"Ay, ay, your honor," said Jemmy, touching his hat with mock humility; "we will do the dodge as if we were convicts in earnest."

Roger laughed at this sally, and, the two worthies getting into the boat, Mark Brandon took his seat in the stern, and they left the shore.

In the mean time the party on board, when they caught sight of the boat on the smooth surface of the water proceeding heavily towards the brig, indulged in various speculations as to the character and intentions of their approaching visitors.

CHAPTER III.

FLATTERY.

It was still early in the forenoon when the boat containing Mark Brandon and his inferior confederates drew near to the motionless brig, on the deck of which the passengers and crew were assembled to view the first appearance of the occupiers of the new world. Their surmises on its appearance were as various as their characters.

"There are three of them," said the major; "what can be their object?"

"It's a sweet boat," said the mate; "it floats on the water like a duck! But those are lubberly fellows in the yellow jackets; they don't seem much used to handle an oar, to my thinking."

"Gracious! what an odd way to dress in!" remarked Louisa; "they must be very fond of yellow."

"It's the livery, most likely, of the servants of the gentleman who sits in the stern of the boat," remarked the cockney (he always said stern instead of stern, because he thought the broader sound more nautical). "Perhaps it is the governor coming to visit us?"

"It's a pilot, no doubt," said the mate; "though he is but a rum-looking one, I see, by his coat-flaps hanging over; but pilots' tails grow on this side of the earth. 'Well, perhaps he'll bring a wind with him. Stand by, there, and ship the hand-ropes.'"

By the aid of these conveniences the supposed pilot swung himself up on board, and, without betraying by a muscle of his countenance his apprehension of the daring risk which he was running, should it happen that any one on board was acquainted with the persons of the true officials, he touched his hat in a respectful manner to the major, who seemed the principal person on board, nodded to the mate, took off his hat to the ladies, to the eldest of whom he presented a sprig of wild geranium which he had plucked from a shrub on shore, and, having glanced at the sails and gear with

a professional look, he asked the usual question:—

"Where from?"

"London," replied the major.

"I suppose you're a pilot?" asked the mate.

The pilot nodded an affirmative.

"What sort of berth have we got here? bottom good?"

The pilot shook his head:—

"Ah! very well," he replied; "if it doesn't come on to blow; but this is a dangerous channel. All well on board?"

"All well," replied the major. "You see the whole of us," he added; "our craft is but a small one."

"You don't seem to be strong-handed," remarked the pilot, carelessly.

"Only nine men with the mate, and the steward, and the boy, making, with myself, thirteen—Oh! I forgot Mr. Silliman; he makes fourteen; and, with my two daughters, sixteen in all."

The pilot looked at Mr. Silliman with an expression that a close observer might have construed into an opinion, that he did not consider it of much importance whether that young gentleman was included in the number or not; but he examined the crew with more attention. It did not seem to him that there was much fight in them if it came to a struggle; but with the major, he saw in a moment, he had to deal with a man of determination and energy; and the mate, too, he thought, might prove an ugly customer. As for the rest, their air and appearance did not affect him with any particular uneasiness.

"What chance of a wind?" asked the mate, who, sailor-like, was always thinking of the wind or his sweetheart; "what chance of a wind? it's dull work sticking here."

"Do you want wind?" asked the pilot.

"Want wind!" exclaimed the mate, surprised at such an unprofessional observation; "why, what else does any one want aboard ship but wind?"—"The wind that blows, and the ship that goes—"

"And the lass that loves a sailor," chimed in the smiling Mr. Silliman, casting a sentimental look at both the sisters, which Louisa laughed at, but which Helen returned with a look of scorn that made the unfortunate cockney wish himself back within the sound of Bow Bells. The pilot observed the look, but gave no sign of noticing anything but the masts and sails of the vessel.

"I am afraid," he said, with a serious air, "that you will soon have more wind than you can make use of. Has any one on board been in this part of the world before?"

"Not one of us," said the major, who began to be uneasy at the threat of a gale of wind from such an authority as the pilot, and in the midst of a channel that was imperfectly known:—"Not a man on board has been in this country before, and we know nothing of the ways of the place."

So much the better, thought the pilot. "I am sorry for that," he said aloud; "however, the commandant will allow some of our men to lend you a hand, I dare say. There is no fear of the wind coming on before mid-day. First we shall have a dead calm, just as it is now;

and then there will come a burst from the Wellington Mountain that you see peering over those trees yonder, that will spin you round like a humming-top."

"Like a what?" said the mate . . .

"The land on the right hand side there."

"The right hand side!" exclaimed the mate, again astonished at the fashion of the sea-lingo in the new world.

"I mean to starboard, mate," said the supposed pilot, recollecting himself; "but you know, mate, when we speak to ladies, we ought not to make use of our nautical jargon. And I can tell you what, my friend, the man that brought this tiny craft half round the globe safe and sound, as you have done,—and in sailor-like trim, too,—I say that such a man is a credit to the service, and I have no doubt the governor will make a public proclamation of the feat, for the encouragement of all future navigators."

The honest mate, albeit that the language of the pilot was not of a description with which his rough ears had wont to be regaled among his hardy messmates of the sea, was hugely mollified by this well-timed compliment: and at once attributed the unseamanlike phraseology and bearing of the pilot to the transmogrifying qualities of the new country. The pilot then turned to the major:—

"You must have had great experience, sir, and great courage, too, to take on yourself the charge of so small a vessel to this distant place. It is the smallest craft, I think, since the time of Captain Cook, that has visited these seas."

The major was excessively pleased at this flattering eulogium from so experienced a person.

"And as to these young ladies, they do honor, sir, to their country. Sir, they will be regarded by all Australia as the heroines" (here Helen's eyes flashed, and Louisa shrunk back)—"as the heroines of the new world. But you are short-handed, sir, very—however, this gentleman was as good as an able seaman to you" (Jerry actually thrilled with delight to the very tips of his fingers, and he shook the pilot's hand cordially); "and you must have had a capital crew," he added, raising his voice, so as to be heard by those who were lingering within earshot to catch any information from the oracle of sailors in an unknown sea; "a capital crew, and every man of 'em a seaman—every inch of him, or you would never have succeeded in the exploit of bringing your vessel so far in safety, and with so few hands; every hand must have been worth two, that's certain."

The official commendation of the pilot was immediately carried forward, and it was received by the crew with no less satisfaction than it had been devoured by their superiors.

"And now," he continued, after having noted every particular of the vessel into which he could find an excuse for prying, and, after having extravagantly praised the juvenile steward for the admirable order in which he kept the cabins and their appurtenances, wondering how they could contrive to find room for their arms in so confined a space, and the boy having replied that they were all stowed away in the lockers, the pilot took his leave "to make interest with the commandant" to allow some of the best behaved men in the govern-

ment employ, and who could be trusted, to assist in securing the vessel from the coming storm. It was with great difficulty that he defended himself from the pressing offers of Mr. Silliman to accompany him, which he was enabled to parry only by judicious hints of the inconvenience which might arise to the vessel from the absence of so efficient a hand at the present time; but he gave the major reason to understand that as the commandant was stationed at an out-of-the-way place, to which it was difficult to convey supplies, a few bottles of brandy, &c., might be acceptable—a hint which was readily complied with. Thus provided, the pilot returned to the shore, and the parties on board hastened to pass their different opinions on his person and demeanor.

"A very well spoken man," observed the major; "quite a superior man, indeed, to what one would expect; but perhaps, like the rest of us, he may have been better off in the old country."

"He has a very fine countenance," said Helen; "but there was something in his look that did not quite satisfy me; he seemed to me to be playing a part; but for what purpose, I'm sure I cannot imagine."

"I thought him a very nice man for a pilot," remarked Louisa; "but this little sprig of geranium which he gave to us has no smell; what a deception, for a geranium to be without fragrance! A knavish Van Diemen's Land weed in the disguise of an honest flower."

"He was a very determined looking fellow, that," said the mate, after some reflection, his mind dwelling with considerable satisfaction on the praise which had been artfully instilled into the unsuspecting ears of the honest seaman; "though I can't say he looked much like a sailor; but I suppose they are not so particular in these parts; and it's not to be supposed that a thorough-bred seaman who could do better, would be dodging about here after a stray vessel now and then. It wouldn't be worth his while. He's not a bad chap, for all that."

"In my opinion," said Mr. Jeremiah Silliman, giving his little tarry hat a vigorous slap to set it firmer on his head, which he held considerably higher since the eulogistic observations on his nautical qualifications so judiciously administered by the stranger; "in my opinion that is the most sensible man I ever met with—the present company always excepted: he knows what a sailor is, that man. None of your shore-going, conceited fellows, but a perfect sailor. I knew it directly; I saw through him, though he did wear a long-tailed coat; but I dare say that was because he couldn't get a regular jacket—like mine."

In the mean while, the object of these self-satisfactory encomiums was making the best of his course to the shore, not disdaining to take an oar to make the better way, and in little more than half an hour he had rejoined his fellows.

"What news?" asked his famished confederates.

"Rum, biscuit, beef, and brandy."

"Hurrah! Mark for ever!"

The provisions were rapidly consumed with the avidity of hungry men; but as they were afraid of making a fire, lest the smoke should

betray their whereabouts, they divided the uncooked meat with the remains of the bread into equal portions, of which each man took his share, to provide against an emergency.

But of the "drink" their leader insisted on their being sparing for the present, as the prize was too valuable to risk the loss of it for the sake of temporary indulgence in liquor, which they could revel in on board in the event of their success. This argument prevailed against the strong desire to make the best use of their time in that respect; besides, they were aware of the difficulty of existing for any length of time in the bush, where they would be constantly exposed to danger from the natives on the one hand, and from the parties of soldiers and constables who would be sent in pursuit of them on the other; and that their only hope of ultimate escape from the death to which their flight into the bush condemned them was some such chance as the present. The much-longed-for spirits, therefore, were placed in the custody of their leader, and the men, sober and steady, after having been perfectly instructed in the parts they were to act, rowed in a vigorous and orderly manner to the devoted brig.

CHAPTER IV.

DANGER.

THE appearance of so many yellow jackets, some of them in a condition of considerable dilapidation, and their wearers, for the most part, of most villainous aspect, rather surprised the people on board; but the persuasive pilot lost no time in making the major and his officer understand that their condition was the result of their exposure to the hardships and labors incident to a new location in the bush; where it was necessary to cut out roads, build huts, and clear away timber, without regard to the devastations or habits of roughness which such employments produced in the habiliments or manners of the working portion of the projectors. The present men, he assured them, "had been carefully selected by the commandant from nearly a hundred and fifty government servants working on their probation, and that seeing the great peril to which the brig was likely to be exposed, he would not allow the men to change their clothes, but had sent them off as they were, thinking the safety of the vessel and the security of those on board (whose skill and courage, he said, had filled the commandant with admiration) of much more importance than the appearance of the party dispatched to assist them."

It would seem as if fortune favored the conspirators in this subtle plot; for at the moment of their coming on board, a gentle play of wind came down the channel, slightly rippling the surface of the water, thus justifying the cautionary forebodings of the supposed pilot; at the same time that a gathering of light clouds was seen on the lofty summit of Mount Wellington in the distance. The whole of the scanty crew were gathered together in a body, curious to look at the new-comers, so that their leader judged it would be too hazardous to attempt a surprise at a time when all the male protectors of the vessel were on deck,

and ready to defend themselves. He waited, therefore, for a more fitting occasion. The opportunity presently presented itself. The mate, after exchanging a word of approval with the major, without waiting for the authority of the pilot, went forward with the crew to weigh the anchor; for the tide was beginning to flow, and with wind enough to give the vessel steerage-way, it was desirable that not a moment should be lost in working the ship out of the dangerous channel in which they were confined.

The leader of the band at once seized the opportunity:

"Here, my lads," he cried out to his yellow-jackets, "take the capstan-bars in your hands, and work away cheerily; show the boys on board what you can do. These capstan-bars," he observed significantly, "would form good weapons in case of need."

His followers took the hint. They possessed themselves of the bars instantly, and looked to their leader. But Mark saw that it was not yet the time; the sailors were all on deck, as well as the major and the steward, who were in the stern of the vessel, and within reach of the hatchway of the cabin in the lockers of which the arms were deposited. Besides, it was an important object with them to get the vessel speedily under weigh, and to contrive to put out to sea, for he calculated that the authorities at Hobart Town would not be long in ascertaining their escape from the barracks; and the boat, which would soon be missed, would make them aware of the object of the absconders. With these thoughts, he urged his men to put their strength to the work, and in a few minutes the anchor was apeak, and the vessel under sail.

"We shall be able to beat up now," said the mate cheerfully, and rubbing his hands; "the wind is getting up, and soon we shall have a stiffish breeze if it holds on."

"We shall never be able to work up with the wind dead against us," said the pilot; revolving in his mind some expedient to get the vessel's head put the other way; "you have come in by the wrong passage; you ought to have gone round, and made your way up by Storm Bay."

"An ominous name," observed the major, "for an entrance into a new country!"

"You have plenty of sea-room there," said the pilot; "and if it does blow, you can keep off the land; but in these narrow channels, what with the juttings-out of land, and the shoals, and currents running in all sorts of directions where you least expect them, it is difficult to get through them with a fair wind—much less with a wind right in your teeth as this is."

"Perhaps it would save time to go back," said the major, "and make the other passage?"

"The tide would be against us," said the mate.

"But the wind is against you now," observed the pilot; "and that's worse, if it should come on to blow hard, and there's every appearance of it. You see Mount Wellington has put on his night-cap, and that's always a sign of a gale. But you are too good a seaman," he added to the mate, "not to know the advantage of having sea-room in a gale of wind. And it would be

a sad thing," he continued, turning to the major, "for this little vessel to be lost, after having come safely all the distance from the other side of the globe."

The major was struck with the apparent candor and justice of these observations, and looked at his officer inquiringly. But that clear-headed and plain-dealing son of the sea could not be made to understand that the nearest way to a port, was to sail away from it. He sturdily resisted the proposition.

"If the worst comes to the worst," he said, "we can let go the anchor again, and that will hold us on; even though it should blow great guns, which, upon my word, looks likely, for the breeze is freshening up every minute, and I don't like the look of those mares' tails to windward yonder."

"And how will you get your anchor to hold?" pursued the pilot. "It's all very well thereabouts," pointing towards the spot from which the vessel was flying at a rapid rate; "but this channel has scarcely any anchorage ground, as every one knows; why, most parts of it are paved with rocks as regular as the Strand in London! You would never get your anchor to bite—much less hold!"

"We might gain time, after all," said the major to the mate, "by trying the broader passage; this wind would soon take us out of this strait; and we should be at the same distance from Hobart Town as we are now, in a few hours, with a better chance of beating up. How long does the wind last in this quarter," he asked the pilot, "when it blows fresh?"

"Three days; always three days; it's as regular as a clock. Every inhabitant of the colony knows it; it's a sort of proverb among the towns-people to say, that a thing will last as long as a three days' spell from Mount Wellington."

"I think we had better take the pilot's advice," said the major; "he must know best."

"I can't gainsay that he ought to know best in these parts, which he understands the ways of, and I don't," replied the officer; "but I can never agree that the shortest way to a port is to go away from it; and as to this wind—why, it's nothing to what we have gone through before!" But at this moment, as if to belie the honest seaman's judgment, and to aid the iniquitous designs of the conspirators, a furious blast from the north called the attention of all on duty to the care of the vessel; and the pilot, profiting by the opportunity, immediately put her before the squall, with her head towards the entrance of the channel. The squall passed over as quickly as it came, but the pilot still continued his outward course, though not without the expression of considerable dissatisfaction on the part of the mate, whose suspicions of the ignorance of the pilot became strengthened by a course of proceeding so contrary to the worthy officer's experience in the practice of navigation. But as his employer, the owner of the vessel, was an assenting party, he submitted, though with a very ill grace, giving vent to his displeasure in a succession of grumbings, much resembling the sound of the north wind, which was roaring and increasing behind them.

Nor were the crew of the vessel better pleased with the proceedings of the Australian pilot,

who, they were not long in detecting, with that almost instinctive knowledge possessed by sailors of their brothers of the ocean, had very small pretensions to the name of a seaman. But as they were only humble subordinates on board, they had nothing to do but to obey, though the pilot saw by their looks that they were not in a humor to submit tamely to any overt aggression. He waited, therefore, patiently, till an opportunity should occur to put his plan in execution; for it was not until the crew were below, and his own men conveniently disposed about the hatchway of the passengers' cabin, that he could hope to get possession of the ship's arms, and be in a position to command success.

The retrograde course of the vessel, however, inspired a general gloom over all on board, except those interested in its execution, and who were anxiously waiting for the signal of their leader to adopt measures more open and decisive. The sisters felt a vague presentiment of evil arising from the disappointment of being obliged to recede from the long-desired haven of their hopes and fears, the encompassing hills of which were in tantalizing sight; nor could the major divest himself of a certain feeling of dissatisfaction with himself for having yielded to the authority of the pilot in opposition to the opinion of his officer.

But the storm, which rapidly increased, seemed to justify the pilot's apprehensions, and the major felt ashamed to suspect the judgment of a man who had so clearly warned him of its coming. The mate, also, was almost shaken in his opinion; but as the gale increased, he had no thoughts for anything but the safety of the ship, which, urged by the furious north wind, made her way rapidly back to the entrance of the channel, and stood out towards the open sea.

CHAPTER V.

THE PURSUIT.

IN the meantime the flight of the prisoners had not escaped the vigilance of the authorities at head-quarters; but it was not until the discovery of the abstraction of the boat, which had been left unguarded at the farther end of Sandy Bay, which lies to the right as you look from Hobart Town towards the sea, that the party made ready for the pursuit of the runaways could be put on the right scent.

Thus guided in their search, the pursuing party, consisting of two constables and a corporal's party of soldiers, embarked in a light boat made of the aromatic white pine, a wood of peculiar lightness, which is obtained chiefly by the labors of the convicts at Macquarie Harbor to the west of the island of Van Diemen, and which is admirably adapted, from its lightness, elasticity, and toughness, for the construction of whale-boats. They had four sailors from the government armed brig to use the oars, and the whole party was well armed, as well to guard against any attack on the part of the natives, as to be in an efficient state to contend with the bushrangers, should they have been able to supply themselves with arms. It seemed that their business was considered in no ordinary degree of a serious nature, as the wife of

one of the constables accompanied him to the jetty, where the party was to embark, where she took leave of him with much appearance of affection:—

"You will be making a widow of me, one of these days," said she, "if you go on these dangerous expeditions; and Mark Brandon is not a man to be taken alive without a scrimmage."

"Never fear," said her considerate helpmate; "there's plenty of husbands to be got in Van Diemen's Land; that's some comfort for all of you. I'll be bound before the end of the week you'll have another."

"A week! you brute! Do you think I don't know what's decent for a respectable woman to conform to? A year, you mean; that's the regular mourning; or, at the least, six months, as it's not a regular country, and only a colony. To be sure, Kitty Flurriman did marry again one month after her poor man met with his misfortune;—it was a shame to hang such a good-looking man as he was;—but to think that I would do such a thing at the end of a month, or even two months!"..... What definite time the lady might have fixed as the *ne plus ultra* term of widowhood, it is impossible to say, as the boat was now out of hearing. The conversation, however, on Mark Brandon was continued in the boat.

"Who is this Mark Brandon?" asked the corporal, who was a sub-officer in the "Buffs," a battalion of which had recently arrived in the colony.

"Don't you know Mark Brandon?" said the constable with some surprise; "why, he's as well known here as Dick Turpin in the old country. He is the most famous bushranger that ever went out. He was pardoned by the governor only last year, when he was cast for death; but you see," said the constable, winking his eye, "there was a lady in the case."

"Oh, ho! handsome fellow, eh?"

"As clean-made and good-looking a fellow as ever you set eyes on. Here's a description of him in this paper." The constable read from the list:—

"Mark Brandon, five feet eleven inches in height; broad-shouldered; waist slim; foot small; brown hair; blue eyes; fair complexion; his hands rather white and delicate." Then here's the description of the others: "Roger Grough, James Swindell—"

"Never mind them just now," said the corporal; "tell us about this Mark Brandon: what was he lagged for?"

"Smuggling;—at least so they say; but of course you can never get the truth of what they are sent out for from the prisoners; but I believe it's the truth in his case."

"That was nothing very bad," remarked the corporal.

"Bad! no: nobody thinks anything of it here. It's only when a fellow has done anything at home that's unfair and mean, such as murders and robberies, and such like, that he's looked down on. But as for smuggling! bless your heart, nobody thinks much the worse of a man here for that, nor at home neither, so far as I know. What is it? It's only giving the go-by to the government: Lord love you! what's the harm of that?"

"How was it, then, that they treated this

Mark so bad as to drive him to take to the bush? Has he been doing anything wrong here?"

"Why, you see, he was assigned, when he came over, to a master up the country; and some of the settlers treat their government men dreadfully severe, and Mark couldn't stand it; and when his master threatened him with his cattle-whip one day, he knocked his master down. He might have got off if he had suffered himself to be taken before the magistrate, for the settlers are not allowed to strike their men. But Mark's blood was up, and he took to the bush—that was more than two year ago—and of course he robbed the settlers' houses of tea, sugar, and ammunition, and things; but he never shed blood; only tied people neck and heels together, and things of that sort—very wrong, of course—but not near so bad as some."

"Bad enough, to my thinking."

"Well; he was taken at last, as they all are, sooner or later, and cast for death; but somehow interest was made with the governor—and they do say a certain lady had taken a fancy to him—but that's no business of mine; and so the best was made of his case, how it was, through the tyranny of his master, that he was driven to take to the bush; and how civil and polite he was to the settlers that he robbed, especially the ladies, and so he got off. But they made him work in chains, and that's what galled him, I dare say. He was not the chap to stand that any ways."

"And what sort of a man is he?" asked the corporal; "a lady's man?"

"When he has a mind to it, they say, he is the most carrying devil that ever came over a woman. But he is a most determined fellow for all that. He will not be taken alive, you may depend upon it; for he must know he has nothing to expect but to scrag for this last break-out."

"Of course not: then I suppose we may look out for a tussle." The soldiers at this mechanically handled their firelocks.

"Are the bushrangers armed?"

"We don't know; but it stands to reason that they never would start for the bush this way without arms and ammunition; for it's not like the interior, where they might get arms from the settlers; there are no inhabitants down the river but the natives."

"There goes the signal up!" said the corporal; "some vessel in sight."

"I see," said the constable, "we may fall in with her, perhaps, when we get further down the river. But where to look for these fellows? that's the point! We think they made away with the boat last night, just after dark, so that they have a good start; but they can hardly do anything with such a boat at sea, for she was but a small one, and had nothing in her but her oars. If they are after going round the coast, they will take the western side, so as to avoid the track of vessels between this and Sydney; and so we will keep away to the right towards the channel, and keep a sharp look-out as we go by."

With this view they hugged the shore on the west, and a breeze soon after springing up, with the assistance of their sail they made rapid progress down the river without seeing anything suspicious in their way. The constable, who

and the direction of the party, as the most experienced among them, was inclined to make a stop after they had proceeded some way down the channel; but at this moment, in turning round a projecting point of land, the steersman caught sight of a vessel in the distance, which was standing across the channel, and beating her way up under a stiff breeze on the larboard tack; when suddenly the vessel, which was made out to be a brig, and of small burthen, was seen to change her course, and under a press of sail, make her way down the channel.

This strange manœuvre roused the suspicion of the pursuers of the runaways, and as their boat was light and fast, they determined to endeavor to overtake the brig, not without some misgivings that the cleverness and the daring of the celebrated Mark Brandon had enabled him to get possession of the vessel.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRATAGEM.

THE gallant brig had nearly reached the entrance of D'Entrecasteaux channel, when the squall from Mount Wellington ceased as suddenly as it rose; and presently the wind was lulled into a calm. The experienced mate, however, was not to be deceived by this suspicious suspension of the blast.

"What are we going to have now!" he said to the leader of the bushrangers, whom, in his capacity of pilot, it was his duty to consult: "I don't like this lull; they are only getting ready a fresh hand to the bellows, I fancy. I suppose the wind shifts on this side of the world much as it does on t'other. I think the bank right ahead—to the south yonder—begins to rise."

"You are quite right," replied the supposed pilot; "and with such a man as you on board you have no need of a pilot; the vessel is quite safe in your hands: you seem to know the way of the winds in the new world as well as if you had been born among them. A better seaman I never....."

"Avast there, mate!" said the honest officer; "you give us too much of that; why, you have got the gift of the gab like a sea-lawyer! To be sure, this is not the first time I've looked the winds in the face. But we had better try to put her head about; if it comes on to blow from the south, it will be a fair wind for us up the channel."

"Better get out," said the pilot, "and have sea-room; when it comes on to blow from the southward it always blows great guns; and this is a nasty channel to be sticking in—full of shoals and rocks, and headlands stretching out in every direction."

"You seem to have taken a great dislike to the channel," replied the mate: "for my part I don't see any great harm in it: and Horseman says it's good enough if you mind your soundings; and the chart is clear. What makes you so anxious to get out of it?"

Two or three of the yellow jackets were standing in the fore part of the vessel near the pilot and the mate during their brief colloquy, and it struck the worthy officer that there was

an expression in their faces incongruous with their characters; and he thought he observed a glance of intelligence pass between one of them and their leader. A vague suspicion crossed the mate's mind; but as there was nothing definite to give it substance, it passed away for the moment, but afterwards it recurred to him. As he went ast to take the orders of the major, he heard a voice, which it seemed to him proceeded from the same man whose look he had observed, ask in a low tone:—

"Is it time?"

The mate turned round, and gazed inquiringly at the group in the fore-castle.

"Is it time?" he repeated; "time for what?"

"He was asking," replied the pilot, rather hastily, "if it was time to go about: but I see the major has come on deck; we will consult him as to what he would like to do with his vessel." Saying this, he went ast, following the mate.

The sisters were gazing listlessly at the land from which they were unwillingly receding with the change of tide, and the gallant Mr. Silliman found it impossible to inspire either of them with those feelings of mirthful gaiety with which they were accustomed to receive his assiduities. The major was supporting his youngest daughter by the arm, as the motion of the vessel from the broken sea rendered it difficult for her to stand on deck. Helen, on the contrary, stood erect and alone, with one hand grasping the bulwark, and the other holding the ship's glass, which she condescended to allow Mr. Silliman to support at the other end to keep it steady. The honor of this position was perfect bliss to that enraptured individual, who made extraordinary exertions to call into exercise the utmost dexterity of his sea legs, so that the view of the beautiful Helen might not be disarranged.

"Do you see anything, Miss Helen?" he ventured to inquire in a tone of extreme insinuation.

"Nothing but the brim of your ugly hat," replied the lady.

"Bless me! I beg a thousand pardons; it's the rolling of the sea: there again; I hope I did not hurt you; now do you see anything?"

"I see something. Papa, come and look through the glass just as it is now. Stand still," she said to Mr. Silliman, "and do try to be steady; a pretty sailor not to be able to bear the rolling of the ship! Look, papa, I see something like a swan."

"A swan, my love; then it must be a black one, for all the swans are black, they say, on this side of the earth. A swan, my dear; no it's no swan, but the sail of a boat that you see, I think. Mr. Northland, what do you make of it?"

"A boat with her square-sail up," pronounced the mate, with professional precision, after taking a brief earnest look at the object. "She looks like a large whale-boat by her make; but she is too large for that work—she is coming down with the tide. What do you say to it, pilot?"

There was a visible embarrassment on the part of the supposed pilot, at this communication. A slight paleness came over his countenance, as if he was struck with some uncontrollable emotion, and then his face flushed

with excitement. As he looked round with an attempt to appear unconcerned, he encountered the eye of Helen, which was fixed steadfastly upon him. He quailed for an instant beneath the penetrating gaze of that brilliant eye, and, hastily taking the ship's glass from the mate's hands to cover his confusion, he directed it towards the object; but his hand trembled, and the glass shook visibly.

"Rather a shaky hand," remarked the mate to the major, in a whisper; "but there's no duty on grog in this part of the world."

The whisper of the mate seemed to discompose the pilot a little. He took his eye from the glass, and searched the countenances of the bystanders; but seeing nothing in them to alarm, he applied himself again to his scrutiny of the boat.

While he was so employed, Helen made a sign to her father to come near her. They moved round to the side of the binnacle, leaving the pilot, with his back towards them, looking through the glass.

"Papa," said Helen, in a whisper, "I have been watching the countenance of that man. He changed color when the mate spoke of the boat. Depend upon it there is something about that boat that troubles him."

"It must be fancy, my love; there can be nothing in the appearance of a boat to disturb the pilot. It is only fancy."

"Dear papa, it is not fancy. I cannot be mistaken in the countenance of that man; it is one of the most remarkable I ever saw. I watched him; and I am sure that the boat in sight has had some powerful effect on him. He does not look like a man to be moved by a slight cause."

"Well, my dear girl, the shortest way is to ask him. 'Pilot,' said the major, addressing the bush-ranger, "what do you see in that boat to disturb you?"

"To disturb me!" replied the pilot, regarding the major fixedly. "Why do you suppose that the sight of that boat disturbs me? What do you suppose the boat has to do with us—I mean, with me?"

"But what do you think of her?" interrupted the mate, who was a little out of patience with the lengthened examination of the pilot. "You have had a pretty long spell at the glass; long enough to make her out, I'm sure. What do you think of her?"

"I will take another look at her," replied the bushranger, who was anxious to gain time to enable him to devise some scheme to counteract the dangerous approach of the boat, which, he had no doubt, had been dispatched after him and his associates by the government authorities; "I can see her plainer now."

"And what do you make of her?" repeated the mate.

"It's only a boat," replied the bushranger, continuing to look anxiously through the glass.

"Well, if it's only a boat, there's an end of it," said the mate. "There's a light air coming from the southward," he said to the major; "I suppose we may stand up now with the wind in our favor."

"But the tide is against us," observed the pilot, "and if it comes on to blow—and I don't like the looks of that bank which you first ob-

served rising yonder—you would find yourself cramped in this narrow channel."

"I'll never agree to go out of the channel with a fair wind up," exclaimed the mate.

"Way, friend, you are for not going up the channel any way! Before, it was the wind that was against us, and then we were not to go up; and now that we are getting the wind, it is because the tide is against us that we are not to go up! Beg pardon—no offence meant; but, to my thinking, you don't want us to go up the channel at all!"

"The boat is coming nearer," cried out Mr. Silliman, who, as all the others had done with it, was allowed to use the glass: "I can see it as plain as can be; and they have taken the sail down, and they are puffing with all their might, I can see. They have got the tide in their favor, and they will soon be down on us; we shall hear some news now! Hurrah!"

The bushranger snatched the glass out of the exulting Mr. Silliman's hand with an abruptness which made that astonished individual open his mouth with surprise. With a firm hand, and with a certain air of determination, he applied the glass to his eye, and directed it to the still distant boat, which, however, propelled by the oars of the pursuing party, and assisted by the tide, was rapidly approaching the brig. Helen had observed the impetuous motion of the pilot, and had watched his varying countenance as he gazed through the glass. Prompted by an irresistible impulse, she gave vent to her vague suspicion of danger, and spoke:—

"Sir," she said to the pilot, "I am sure there is something about that coming boat which disturbs you. You know something about it, you do—I am sure you do," she repeated, her eyes kindling, and her cheeks reddening with excitement.

"If there is danger, do not deceive us, but tell us in time, that we may be prepared for it. Do not suppose," she said, taking hold of her sister's hand, "that because we are women we are afraid. We have looked on the dangers of the sea without terror, confident in our skill and our courage; and we can look without fear on this new danger—for danger there is, I know, by your look and manner at this moment. Speak, I say, and let us know at once what the danger is."

The spirited words of the heroic girl unfortunately inspired the bushranger with a happy thought. He seized on the suggestion of danger from the boat with the readiness of practised dissimulation. Forming his plan on the instant, he replied without hesitation, and with an expression of feeling and interest in the welfare of the women which disarmed suspicion:—

"Major, I fear your gifted daughter is right. I wished to make my communication when they were gone below; but there is no time to be lost; and these courageous girls shame us with their spirit. But I will do justice to their courage! and say at once there is danger..."

"Danger!" said the mate, looking about him: "where from?"

"Danger!" repeated the major, in a voice of mingled surprise and emotion, and clasping his youngest daughter with instinctive tenderness; "danger from that boat!"

"Yes," replied the supposed pilot; and there is no time to lose if we are to defend ourselves. That boat, I have no doubt, contains the party of bushrangers that broke away from camp some days ago: the commandant at the look-out has had notice of them; and their design must be to endeavor to take this vessel. They are well armed; it is supposed there are about a dozen of them; and as the villains are desperate, they will make a determined attack on us. However, I for one am ready to fight for you; and if you will arm your men, my people shall work the vessel while they defend us."

"Let it be done at once," said the major. "This is a most unlucky accident! However, it is fortunate that we have you on board to help us." So saying, he descended to the cabin in all haste to prepare the arms and ammunition.

The bushranger, meantime, went forward, as if for the purpose of giving directions to the party under his control. As he passed his confederates, he said, in a low firm voice, to each of them:—

"Be ready."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ATTACK.

THE consummate art of the bushranger in proposing that the crew of the vessel should be armed, while his own men undertook the management of the vessel, had its intended effect. There was no suspicion on the part of the major or of his people that the approaching boat was really in pursuit of the absconded prisoners on board the brig; and the activity of the supposed pilot in preparing the means of defence was regarded as corroborating evidence of the danger threatened to the vessel. All was activity on deck; muskets, pistols, and cutlasses were brought up from the cabin, and ammunition was disinterred from the lockers: and the bushranger took care to provide himself amply with the means of defence or offence, as the case might be.

Still he was well aware that the moment was critical and most perilous. He was now in the worst position: his confederates were defenceless; the sailors of the vessel were armed and prepared to resist aggression: and the boat, which he had no doubt contained a government party in pursuit, was coming nearer and nearer every minute. But with a coolness and courage worthy of a better object, he bided his time, and waited with patience for the result, which he calculated must take place when his men attempted to work the vessel.

At this time a brisk breeze had sprung up from the south, which gave the advantage to the brig over an attacking boat, as it enabled the vessel to choose her position. The increase of the wind rendered a corresponding arrangement of the sails necessary; but here the ignorance and blundering of the supposed pilot's men was too provoking to be endured by the angry mate:—

"What do you call your fellows?" he broke out to the pilot, "do you call that chap a sailor? See how he handles a rope! By ———! look at that fellow sticking in the shrouds! There's another creeping through lubber's hole!

That's right, my man, take care of your precious limbs! Oh! this will never do," he said to the major; "these men will never work the vessel: such a lubberly set I never set eyes on! There goes the jib! Hold on there, hold on! By ———! you'll have the maintop-sail-yard down by the run. Pilot, hold your men off. What's the use of such a pack of fools! Keep an eye on the boat, some one, can't you! A pretty set, that don't know the main-sheet from the topsail-halyards; and they can't fight! No, not they! I should like to know what they are fit for!"

"Do you think your men would stand by us?" asked the major, eagerly, of the pilot; "you see we want our own people to work the vessel."

"Fight!" said the pilot; "they will fight like devils, depend upon it, when the time comes; but of course you can't expect them to be used to arms," he added carelessly: "however, they will do their best. Come aft, my men." They quickly came at the voice of their leader.

"The major says he wants his sailors to work the vessel; and he asks me if you will stand by us to defend the brig from the bushrangers coming on to attack us in the boat yonder!"

The diligent Mr. Siliman, who was examining the boat through the ship's glass, cried out at this moment, "I can see the men in the boat, and I can see the gleam of some muskets: the boat is full of the rascals!"

"Make haste, then," said the bushranger; "relieve the sailors of their arms; and be ready to use them," he said, significantly, "when I give the word."

The exchange of duties between the sailors and the conspirators was the work of a minute only; and the crew of the vessel became immediately busied in trimming the sails and attending to the ship; while the supposed pilot and his gang stood with arms in their hands, ready to pounce on their unsuspecting victims.

The bushranger felt that the time had come when he must strike a decisive blow; but first he ran rapidly over in his head a scheme to get the major and his chief officer below, in order that the crew, being deprived of their leaders, might be more easily mastered: his object was unexpectedly furthered by the officious Mr. Siliman.

"Major," said that bustling individual, as he hurriedly loaded his musket with an excessively martial air, "would it not be better for the young ladies to go below? they will only be in our way on deck, and hinder us from fighting."

"We shall work the better," put in the pilot, "if we are assured that your daughters, major, are out of the reach of the bullets."

Louisa, who was very pale, assented to this suggestion without reply; but Helen, who was flushed and excited, remonstrated and resisted. "I can fire a gun," she said, "as well as any of you; any woman can do that: and where my dear father is there will I be also;" and saying this she seized a musket, and held it in the attitude of a heroine prepared for war.

It required all her father's entreaties and, at last, commands to induce her to descend into

the cabin. The major was obliged to lay down his weapons and accompany her below. The bushranger saw his opportunity, but the troublesome Mr. Silliman came breathless to the entrance of the companion-way, and bawled "Major, major, I can see the red coats of soldiers in the boat!"

"Soldiers!" said the major; "what can that mean! But they are in my line; I'll soon be up and give a look at them."

"Mr. Northland," called out the pilot, "the major is asking for you below; something about the dead-lights, I believe."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the mate, as he ran aft; "look out, pilot, the boat's upon us;" and by an indescribable process of locomotion, which sailors alone possess, he dived down below, and his head disappeared in a twinkling.

The bushranger immediately made a sign to four of his men who were near him to close the hatchway: it was done in an instant. At the same time he presented his own musket, which he cocked with an audible click, at the man at the wheel. Mr. Silliman observed these extraordinary manoeuvres, which altogether exceeded his nautical experience, with inexpressible astonishment; but before he had time to make up his mind what to do, he was seized by two of the bushrangers, disarmed, and on his resisting, with the courage of desperation, their attempt to bind his hands and feet, was without ceremony pitched into the sea.

"That was wrong," said Mark Brandon, quietly: "never take life if you can avoid it: but the boat will pick him up; and after all, perhaps, he was of no great value."

In the mean time, the carpenter, who was a cool and determined fellow, with three of the crew, armed themselves with the capatan-bars, resolved to resist, though unable to make out the reason or object of the sudden attack on them by the pilot and his followers; but the bushranger, rushing forward with four of his fellows, presented their muskets; and the sailors, taken unawares and in amazement at the suddenness and strangeness of the proceeding, and seeing, besides, that resistance was hopeless, quietly surrendered. The rest of the crew were as easily brought under subjection, and, having been bound hand and foot, were placed singly in convenient places below, and in less than ten minutes the vessel was in the possession of the marauders.

"Now, my men," cried out Mark Brandon, "cheer for liberty!" His associates raised a wild hurrah, which conveyed to the inmates in the cabin the information that the vessel was overpowered; but by whom or how was a mystery! The mate put his head out of the stern window, but the bushranger was too well on his guard to permit such an escape; and, meeting the muzzles of two muskets close to his face, the enraged officer was obliged to retreat, though not without venting his discontent in a vigorous volley of nautical abjurations.

Mark Brandon now took the helm, and, making a gesture of defiance with his fist at the still distant boat, he immediately turned the vessel's head back again towards the south; and, under all the sail that she could carry, the captured brig making short tacks stood out to

sea.

CHAPTER VIII.

INFORMATION.

THE unfortunate Mr. Jeremiah Silliman made more philosophical reflections during his rapid evolution from the deck of the brig to the waters of the sea, than had ever occurred to him in the whole of his previous life. The first dreadful thought that presented itself to him was that he could not swim! but before he could give vent in words to the novel sensations which assailed him, he found himself plunged under the waves, and descending beneath them with a velocity proportionate to his specific gravity and the precipitancy of his descent. As he felt himself hurrying down to those abodes, which in the poetical simplicity of his imagination he had been wont to picture as the dwelling-place of sea-nymphs with green gauze robes and coral necklaces, but which he now contemplated with affright as abounding in enormous crayfishes and voracious ground-sharks, deeply and energetically did he lament that his love of the romantic had led him away from the peaceful haunts of Cheapside and Cornhill to the villainous shores of Botany Bay; and much did he marvel at the disagreeableness of his reception into the bosom of the land of his adoption.

Such and so sad were the curious reflections which were suddenly forced on him by the novelty of his situation; and still he went down and down, as it seemed to him, and deeper and deeper still, till his thoughts became confused, and he felt a cold, fishy sensation, as if he had become partially transformed into the semblance of a scaly inhabitant of the deep; gradually his feelings became blunted; his last thoughts were of the brig from which he had been unceremoniously cast, and the bright eyes from which he was for ever separated—even in the last moment he could not make up his mind which he preferred—and then the dimness of death came over him; he mentally uttered a fragment of a prayer, and all was oblivion!

The party in the boat, however, had not failed to notice the sunset involuntarily performed by the luckless individual in question: and the occurrence, indicating that violence was going on in the brig, confirmed the suspicion to which the unaccountable changes in her course had given rise—that the bushrangers had got possession of the vessel.

"There's bloody work going on, I'm thinking, on board that craft," said the constable, who was sitting with his face towards the head of the boat. "I saw one chap pitched overboard plain enough: I wonder which party he belonged to."

"Give way, my men," cried the corporal, standing up in the boat, and looking through a glass with which he was provided. "I can see the body, it has come to the surface of the water; it's not above half a mile from us. Give way—stick to your oars—and we shall save him yet, whoever he is!"

The men bent stoutly to their oars, and in a few minutes, the tide being in their favor, they shot up alongside of the floating body, which they caught just as it was sinking for the last time. The lifeless corpse, as it seemed, was quickly

hauled into the boat, and a brief consultation was held as to the best means to be adopted for its recovery.

"Nothing better than a bit of salt beef," suggested an old sailor: "rub it well in; I know it recovered a man off Yarmouth—at home—that had been in the water more than four hours: the salt, you see, rouses him up, if there's any life in him."

"This is not one of the bushrangers," pronounced the constable, as they stripped off the clothes from the drowned man in order to give him the benefit of the salt beef recipe prescribed by the old sailor; "this must be one of the people of the vessel; he looks like a sailor by his dress, but his hands are too smooth for that; perhaps he's a passenger."

"Rub away, my hearties," urged the sea-doctor; "rub it into him, and if there's any life left, the beef will fetch it out."

The body of the unconscious Jeremiah was excoriated accordingly, secundum artem (salsi junki), the boat continuing its pursuit of the vessel nevertheless, as the surmises of the officials were confirmed by the appearance of the body which they had rescued from the water. At last, after a prodigious quantity of rubbing, which reduced the person of the apparently deceased to a substance closely resembling the material which was made use of as a flesh-brush, signs of warmth were observed in the body, and presently a sigh was ejaculated which indicated returning sensibility. The progress of the boat was suspended for a few minutes at this interesting success of the old mariner's surgical operation, and the attention of all was directed to foster the breath of returning life which the stranger now exhibited. The result was speedy favorable; the man, rescued from death, sat up, and looked around him.

"How do you find yourself, my hearty?" said the corporal; "you have had a narrow escape."

The stranger stared at him unmeaningly.

"Who are you?" asked the constable, anxious to ascertain the condition of the vessel, and to learn some tidings of the bushrangers; "what's your name, and who are you?"

But the intellects of the poor man had been too much obfuscated by the salt water, to say nothing of the subsequent scarification to which he had been subjected, to understand where he was, or what had happened to him.

"Can't you tell us who you are?" repeated the constable, impatient to get at some information for his guidance; "what are you?"

"A freeman of London, and a liveryman," answered Jerry, his mind wandering to former scenes.

"His wits are a wool-gathering," said the constable.

"It's the water that's swamped 'em," said the ancient mariner; "salt water gogs poor stuff at any time, 'specially without the rum: and this cove has had too much of it for one bout."

"What are you, and who do you belong to?" repeated the constable, giving the reviving man a little shake in his impatience.

"The Chandlers' Company," replied Jerry; "and so did my father before me. I'm a freeman, I say—and a liveryman; and if I don't shoot the centre arch of Battersea bridge...."

"What company did he say he belonged to?" asked the corporal, "the Chandlers'? He means Captain Chandlers! Ask him what regiment! And he said something about shooting; I can't make it out at all."

"It's not that," said the constable; "but he seems plucking up a bit. How is it now with you, my man? We have saved you from drowning. Who was it that chucked you overboard from the brig yonder? Have the bushrangers got possession of the vessel?"

The word "bushrangers" seemed to strike some responsive chord in the bewildered man's memory.

"Bushrangers!" said he, "bushrangers! Ah, that's it! The bushrangers have got me, and now I'm done for!"

"No, no," said the corporal; "we are not bushrangers: look at our red coats; we are soldiers going after the bushrangers. Look here, man, bushrangers don't keep their arms bright like ours. Can't you tell the difference between a bushranger and a gentleman in his majesty's service? Look at our firelocks; bushrangers can't show such tools as these!"

By degrees, the recovered Jeremiah began to understand what had happened to him, and the character of the party who had saved him from drowning. He was excessively rejoiced at his fortunate escape, and vowed manfully that if he could only come across that insinuating rascal of a pilot, he would serve him out for his ungentle behavior. He narrated all the events that had happened; how the chief of the gang had introduced himself on board as a pilot; the plot which he had schemed to get his confederates into the vessel; and the art with which he had contrived to transfer the arms of the sailors to his own followers, under the pretence of leaving the crew of the brig at liberty to manage the vessel in the approaching encounter with the boat which the major was made to believe contained the runaway prisoners who actually were on board all the time.

"By George!" said the constable, "that is Mark Brandon all over! That man would circumvent the very devil himself! It's impossible to be up to all his dodges! But what's to be done now? The wind's getting up, and that's all in favor of the rascals on board the brig. How many did you say there were with Mark?"

"Six others," replied Jerry. "And now I recollect we all thought them most desperate-looking ruffians: but that Mark Brandon, as you call him, is quite a genteel person; there doesn't seem to be much harm in him."

"Didn't he chuck you overboard?" asked the corporal.

"No; it was two other chaps. Mark, as you call him, was standing by the man at the wheel with a cocked musket presented at his head."

"Just like him!" said one of the sailors; "that's their way. Somehow, all the bushrangers take to the same ways. When they attack a man they make him throw his arms above his head, and then they stick the muzzle of a fowling-piece, or a musket, if they have one—but they don't like muskets, they are so heavy to carry about—close to his ear; and then what can a man do! No pleasant thing, I can assure you; I have felt it myself."

"But what's to be done," repeated the constable; "are we to attempt to attack the bushrangers in the brig with this boat? Let us see;—how many are we? Four at the oar—two of us constables, and the corporal with his two men—that's nine; and with the newcomer, ten against seven: we can do it easily, corporal."

"If we could only get at them fairly, we could do it," replied the corporal; "but the odds would be against us with a vessel under sail: they could fire on us from the protection of the sides of the vessel; and four of our party at least would have to use their oars. There ought to have been more of us."

"There are more of the bushrangers," replied the constable, "than were reckoned on in camp to have made their escape; it was supposed that only Mark and two others had gone off: but half a dozen, with Mark Brandon at the head of them, is a formidable party—and all well-armed too!"

"There will be the major's party on board, as this gentleman says, to help us; and, as the major has seen service, he would know how to second us if it came to a brush."

"Lord bless you!" replied the constable, "you don't suppose the bushrangers will be troubled with the crew of the vessel; bless your heart! they'll get rid of 'em in no time."

"What, murder them in cold blood!"

"Ay, any way: why their rule is, never to give away a chance: depend upon it there's not one of the crew left alive at this moment."

"What! nor the old major neither!" exclaimed the corporal, his professional sympathies excited for the fate of an officer; "will they kill the major, think you?"

"Have killed him," said the constable; "they have killed him, I'll be bound. You're new in the colony, corporal, and don't know the ways of these fellows: they make short work of it when it serves their plan to do so. Do you think they would keep a witness alive to hang them?"

"But the young ladies!" interposed Jeremiah; "the poor major's daughters! They would never kill them! They couldn't be such brutes as to kill two young girls!"

"Are they pretty!—though that would not matter much with bushrangers:—but are they pretty?"

"Both," replied Jeremiah, "very beautiful; the elder one—that's Helen—she's about eighteen; she is very handsome: and Louisa—she's about sixteen; she's very beautiful: I don't know which is the handsomest of the two; but Helen is the spirited one."

"Then Mark will take her, and the rest will cast lots for the other; so they will be saved, likely. The spirited gal would be just Mark's taste."

"Better be both dead than suffer that fate," said the kind-hearted Jeremiah. "I'm sure Louisa would die, and Helen would kill herself at the thoughts of it! But I say, corporal, you will never let those rascals murder and go on that way without making an effort to save them! I'm sure those ill-looking sneaking ruffians would never fight if it came hand to hand."

"That's the difficulty," said the corporal:

"if it was hand to hand we could manage them, because we could fire three times to their once; besides our being steady and used to handle our arms."

"There will be no fight hand to hand, or any way," said the constable, as a violent blast from the southward nearly overset the boat, "if it comes on to blow, as it looks likely, I think our best plan is to get under shelter in some creek somewhere, for I think we are going to have a regular hurricane from the south by the looks of those clouds rising up yonder like blocks of black wool."

The attention of all in the boat was now peremptorily directed to their own safety, as the wind rose and the storm increased to fury. The same squall was observed to assail the brig, now dimly seen through the murky atmosphere. In a short time the sky was enveloped in darkness, as the gathering winds prepared from the thick curtains of the clouds to expend their rage on the agitated waters.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUMMONS.

MARK BRANDON, by one of the most daring stratagems in the annals of piracy, had got possession of a vessel admirably adapted for his purpose, and the crew, bound hand and foot, were stowed away here and there in convenient places; but still he felt he was not quite secure the major and the mate were unbound; and although confined in the cabin, and unable by themselves to cope with seven desperate men, it was possible for them to be dangerous; and the bushranger had too much experience in the power and resources of even a single man not to be alive to the possibility of the escape, and the successful resistance of two determined spirits—the one having at stake his pride and reputation as the chief officer of a ship, and the other urged by the still more powerful feeling of a parent struggling for the preservation of the life and honor of his daughters. Filled with these thoughts, but attending anxiously at the same time to the course of the vessel, he turned over in his mind a scheme to entice the officer on deck, and to neutralize the hostility of the major. The increasing storm favored his project.

In the mean time the parties in the cabin were a prey to the most agonizing anticipations.

"This takes one all aback!" said the mate, quite confounded by the unexpected aggression of the pilot and his followers. "Many a rum go have I been witness to; but this beats all! Who are these fellows? I never liked the look of that soft-jawing pilot and his men, as they called him. And all the arms are on deck. This is what I call being thorough done!"

"I am afraid," said the major, "that the case is too clear; in short, we have been deceived all along; and this sham pilot is some desperate man with his gang endeavoring to escape from the island."

"By George," said the mate, slapping the table with an energy which at any other time he would have considered an unpardonable breach of good manners in the state cabin, and in the presence of ladies, too; "that's it; and

that accounts for the rascals shying the up-passage, and trying to get out of the channel with every tide, and with every wind that blew! That's it! we're hard up! and we shall have all to walk the plank, every one of us; I know what that game is in the West Indies! But it's hard for you, Miss Helen, and for you, Miss Louisa: it doesn't matter for the like of me; it all goes in the day's work, as sailors say: but for you—" and here the worthy mate gave the table a tremendous thump with his fist in the excess of his emotion. The sound was echoed from the outside of the cabin window from the nozzle of a musket.

"What's that!" cried out Louisa alarmed.

"That's a summons, miss," said the mate. "Better not to frighten you, but I suppose they want us to walk the plank; not you, perhaps," he added, "nor your sister; but me and your papa. Major," he said, turning to their father, "you don't mean to give in without a struggle?"

"What can we do?" said the major; "we are unarmed: better make terms for the girls."

"Better drown them at once," said the honest seaman, having before his eyes the scenes of horror which he had seen and known in the seas prolific of piracy in the West Indies; "no use mincing the matter. If they were sisters of mine, I know what I would do."

Helen calmly rose at these words: she first kissed her father, and then her sister, and then extending her hand to the mate, she shook it warmly. Without speaking, her gestures sufficiently intimating her intention, she sought in the steward's locker for a large table-knife: she selected one with a point, tried its sharpness deliberately with her finger, and placed it in her girdle; she then resumed her place by the side of her father.

Louisa observed her proceedings with trembling interest. When the high-minded Helen took her hand in hers she shuddered convulsively, and placing the other hand before her eyes, as if to shut out at once the peril with which she was threatened, and the aspect of the Lucretian death meditated by her sister, she threw herself into the arms of her father. The major embraced her with despairing tenderness; the tears ran down his manly cheeks; and he lifted up his head to heaven as if he would pierce through the obdurate deck in his mental appeal for succor. But the action of the heroic Helen suggested other thoughts to the mind of the hardy mate:

"Major," he said, "Miss Helen shames us men. There are weapons still," pointing to the knife appended to Helen's side; "and they may stand us in good stead at a pinch. Let us do our best to defend the cabin from an attack from without, and trust to chance for the rest. How the vessel pitches, poor thing! Those fellows don't know how to handle her—and the wind blows stronger and stronger every minute. That top-gallant mast will be sprung as sure as fate, if they don't look alive! But what does it matter what becomes of the masts, or the sails, or the gear, or anything? we shan't live long to see the ruin that's coming on this prime little brig that I've brought over from the other side of the globe, safe and sound! Well, it will be all the same a hundred years hence! They are knocking

at the window again, as if they were determined to have an answer this time."

A voice was at this moment heard:

"Below there!"

"Ay, ay," said the mate, answering with professional promptitude. "What the devil do you want with us?" he added, raising his voice; "can't you let us be quiet?"

"The captain wants to speak with the major!"

"And who the devil's the captain?"

"Mark Brandon."

"And who is Mark Brandon? One of the rascally convicts, I suppose, escaped from jail?"

"He will soon let you know who he is if you give us any of your sauce! Look out of your stern windows at the sea beneath you; plenty of ground sharks at the bottom; do you understand that?"

"Major," said another voice from the top of the companion-ladder, which they instantly recognized as Mark Brandon's, "the ship is in danger, and you and your daughters will be lost if something is not done for the management of the vessel."

"Ah, ha!" cried the mate, "it is come to that, is it?"

"If we let you free, will you pledge your word of honor not to make any attempt against us! You are a soldier and a gentleman; and I know if you pledge your honor you will keep your word."

"Do it," whispered the mate, "if you do make a promise with such rascals, you need not keep it."

"And my daughters," asked the major, "what do you say of them?"

"If you can trust to my word," replied Mark Brandon, "they shall remain in this cabin, and be respected. Our only object is to leave the colony, and regain our liberty: that done, we have no desire to do violence to any one. But you must decide quickly."

"Don't let him come in, papa," said Louisa.

"Trust him," said Helen; "we are in his power; and if there is a spark of generosity in the man it can be kindled into goodness only by confidence: trust him."

The major hesitated; the danger was imminent: on the one side was certain death in case of unavailing resistance; on the other, the possibility of good treatment if the leader of the bushrangers were not thwarted in his object. Besides, there was hope in procrastination: "Perhaps after all," he said to the mate, "the only object of these men is to effect their escape; and it is quite clear they cannot navigate the vessel by themselves. We must bend to circumstances. Pacifying measures are always the best for the weaker party. Will you promise to do no violence to the mate?" he asked of the bushranger.

"I promise not to take his life," replied Mark Brandon through the door.

"Shall we trust him," said the major to his officer, "or shall we sell our lives dearly?"

"I don't see how we are to help ourselves," replied the mate; "and it will be something to save the vessel, for with the wind that is raging outside, these fellows will never be able to keep her off the land."

"What is the alternative if we refuse?" asked the major, still hesitating.

"Death!" replied the bushranger: "it is our lives or yours; we do not want to take yours, nor to harm you unnecessarily; but if it must be one or the other, you cannot expect us to sacrifice our own. My object is to save the vessel."

"He's right in that, at any rate," said the mate; "that's the first thing to be looked to; for if the vessel goes down we all go down with her—that's certain. Take him at his word, major; we can do no better: 'and needs must,' as the saying is, 'when the devil drives.'"

"I promise," said the major.

"I cannot pay you a higher compliment than to trust to your honor, major," said Mark Brandon, undoing the barricading of the door, at the entrance of which he appeared with two of his men with their muskets cocked and leveled at the parties within. Louisa screamed, and Helen put her hand on her weapon. "Now, sir, if you please, you may come out."

His daughters clung to him instinctively, but Helen presently loosened her grasp; Louisa, however, would not relax her hold, but begged and prayed him, with the wildest grief, to remain to protect them. The mate, anxious to get on deck to take a survey of matters on board, passed up the ladder, and was instantly seized by four of the conspirators, who in a moment bound him hand and foot, and placed him by the wheel.

"If your father prefers remaining below," said Mark Brandon, courteously, to Helen, "he is quite at liberty to do so; at the same time he may come on deck when he pleases: but as the waves are high, and as we have shipped several seas already, I think it will be more agreeable to you to close the hatchway;" and so saying he closed the door, and turned his attention to the prostrate mate, who, with a storm of oaths outrivalling in ferocity even the fierceness of the increasing storm, was cursing the bushranger and his gang:

"You precious infernal rascal! this was your promise, was it? I thought you said you would do me no harm?"

"And I have done you no harm," replied the bushranger. "I promised not to take your life, and I will keep my promise. But I did not promise not to bind you, to keep you from doing harm to yourself and to others. And now, my friend, what do you say? will you help us to save the vessel, or shall it be a short prayer and a long plunge to see what the sharks will say to you?"

"Do what you like, you rascally, lying, lubberly sneak—do what you like; I'll do nothing for you with my hands bound this way. You and your villainous gang may go to the bottom, and your souls to—that is, if your friend there will take you in; but two of a trade, they say, never agree—so there must be some place made on purpose to hold such a rascal as you! I only wish I had my hands free, and a marline-spike in one of them—you should not be grinning at me in that cool way."

"Well, my friend," replied Mark, "there's no time to lose; you must make up your mind at once. Roger and Dick," he said to two of his men, "put your muskets to his head." The men obeyed promptly.

"What do you say now?"

"I won't; while my hands are bound I'll do nothing."

"Cook your muskets," said their leader to his men.

There are few things more disagreeable than the click of the lock of a musket, when the muzzle of it is placed close to your head by a hostile party; but the mate was firm.

"Are you ready?" said Mark.

"Yes," said the men, with their fingers on the triggers.

"What do you say now? in one moment you will have the contents of those pieces through your brains."

"Fire away," said the mate.

"Stay," said Mark Brandon.

Knowing well the habitual horror which sailors have of drowning and of sharks, and their superstitious dread of remaining unburied after death, he thought he would try another method.

"The shortest way," he said, "will be to throw him overboard. Take him up and heave him over the taffrail, and then there will be an end. Now, my men—one, two, three. Have you nothing to say to stop them," he said to the mate, who, with hands and legs tied and bound tightly together, was utterly incapable of the slightest resistance—"have you nothing to say to stop them?"

At this moment a tremendous sea struck the little bark, and the main-top-mast, with a crash, came rattling down, encumbering the deck with its ruins. The mate and his executioners were nearly washed overboard; but high above the din and the roar of the elements the mate's voice was now heard:—

"Unbind me," he cried out, "and I promise to save the ship. You will all be lost, and this tight little brig, that I have brought so far, will go down with you all."

"You will promise, then, not to make any attempt to regain the vessel," said Mark Brandon, preserving his coolness in the midst of the confusion around him.

"I will promise anything," said the mate, "only let me save the vessel. There's another sea coming! Starboard the helm, or it will be upon us."

A monstrous sea burst over them, doing fresh damage, and adding to the confusion and danger. Mark Brandon, seeing that the case was desperate, and trusting to the instinct of the seaman to abandon all other thoughts than that of saving the vessel, at once cut the cords which tied him, and the mate, starting to his legs, immediately rushed to the wheel and assumed the command of the vessel.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORM.

THE storm raged; and the shattered ship, pitching and reeling under the influence of the roaring wind and raging sea, was driven with desperate speed towards a projecting promontory on the western side of the channel. The voice of the sturdy mate was heard above the shrieking of the tempest, but in vain; the terrified followers of the bushranger, unused to wage war with the elements, were utterly use

less in the extremity. It was in vain that their leader exerted himself with almost preternatural energy, and endeavored to rouse the exertions of his men: they were not sailors; and they had neither the bravery to dare, nor the skill to execute, the feats of seamanship which were necessary to give them a chance of escaping the perils of the storm.

"We shall never save the ship with these fellows," said the mate to the bushranger, the urgency of the danger drawing into momentary fellowship two minds, though belonging to different characters, of kindred courage; "if you don't let my own blue jackets free, the ship is a lost ship."

"Can I trust them?" said the bushranger, balancing the two perils in his mind, and at a loss to decide to which to give the preference.

"Trust them! You may trust them to save the ship—at least to do their best for it; every sailor will do that: as to the rest, that is another matter, and you must look out for yourself; that's fair and above-board, at any rate, Mr. — Pilot!"

Mark Brandon was not a man to give way under difficulty: with a firm mind he rapidly compared the two dangers, and, with the decision of a bold one, he determined on giving liberty to the crew. Without hesitation, he directed his men to unbatten the fore hatchway, and to release from the hold the sailors who were confined there. This was a matter by no means of easy execution; but at the expense of shipping much water it was effected, and the liberated sailors gladly jumped on deck. The bushranger directed his men to retain their arms, and endeavor to keep them from the wet to guard against a surprise; but the seamen, cheered by the voice of their officer, and in a moment conscious of the extreme danger of the vessel, thought only of their duties, and of saving themselves from shipwreck, leaving the bushrangers to keep guard as they could or as they pleased, and paying no other attention to them than to tell them to get out of their way.

It is not to be supposed that the noise of the raging wind, and the confusion caused by the fallen mast, had passed unnoticed by the parties in the cabin. The major wished to go on deck; but Louisa clung to him with so tenacious a grasp, and the uncertainty of the nature of his reception by the bushrangers was so great, that the father yielded to the entreaties of his youngest daughter, and remained below. But when he heard and recognized the familiar voices of his own sailors battling with the thunder of the storm, he ventured to raise his head above the companion ladder.

A washing of the waves drove him quickly back, at the same time that it deluged the cabin. By taking advantage of a lull, he again essayed to emerge from his place of security, and to his amazement beheld his vessel apparently in the possession of his own people, and his officer at the wheel, issuing his commands as usual, for the management of the ship. He quickly joined him, though it was with difficulty he was enabled to make good his footing.

"What chance is there," he asked, "of saving the vessel?"

"Very little; you see we are a mere wreck;

there's scarcely a rag of sail left: we are driving before the wind on that point of land that you may see yonder through the haze. Our only chance is getting a soft berth to bump on; but that chance is very small, for most of this coast seems rocky. It won't be long, however, before we shall know our fate. These rascally lubbers of bushrangers have done for the poor brig. Serve 'em right, for pretending to know how to take care of a vessel they knew nothing about. More fools they for binding with fetters those who might have saved them: and now they see what they've got by it

"Had I not better prepare the girls for what is to happen?" said the major, his mind borne down for the moment by the extent of his disaster; his gallant vessel lost, his property presently to be scattered to the waves, and his children's lives and his own in imminent peril!

"I hardly know what is best to be done," replied the sturdy seaman, almost subdued by the danger of the ship, and the thought of the women: but better let 'em stay below till the shock comes; they couldn't hold on here."

"Could the boat be of any use?" asked the major, in a sort of despair.

"It was washed overboard a quarter of an hour ago. But look at the raging sea around us! Do you think a boat could live in such a sea as that? If our own vessel—poor thing—wasn't as good a sea-boat as ever swam, it never would live in such a whirlpool as it's in now! I wonder what has become of the boat that we saw coming, before the wind caught us:—gone to the bottom, I fear, long ago."

"And the people in that boat, perhaps, were our deliverers," said the major. "Good God! that land seems fearfully close! is there no way to save ourselves?"

"Look out for a soft place," replied the mate, with a grim smile, for he knew full well that the death-struggle of the gallant little ship was at hand. "The sea refuses to keep us, so we must needs trust to the land; though I must say it doesn't look very smiling at us."

As he spoke, the impetuous winds seemed to gather up their strength for a final effort to hurl the devoted ship on the expectant rocks; but at this moment the watchful mate, as cool in the moment of danger as if the vessel was within view of the windmill at Gravesend, caught sight of a break in the cliff, forming a little creek or armlet of the sea: with a vigorous hand he directed the ship's course to the opening, and in another minute, by an instantaneous and seemingly miraculous change, the shattered brig, with a sudden turn, found itself floating on the smooth surface of a little bay sheltered from the wind and the waves. The vessel glided slowly towards a grassy bank, and, gently touching it, remained stationary.

For a brief space every man on board held his breath with joy and surprise at an escape from the horrors of shipwreck which struck them as something supernatural! But presently the consciousness of the unsafe position of either party called into fresh activity the energies of both to guard against the aggression of each other; and, before the major had time to congratulate his daughters on the extraordinary preservation of the brig, the bushranger suc-

moned his men to his side, and assumed an offensive attitude, while the seamen, hastily clutching at any materials within their reach which might serve for weapons, gathered together in a body, and stood in defiance of the threatening muskets of their opponents, and, with the stern determination of revenge depicted on their worn and hardy countenances, turned their eyes to their officer for directions in the new emergency.

At this moment a column of thick smoke, as if from damp wood newly fired, was observed to rise from the other side of a low hill bare of trees. Mark Brandon seemed struck with a sudden thought at this indication of other parties being near at hand. In his own mind he feared that the fire had been kindled by the people in the boat, who, he felt sure, were in pursuit of himself and his companions. Aware that if his conjecture was right the reports of fire-arms would quickly bring his enemies upon him, he stood before his men, and repressing their preparation to fire by a gesture of his arm, he directed his voice to the major, who was standing on one side, restrained by his promise from taking part in the threatened conflict, and filled with hope that the result would be favorable, even against the superior weapons of the bushrangers, to the injured party.

"Major," said Mark Brandon, in the clear, cool, and articulate voice for which he was so remarkable, "I see that you can keep your promise like a soldier and a man of honor; and you shall see that I will keep mine. Do you see that smoke yonder? That smoke proceeds from the body of natives on the coast—the most numerous and the most savage of all the mobs on the island! If we weaken our force by fighting with each other we shall become an easy prey to them."

"Gammon!" said the mate.

"I do not wish to be devoured by those wretches," replied the bushranger, without being in the slightest degree moved by the contemptuous expression of the mate: "nor do I suppose the major there would like to see his daughters torn limb from limb, and chucked on that fire that the black devils have kindled yonder, and eaten before his face."

"Gammon!" repeated the mate.

"That would be a fate," continued Mark, "too dreadful to contemplate. And therefore, I say, let us forget for a while our own quarrel, and join together to resist the attack of the natives."

"But we are not sure that they are natives," replied the major.

"Suppose it is the party that we saw in the boat coming after us," said the mate—"the party that you persuaded us were bushrangers or pirates, or whatever you may like to call them; then, you know, there would be no danger from them. I propose that two of us—that is, one from each side, should go and find out; and in the meantime we will agree to a truce till our messengers come back."

"Agreed!" said Mark. "I will go for one on my side, and you for one on the other."

"I can't help thinking," said the mate to the major, in a whisper, "that he is hatching some mischief or other; but he will find me wide awake."

While the mate communicated this suspicion to his commander, Mark Brandon gave some directions to his followers; and then the bushranger and the officer set out together, each keeping a wary watch on the other to prevent surprise or treachery.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BUSHRANGER'S GENEROUS CONFIDENCE IN THE MATE.

MARK BRANDON had a very disagreeable suspicion that the smoke which had been observed on the other side of the hill proceeded from the party in pursuit, who had taken advantage of one of the little creeks or inlets with which that part of the coast abounded to shelter themselves from the storm.

The fire was not likely to have been kindled by natives; for, so far as their haunts were known, they were not in the habit of making that part of the island the place of their temporary habitation, as from its exposure to the cold and boisterous winds of the south, and from the greater part of its surface being scrub and rock, kangaroos were scarce, and opossums by no means plentiful; neither was the gum which forms so large a part of the food of the natives, to be found there in sufficient quantities to make it an eligible place of encampment, as the mimosa, from which it is obtained, does not thrive in bleak and exposed situations.

The chance in his favor of its being the natives who had lighted that fire, Mark Brandon felt was so small, that nothing but his own eager desire that it might be so, could prompt him to cherish the hope. On the other hand, if it was the party in pursuit who had landed, then indeed his position was most critical and dangerous. There was the vessel lying in a basin from which it was impossible to extricate it against a contrary wind; the present storm, which still raged, might last, perhaps, for some days; and the sailors who composed the crew were at liberty, and prepared to resist any new aggression to the death.

It was true that his own men were in possession of all the fire-arms, which gave them a decided superiority; but still the struggle would be a doubtful one; and the reports of the muskets during the contest, would be sure to give information to those in pursuit of him and his followers, should it turn out as he feared, that the smoke which had been observed, proceeded from a fire made by the party in the boat; and it was not to be supposed that they would neglect to keep a good look-out in the direction where the vessel might be expected to be visible.

The bushranger revolved all these thoughts in his mind, and in vain sought for a way out of his difficulty: for once, his ingenuity was at fault; he could devise no plan of escape; he found himself in a "dead fix." But still while there was life there was hope; and he thought that if he could get rid of the sturdy mate, who strode by his side, and who, he observed, kept a close watch on him, he might have a better chance of succeeding in any ulterior operations.

The bushranger carried a double-barrel fowling-piece, strong in the stock, and the mate had

in his hand a drawn ship's-outlas. Mark measured the distance with his eye which separated the butt-end of his piece from the back of the mate's head; he calculated that he might swing the fowling-piece round by a quick and vigorous movement, and, without noise, rid himself of his inconvenient companion by a single blow. With his accustomed caution, his hands mechanically following out the thought which had suggested itself, he thought it right to remove the risk of the piece discharging itself from the shock. He stopped, therefore, for a moment on the precipitous hill which they were descending, and, opening the pans of the locks, shook out the primings and let down the hammers.

"What do you do that for?" asked the mate, surprised at the proceeding; "is that the way to be ready for the natives! Why, they may be on us before you have time to prime again."

"This is rather an awkward place to scramble down," replied Mark, with an air of polite concern, and pointing to the gulf below them; "you see, if I was to chance to have a tumble, my piece might go off, and lodge its lead where it was not intended to go—in my body, or, perhaps, in yours, friend."

"Humph!" said the mate, ejaculating a sea-grunt, which at the same time served as a vent to his own feelings, and conveyed to his companion the intimation that he was not to be gammoned by Mark's blarney about his excessive care for the mate's valuable person;—"he means something now, by that move," he said to himself; "but whatever it is he's up to he'll find me wide awake."

Shall I shoot him? thought Brandon:—no; the report of the piece would be heard by both parties—by the vessel's people, and by the soldiers; it must be done some other way; but he keeps out of my reach, as if he suspected the trick:—I must try another game.

By this time they had descended into a deep and narrow gully; looking up, they saw before them a sharp and abrupt hill to climb, interspersed here and there with low shrubs and irregular masses of pointed rocks and stones. The bushranger guessed at once the sort of country they had lighted on, which was a succession of abrupt stony hills like the huge waves of a sea suddenly petrified into solidity: an exceedingly difficult country to make progress in, either on horseback or on foot, for while the actual distance gained in a straight line, as the bird flies, is very small, the length of ground gone over is very great, and very fatiguing from the continual up and down movement, and from the annoying obstructions of the cutting fragments of sharp rock and loose stones met with at every step.

As they mounted the hill, therefore, it is not to be wondered at that the worthy seaman found the process of making way on shore, with his own legs, a much more laborious operation than making way on the water with sails and oars; and although he took advantage of his nautical experience, and made short tacks to the right and to the left of the hill, as he would have done against a contrary wind at sea, the work soon became too hard for him.

"I say, mate," he said to the bushranger, "this is going dead against a wind with a ven-

geance! now it's rattling down stream, and then it's up against tide, and whichever way it is it doesn't seem the better for my legs!—I tell you what it is, I must come to an anchor, and that's the long and the short of it:" and saying this, he plumped himself down on the softest stone he could find convenient, and proceeded to swab himself with much diligence.

"Luck's with me, after all," thought Mark, as he received this gladsome communication from the sailor, and saw him in an attitude of utter exhaustion from his exertions in the unusual exercise of walking on land; "luck's with me after all! and now is the time to disarm my very clever and very cautious friend of all suspicion by a false confidence, and then he is mine to do what I please with—at least so far as one point goes:—

"Friend," he said to the mate, "I see I was wrong to propose that you should go with me; I ought to have remembered that you were more used to make your way up the shrouds of a ship than the sides of such hills as these;—but I am used to them. However, we will not lose our object; I must see how many natives there are yonder. Come now; we have had a bout I allow; but we are comrades in this venture: if I could trust to your honor not to take advantage of my confidence, I would try to have a look at the black rascals alone—but you must be ready to stand by me."

"I'll stand by you, if that's all," said the mate; "but what do you want me to do with your 'confidence' and your 'blarney'?"

"There," said the bushranger, placing his fowling-piece in the hands of the astonished mate; "there's no blarney in that; now, if you could be dishonorable, and treacherous, and a rascal—which I know you cannot—you have me at your mercy."

"What the devil do you mean by this?" said the honest seamen, completely overpowered by an act which placed the bushranger, seemingly, completely in his power.

"What I mean is this; we are now all bound up together; unless we stand by one another we shall never be able to resist the attack of two or three hundred natives, for they have learned the way of shooting with lighted arrows, and they never show any mercy to white people.—and the food they are fondest of above everything is human flesh."

"The black villains!"

"And I don't suppose you have any particular desire to form one of the principal dishes at their supper to-night?"

"That would be no joke!"

"Now I will tell you what to do; for I shall rely on your courage and coolness, which I am sure I can do as surely as on your honor—for my own life as well as your own, and the lives of the major and his daughters depend on our activity."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"You must remain here without moving, and especially without making the least noise till I return."

"And how long shall you be away?"

"We shall see: I will get as near to the natives as I can on my hands and knees, and try to find out what they are doing. If they are going away, we have only to lie close and wait

for their departure. But if they are waiting for the wreck of the vessel, I must find out their numbers, and then we must prepare for the worst."

"Well—let them come; I don't much mind them; only let me be on board the brig, and then we will astonish them, perhaps, with something they don't expect."

"But if they discover me, I shall have to make a run of it; and in that case I must depend on finding you here, and then we must fight our way back to the ship as well as we can."

"Well I'm your man as far as the fighting goes; but as to making a run of it, that's out of my line."

"Then I trust I may depend on you," added the bushranger; "that you will neither move nor make the least noise to betray yourself till I return."

"Never fear," replied the mate; "I never betrayed any man yet, and never will; you have placed confidence in me, by giving me your gun; let you be bushranger or what not, you are safe with me as long as the bargain lasts—as long as the bargain lasts, mind, no longer."

"Good," replied the bushranger; "and now I go on my errand;" and mounting the hill with a vigorous step he passed over the top and presently disappeared from view.

"And now," thought Mark Brandon, as he sat down on the brow of the hill behind a low shrub, and examined the charge and priming of the pistols which he carried—"what's to be done next? I have secured the mate: if he had insisted on going on instead of being so well inclined to sit still, it would have been impossible to prevent him from discovering that instead of the smoke proceeding from a party of natives eager to devour us, it has been lighted, as I strongly suspect, by the very party sent to assist the vessel, and to capture me and my companions! But, luckily, he is knocked up; I thought his sea legs would never carry him far over these hills. Now my game is clear before me; I must keep the major and his people close, and especially this troublesome fellow of a mate, by making them believe that the natives are coming down on them every minute; that will keep them quiet. Shall I get rid of the whole lot? I might do it perhaps, but there would be too much murder in it; and besides, I fear I could never get the vessel out of that basin and through the narrow opening, which is not much wider than to allow it to pass through, without the assistance of the mate and his sailors; my fellows could never do it. And that vessel is my only chance of escape from wretchedness and bondage! To be sure I might take to the bush, for we have plenty of arms, and we might contrive to make a plant of provisions and necessaries. But what is the use of wandering about in the bush? Of all lives that is the most wretched! To be exposed to betrayal from one another every day and every hour, waking or sleeping! No! that existence is not worth having. Or to be alone—exposed to all the horrors of the terrible solitude of the bush, with every man's hand against you, without friend or companion. No—that is a life of melancholy madness! The

brig—the brig's the thing! At all hazards, and cost what lives it may, she must be secured! But first I must assure myself to a certainty from what source that suspicious smoke proceeds."

With such thoughts half muttered, and taking advantage of all the inequalities of the ground which would enable him to see without being seen, the bushranger proceeded rapidly, but warily, on his stealthy way.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. SILLIMAN DANCES "THE POLKA" WITH A KANGAROO.

SNAKELIKE and with tortuous windings, keeping a sharp look-out in his hazardous course, and stopping from time to time to catch any sound that might betray his proximity to his enemies, the bushranger edged his way to the top of a sheltered height, from which he could command a view of the valley below.

At a glance, he found his suspicions confirmed; he distinguished the red coats of the soldiers, and the peculiar dress and air of the constables. He counted nine; and in one of them he had no difficulty in recognizing the hated person of one of the most active and intelligent officers of the colony, well known for his activity and courage, and one usually selected by the government authorities for the pursuit of runaway convicts in the bush. Mark knew him well, for on more than one occasion he had come into personal collision with him; and he ground his teeth, and clutched the shrub by which he was holding, as he looked down at his old enemy, who, like a pertinacious bloodhound, was on his track.

The party sat listlessly about the fire, and seemed, as he thought, to be waiting for information to be brought by some scout, for they frequently looked in the direction of the south; but the storm, which still raged violently, although it had ceased to rain, was a sufficient reason why they should remain under shelter for a time; and the bushranger judged that as they would be too prudent to divide their strength, they would remain where they were till the lulling of the waters should allow them to put to sea in their boat. He descended from his post of observation and set out on his return to the spot where he had left the mate.

He saw at once that the game to be played was to delay any outbreak on board till the pursuing party, missing the vessel, and supposing it to have escaped to sea, should return home and report their failure; but this was a difficult task to accomplish. The fears of the major for the safety of his daughters, and the determination of the mate and of the incensed sailors to resist further violence, were fairly aroused; and he felt that anything to be done could be effected only by the most consummate address and stratagem.

The first thing, however, was to make the major and his crew believe that the natives were likely to be on them in force, and so to induce them, for the sake of the common safety, to act together, and to postpone their hostile intentions of retaliation till a safe opportunity. In this scheme accident favored the bushranger in a way that he least expected.

The romantic Mr. Silliman found his spirit considerably damped by the supplemental wetting which he got in the boat before it was sheltered from the broken seas, at the entrance of the channel, but it was with a tolerably heroic air that he stepped on shore, and placed his feet on the land of his adoption. The novelty of his sensations excited him to deliver his sentiments to the company on the occasion, and he was about to hail the land of Van Diemen in a short and neat speech, and had lifted up his leg, in his enthusiasm, to assist his arm in an appropriate flourish, when he was hailed by the constable:—

"Hold hard, sir! don't put your foot down yet: keep still, and keep your leg up; hold it up a little longer. There! it's going quietly away now."

"What is it?" exclaimed the alarmed Jeremiah, with his arms outstretched, and with one foot in the air, in an attitude which, however becoming it might be in assisting a sudden burst of oratory, was both embarrassing and ludicrous when continued beyond its appropriate purpose; "what is it? what's the matter?"

"Only a black snake," said the constable, quietly; "I thought it would have been at you, for you are standing right in the way of its path, and a bite from a black snake is an ugly affair, I can tell you."

"A man of ours was bit by one of those ugly reptiles," said the corporal, "up at Sidney, in the bush there; and in a few hours his body was as black as your hat, and so gone that you could scarce distinguish his features. They're nasty creatures those black snakes! the diamond ones they say are as bad, but at any rate they are not so bad-looking. Take care, sir, where you sit," he added to Mr. Silliman, who was about to seat himself on a low piece of stone convenient for the purpose; "those stones are sometimes full of scorpions."

"Scorpions!" cried out Jerry, who had an unspeakable horror of that mysterious reptile which he had never seen except in a bottle of spirits, and of whose powers and venomous disposition he had the greatest dread: "are there scorpions in this country?"

"Lots! You can hardly sit down in the bush without getting into the midst of them. Just pull up that stone and you'll soon see if you have lighted on a family."

With the assistance of a stake which was near him, Jerry presently upheaved the block of stone on which he had unwarily seated himself, and to his infinite dismay, beheld some scores of those lively indigenes of the country, who, considerably disturbed by the unceremonious uplifting of their habitation, scudded to and fro with their abominable tails curled over their backs, and eyeing their enemy, as Jerry thought, most viciously.

"Upon my word, this is a nice party to come among, and a pleasant reception do I have in this new country! I think I had better remove farther off."

"They are nasty disagreeable things those scorpions," said the constable, "in the bush especially; and it's wonderful what quantities there are of them in the country; but they are seldom large, at least those that I have seen; I never saw one bigger than a good-sized blue-

bottle, and I never heard of their doing any body any harm, except stinging them a little. They're not near so bad as the tarantula spiders; those creatures really are ugly beasts, and venomous too."

"How big are they?" asked Jerry, by no means gratified at this enumeration of the inhabitants of the paradise which he had promised to himself: "anything like the spiders at home?"

"Lord love you! Spiders at home! why the spiders at home are nothing to the spiders here; the tarantula is something like a spider! There," said the constable, spreading out the fingers of his brawny hand on a bit of ground bare of grass—"There, suppose a greenish body as big as a chestnut, with hairy legs reaching out as far as my fingers—that's a tarantula spider!"

"How very disgusting! And pray what do the creatures live on?"

"Oh! all sorts of insects; they do say that they will sometimes catch small birds: but I can't say I ever saw them do it. You generally find them living together like man and wife, under a stone, where they make themselves a chamber; and they grow monstrous big sometimes. I have often seen them on the blue gum trees, so I suppose they find food on them to their liking. It's a remarkable fact," continued the constable, who was fond of showing his knowledge of colonial customs and productions, "that the tarantula spider will always drop on your face if it has the opportunity; I have often thought why it was, but I never could make out the reason; may be the white man's face resembles some surface where they catch their food; some think that it's the motion of the eyelashes that attracts them; but whatever it may be, they do it, that's all I know. I declare—if there isn't one of them just above your head, on that dead branch, just going to make a drop on you!"

As he spoke one of the spiders so described and vituperized, as if in retaliation of the abuse which had been so copiously lavished on its species, and invited perhaps by the temptation of the broad round cheeks of Mr. Silliman, who was lying on his back in a position of luxurious repose, dropped slap on his face, and embracing it with its long hairy legs presented an admirable specimen for the cabinet of a naturalist. But the thoughts of the terrified Jeremiah were by no means inclined to take that scientific direction. On the contrary, he roared out most lustily, as he hastily brushed the creature from his face, and regained his legs with almost unexampled activity.

In truth, the afflicted Jerry was almost at his wits' end with his succession of misadventures;—he had been chucked into the sea; rubbed into life again by the medium of salt-junk; assailed by snakes; infested with scorpions; and now was pitched on by an ugly tarantula for his feeding-ground!

"What's coming next?" he cried out, "I can neither sit, nor stand, nor lie, but something attacks me! I shall be driven out of the island!"

"I have observed that before," said the constable; "those spiders have a fancy to drop on the face; I suppose it resembles something they are used to feed on."

"Much obliged to you," said Jerry, as he pinned a pointed stick through the bloated body of the spider, whose size and ugly appearance fully answered the description of the constable; "but I'll thank you not to make a meal of any part of my precious features. I'll put an end to your fun at any rate," he continued, smashing his enemy up with the stick; "and now," he ejaculated disconsolately, "what to do I don't know! for stand or sit where I will, it seems I am sure to put my foot in some mess or other. Would there be any harm," he asked, "in taking a look over that hill yonder! Any natives about here?"

"Oh! there are no natives on this side of the island," said the constable; "they like to be where there are plenty of trees for the opossums and grass for the kangaroos. You can take a spell over the hill if you like; go straight on and keep us in sight; there's no fear of the natives so far down as this, they seldom come to the coast at this end; but don't go far away, or you may lose yourself; a stranger soon loses himself in the bush in this country."

"Who will go with me?" asked Jerry; but the men were exhausted with pulling at the oar, and no one was inclined to accompany him; the adventurous Jerry therefore was obliged to go alone. "I shall know my way back," he said, "by the smoke of our fire;" and so saying, he ascended the hill to get a view of the country, and was disappointed to find that he could see nothing but another hill before him.

He descended, however, to the bottom, and found himself in a deep gulley or cleft between the hills. He had already received considerable alarm from a horrible-looking animal poking his nose out at him from a thicket: the animal was quite black, of the size of a little pig, rough and of ferocious aspect, popularly known in the colony by the name of a "devil," that being the most appropriate appellation which could be hit on in a hurry to convey the combined idea of its savageness and ugliness.

In trying to avoid it, Jerry stumbled over a wombat, a creature about as big as a badger, and considered good eating by the natives. The cry of terror which he uttered scared them both away, but he began to repent him of his adventurous expedition.

Winding his way to the right, he came to an open space of green grass clear of brush and stones, and to his inexpressible delight beheld a living specimen of the animal whose likeness he had often gazed on in books with wonder and admiration—a real, live kangaroo!

It happened that on this occasion he had fallen in with a male of the largest species, known popularly in the colony as a "boamah." The animal stood nearly six feet high on his haunches, and was feeding with much relish on the young sweet grass. As it hopped leisurely and lazily to a fresh place, Jerry had the opportunity of admiring the length and thickness of its immense tail, which protruded in a straight line from behind, forming a triangle with its two legs, and affording a firm support to its body as it sat upright.

Struck with the size and beauty of the creature, the enterprising Jerry was seized with

an irresistible desire to appropriate the magnificent piece of venison to himself; and having read that the kangaroo is a timorous beast, he thought he should have no difficulty in becoming master of its person, if he could only get close enough to the animal to give it a knock on the head. Had he been near enough to observe the principal claw on the kangaroo's hind legs, about five inches long, as hard as an iron spike and tolerably sharp at the point, he might have paused in his valorous design; but as this weapon of offence and defence was unknown to him, he had no idea that there could be any danger in a personal encounter with a kangaroo.

Armed with a stout stick, therefore, he advanced, slowly and cautiously, endeavoring to reach the animal from behind in order not to give it the alarm, and calculating that one smart blow on the head would stun the creature, so as to render it an easy prey. In this way he approached within ten yards of the boamah, when suddenly raising its head from the grass the creature turned round and sat up on its haunches, gazing on Jerry as it seemed with not less curiosity than Jerry gazed on the kangaroo.

Whether it was that it mistook the adventurous cockney for one of its own species, or that it was desirous on its own part to investigate the new specimen in natural history which Jerry's person presented, the creature was apparently desirous to make acquaintance with the strange animal, and making a little hop it alighted close to its new friend.

Astonished at this unexpected familiarity, and catching a sight of the middle claws of his hind legs as the kangaroo made his fraternal approach, Jerry made a corresponding hop backwards.

Confirmed in his opinion of relationship by the dexterity with which Jerry executed this movement, the boamah wagged his great tail and made another advance, which was met with a similar movement backwards on the part of Jerry, and in this way they performed a circle round the green sward, much to the amusement, it is to be presumed, of the kangaroo, but by no means satisfactorily to Jerry.

Far from being gratified with the performance of this "Kangaroo" Polka, he was, on the contrary, very angry to find himself chasséed in so peremptory a manner. Watching his opportunity, therefore, he raised his stick and dealt his partner a blow on the head which made the kangaroo shake it with visible dissatisfaction; but incensed, it seemed, to meet with so ungracious a return for his acts of courtesy, the huge boamah made a bound to Jerry, and embracing him with his fore paws was about to apply his terrible claw in the way in which those animals rip up in a moment the strongest dogs, when Jerry set up so fearful a cry, that the creature, after making a few hops with him in his paws, let him go with affright; and Jerry, rejoiced to be released from the formidable hug of his new friend, without looking behind him, and expecting every moment to feel the kangaroo's great toe at his back, rushed down the hill and tumbled over head and heels to the bottom.

Opening his mouth to give vent to a great

breath, and his eyes to look about him, he suddenly found the barrel of a horse-pistol thrust into the former, and with the latter he beheld, to his horror and amazement, the features of the bushranger! who, not less surprised to behold the man who had been tossed overboard, but more practised in concealing his emotions, intimated to Mr. Silliman in a calm, distinct voice, whose tones were suitable to the politest and most agreeable announcement:

"If you move or make the least noise, I'll blow your brains out!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EXTEMPORE NATIVE.

WHATEVER inclination the unfortunate Jerry might have had to indulge in exclamation or remonstrance was effectually checked by the proximity of the horse-pistol; nor could he fail to observe that it was on the full-cock, and that the finger of the bushranger was on the trigger!

If the reflections which he hastily made during his transit from the deck of the brig were grave, those that he made on the present occasion were of a cast still more serious, inasmuch as the danger was greater and more imminent; for he felt that the slightest movement or shock, either on his own part or on that of his enemy, would cause the contents of the pistol to be discharged into the innermost recesses of his brain.

He took especial care, therefore, to keep perfectly still, with his eyes wide open and fixed in extended horror on the bushranger, but mentally vowing, with all his might, that if ever it should be his infinite good fortune again to get within sound of the bells in Cheapside, he would take most particular care to keep within hearing of them for ever afterwards!

"Hold up your arms," said the bushranger, after he had contemplated for a brief space the excessive terror of his victim.

Jerry held up his arms.

"If I take the pistol from your mouth will you promise to be quiet?"

Jerry made the best signs he could to signify his entire concurrence with that proposition.

"Be still then," said the bushranger, "while I empty your pockets."

The operation was completed to the bushranger's satisfaction, but nothing appeared to cause particular observation.

"Now," said Mark, who had suddenly conceived what he thought a novel and bright idea, "strip!"

"Strip?" said Jerry; "what take my clothes off?"

"All," said the bushranger.

"I shall be so cold," Jerry ventured to remonstrate.

"Strip!" repeated the bushranger, recocking the pistol.

Jerry looked behind him, and before him, and around him; but there was no help nigh; he was entirely in the bushranger's power. He took off his blue jacket; and then his waistcoat; and then he paused.

"Breeches next," said Mark, with a fierce air.

"What are you going to do with me?" said Jerry, in a lamentable tone; for he began to apprehend that the bushranger had a design to turn him naked into the bush, and visions of snakes, and scorpions, and tarantula spiders rose before him!

"Off with them!"

"I shall be bit to death," said Jerry.

"Quick," said the bushranger, presenting the pistol.

"Well, you needn't be in such a hurry; there—I suppose that will do now."

"Stockings and shoes off."

"But my feet will be cut to pieces on these horrid rocks; and I shall catch cold. Gracious heaven! was ever man so treated before! There—I hope that's all," said poor Jerry, as his shirt fluttered in the breeze.

"For the present; now pack up your clothes in a bundle."

Jerry did as he was bid.

"Now march on to that little pool of water that you see yonder."

What, in the name of all that's extraordinary, is the man going to do with me? thought Jerry, as he marched on before with his bundle, with the bushranger behind, his eternal pistol touching his back occasionally, as if to remind him to be on his good behavior. They found, as the bushranger expected, a particular sort of black mud, which he considered would be well suited to his purpose; on his way he had picked up several pieces of soft red ochre, which he placed to soak at the edge of the pool.

What's the meaning of all this? thought Jerry; is the bushranger a madman after all?

"You see that nice black mud," said Mark.

"Yes, I see it," said Jerry.

"Now let me see how soon you can make a native of yourself; you will smear yourself all over with that paint; and be quick about it; for I am rather in a hurry, and if I can't finish the business this way," he added, "I shall be obliged to finish it in another," tapping the barrel of his pistol with his finger.

"This is downright brutality to make me dirty myself all over in that way! Heavens! what a figure I am making myself!"

"You mistake," said the bushranger, sarcastically, and with a Mephistophelian smile; "unencumbered and undisguised with artificial vestments you have now recovered the natural dignity of man; and, by plastering your body all over with that mud, you will defend it from the attacks of numerous insects which would otherwise annoy you. Stay, I will just finish you up a bit, and then I think you will do."

Saying this, he hastily made him a wig of long grass, which he stuck on his head, and availing himself of the red ochre, which was now in the condition of a convenient pigment, he flourished two round red patches on either cheek, and made sundry daubs with it on Jerry's chest and legs.

"And now," he said, "you look really like a child of nature, and the natives themselves would take you for a brother; there is only one other little thing to do; excuse me, but it must be done, because, you are aware, we never give away a chance;—yes—I must gag you, I must indeed; but I won't hurt you, if you will be quiet. There, that will do nicely."

and now you may come along and finish the next part of your performance."

The bushranger looked about, and presently, spying what he wanted, he cut from the other side of the pool three long slender sticks resembling the spears of the natives, which he placed in Jerry's hands, and desired him to shake them menacingly when he gave directions, threatening him with instant death if he disobeyed his injunctions in the slightest point. In this way he led him by a convenient route, carefully avoiding the place where he had left the mate, to a spot in view of the vessel, where he desired him to remain, for the greater security binding his hands together; and then he sought the mate with all expedition, and led him back to the vessel.

"Well," said the mate, "what have you seen? any natives?"

"Three hundred at the very least; the most ferocious mob I ever set eyes on! They are aware, I am sure, that the vessel has been driven into the bay yonder, and that we are few in number, for the women are preparing their weapons, and the men are dancing their war-dance; we shall have them down upon us before night. We must lose no time in regaining the brig and putting her in a state of defence."

"The devil! Then we must make a fight of it. What's that?" said the seaman, after they had proceeded some distance, when he turned round to see what was in his wake; "what's that?" pointing to the spot where the bushranger had left Jerry, who now became visible.

"That's one of their scouts; they have sent him on, I have no doubt, to watch us; but I'll be bound they are placed all round us, only their bodies being black, you can't distinguish them from the charred stumps of the trees."

"Are those spears that he has got in his hands, shaking that way?"

"Yes; spears curiously tipped with sharp pieces of flint; they can hurl them to a great distance, and when the natives are in numbers they become formidable weapons, to say nothing of their waddies and their womeras."

"Waddies! What are they?"

"They are short thick clubs about four feet long, made of hard wood, with which they batter in your skull by repeated blows; but the womera is the worst weapon."

"What's a womera?"

"It's a semicircular piece of hard wood shaped in the form of an elongated crescent, with a sharp edge inside; the natives have the knack of throwing it with a peculiar sleight of hand difficult to be described, and they can bring down with it an emu or a kangaroo, or a man in their fights; and the curiosity of the weapon is, that if it misses the object at which it is cast, its revolving motion in the air causes it to return to the same spot nearly from whence it was thrown. I have stood by a Sydney native who has hurled it at an angle of about forty-five degrees almost out of sight, and I have had to jump aside pretty quickly to avoid being struck with it on its return to the spot it was thrown from."

"Very curious, indeed! but here's the vessel, thank Heaven! And now we will put her

in fighting trim. If we must have a bout with these natives, we'll teach 'em a thing or two before we have done with 'em."

Expectation was eager on board to hear the information of the explorers, but the sight of the supposed native had so taken possession of the mate's mind, and he was so full of his plans for the coming fight, that he relieved the bushranger of all trouble to coin more lies to deceive the major and the rest of the crew as to the hostile intentions of the savages. And the ship's glass having been directed to the spot in the distance where Jerry had been judiciously posted by Mark Brandon to serve as a conspicuous object to corroborate his story of the natives, they beheld that much-abused individual in all the glory of black mud and red ochre, performing the part of a native to the bushranger's admiration, and brandishing his spears and stamping about in the cold with a vigor and a ferocity of manner calculated to inspire awe in the beholders!

But there was one thing which Mark, astute as he was, had overlooked in his proceedings. He had forgotten that in the same way that the person of Jerry disguised as a native was visible to those on board, so was the brig visible to Jerry. Indeed, no sooner did Jerry catch sight of the vessel in the bay than he almost jumped out of his skin in the excess of his delight, and in his endeavor to give intimation to those on board of his own identity, but as he did not know how near the dreaded bushranger might be to him, he was afraid for a long time to move from his position. But he endeavored to make up for that self-denial by the most frantic antics and gestures, which served only to confirm those on board the vessel, who were watching him through the ship's glass, in their opinion of the ferocious and cannibalistic intentions of him and his blood-thirsty companions.

Mark Brandon, however, was presently struck with the fault which he had committed in making known to Jerry the fact of the safety and of the position of the vessel. He announced, therefore, to those on board, who were industriously putting the brig in a state of defence, that he would go on shore again and endeavor to ascertain further information of the movements of the natives, an offer which was highly applauded by the mate, and cordially approved by the major, who were almost led to forget the bushranger's duplicity and violence in his laudable anxiety to preserve the women from the threatened attack. Besides, the honest mate's heart had been quite won by the bushranger's confidence in placing his gun in his hands:—

"Let bygones be bygones," he said; "after all, it was natural for the man to wish to escape from the country where he was a convict and a slave; and if he is ready now to stand by us, and fight against the natives like an honest man, why his help is as good as another's."

It was not without some anxiety, however, that Mark proceeded in the direction of the spot where he had left his prisoner; and when he arrived there he found his fears confirmed, for nothing was left of Jerry and his accoutrements but two of the spears, and the cord with which the bushranger had bound him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE.

JERRY's first impulse was to rush down to the vessel, and take his chance of the reception he might meet with, as anything was better than to be stuck up on a height, and made to perform a pantomime in which he was the chief and only performer; but the fear of encountering the bushranger and his associates, with a lively remembrance of the very unceremonious manner in which he had been pitched overboard on a former occasion, added to his modest disinclination to appear before the young ladies in a character as novel as it was unbecoming, decided him against that course, and he determined, bound as he was, to endeavor to find his way back to his companions in the boat.

By dint of great exertion, and of convulsions of wriggling, he contrived to extricate his arms from their confinement, and was about to resume his clothes, which lay in a bundle at his feet; but catching sight of the bushranger at that moment in the hollow, who was hastening to rectify the blunder which he had made in allowing his prisoner to get sight of the vessel, he snatched up his bundle, and, with a celerity which would have done credit to a real native, he darted off in the direction of the hill, which he had marked as overtopping the spot where the soldiers and constables, with the boat, had taken shelter.

Mark had no sooner ascertained the flight of his prisoner than he guessed his course, and felt all the danger which would result from the information which he would give of the safety of the vessel, and of its position in the bay. Without hesitating a moment, he followed in the direction which he judged Jerry would take; and as he was more used to keep a straight line among the undulating hills than the pursued, it was not long before he caught sight of Jerry, with his shirt tails streaming in the wind, making vigorous attempts to surmount the hill which overhung the inlet where the boat of his companions lay sheltered.

The bushranger was strongly tempted to put an end to the embarrassment in a summary manner. He put his piece to his shoulder, and covered the unfortunate Jerry with a deadly aim; but at this moment the form of another person arose over the crest of the hill, who, although visible to the bushranger, was unseen by Jerry.

The man came over the top of the hill in the direction in which Jerry was advancing; when, to his amazement, beholding the figure of what he supposed to be a native in a state of active aggression rushing on him with a spear in his hand, he hastily fired off his musket, and, immediately turning tail, made the best of his way back, followed by Jerry, who, out of breath and unable to articulate connected words, screeched and screamed unearthly sounds, which only made the terrified man scramble on the faster.

In this way they dashed into the constable's temporary encampment; when Jerry, overjoyed and exhausted, threw himself on the ground, where he was immediately seized and held fast.

The soldiers, meanwhile, held their muskets ready to repel what they conjectured to be an

attack from the natives, although the mode of its commencement seemed contrary to all the rules of war, native or foreign. But by this time Jerry had been raised up: joining his hands together, and looking up towards the sky, he uttered a pious ejaculation:—

"Thank God!"

"Why, man, what has happened to you?" said the constable, who, notwithstanding the black mud and red ochre, had no difficulty in recognizing the podgy person of the corpulent Mr. Silliman; "what on earth has induced you to disguise yourself this fashion?"

"It wasn't me," sighed out Jerry, "it was the bushranger!"

"The bushranger! What, Mark Brandon?"

"The very same! He's here, and there, and everywhere! I was trying to catch a kangaroo, when somehow the plaguy beast caught hold of me, and I tumbled down the hill, and when I got to the bottom, who should there be waiting for me but that confounded bushranger, and the moment I opened my mouth to speak, he clapped a pistol in it, and there I was hard and fast."

"How is this?" said the corporal; "Mark Brandon was on board the vessel, and now you say he is on shore—are you quite sure it is the same man?"

"Sure! There can be no mistake about that; whoever has been in his clutches once, will be sure to know him again! He set me on the top of a height, and there I saw the brig safe and sound in a little bay, surrounded by hills just like a basin."

"The brig near us!" exclaimed the constable in surprise; "well, that's a bit of luck I didn't expect. We must look about us, corporal, and be alive; we shall have work to do before night now."

"Yes," continued Jerry, "there was the brig; and with a glass they could have seen me, if they had looked that way; and that rascal, Mark, made me jump and caper about like a native—but what for, I'm sure, I don't know; I only know it was extremely disagreeable."

"I have it," said the constable, after a few moments' reflection. "Mark never does any thing without a reason. Depend upon it that, by some means or other, Mark has discovered that we are here; and his object has been to keep the crew close, and to persuade them that the natives will attack them; and he made this little gentleman paint himself up for that very purpose, and placed him in view of the vessel to make those on board believe that the natives really were near them. Now, corporal, we have no time to lose; we must get on board that vessel, somehow, before a change of wind will allow it to leave the bay and put to sea. What is your sentry making motions at, and pointing up channel as if he saw something? Go and see," he said to the other constable. "It can't be the bushrangers coming down on us; look to your arms, my men—let us be ready. Corporal, you had better take the command when it comes to fighting: I am used to the bush, and to the ways of the bushrangers; but, when it comes to the scratch, I am under your orders, you know. Every man to his trade, say I."

The constable's messenger quickly returned

with the tidings that another boat was coming down the channel along the coast, and would presently be near the entrance of the creek.

He had scarcely delivered his message, when a large boat shot round and entered the inlet, containing a sergeant's guard, under the command of an ensign, who had been dispatched by the government authorities, in consequence of the suspicious movements of the brig, which had been telegraphed to head-quarters. They brought the information, also, that a large body of convicts, supposed to be thirty in number, had escaped in the same direction as Mark Brandon; and it was feared that if they were able to join him they would become, under his leadership, a formidable body, and requiring the additional aid which was sent to the constable's assistance.

The ensign, on whom now devolved the command of the party, proceeded to make the necessary inquiries for his guidance, in which Mr. Silliman became an important person, as he alone had been a witness of the acts of the bushrangers. The ensign proceeded to interrogate him with military precision.

"How many of the bushrangers are there?"

"Six," replied Mr. Silliman, "besides Mark Brandon; but he is as good as a dozen himself."

"That's seven. Now, how many are the crew and passengers on board the brig?"

"There are nine sailors," replied Mr. Silliman, "and the mate, and me—no, I'm here—that's ten men; and the steward and the boy—that's twelve; and the major and his two daughters—that's fifteen in all. If I was there it would be sixteen."

"The major! Major who?"

"Oh! I forgot; Major Horton and his two daughters."

"Major Horton!"

"Yes, Major Horton."

"And his two daughters, did you say?"

"Yes. Helen is the elder one, and Louisa the other."

"Helen Horton!" exclaimed the ensign, not able to restrain his surprise; "how very extraordinary! And pray," said he, in a tone in which might be observed a little vexation, "have you come in the same vessel with them from England?"

"To be sure I did. I gave the major a hundred guineas for my passage, and paid the money down before I left the river; and the only thing I bargained for was, that there should be lots of bottled porter; the cigars I found myself."

"Major Horton, with Helen and Louisa!" repeated the ensign; "what a singular circumstance. Those rascals have not ill-treated them!" he asked, suddenly turning to Mr. Silliman; "if they have insulted them by word or look I will show them no mercy, so far as depends on me."

"Oh! Mr. Brandon is quite the gentleman," replied Jerry. "He just chucks you into the sea, or knocks you down with the butt-end of a musket, or makes a native of you, but it's all done in the politest way in the world! It's impossible to complain of him, and I wish I had him, with his neck just under my two thumbs; if I didn't give him such a squeeze as

he would remember all the days of his life, my name's not Jeremiah Silliman, that's all."

Mr. Trevor, who held a commission in the regiment, a division of which had lately arrived in Van Diemen's Land, was a young man about two-and-twenty years of age, who had entered the army from an enthusiastic predilection for a military life. He had eagerly embraced the opportunity of going out to Australia, as he considered that those new and unexplored regions presented a new field of adventure, untrodden by the foot of the vulgar traveler, and likely to furnish scenes of romantic adventure, in which his spirit of enterprise might find opportunity for exercise. He had met Helen Horton about two years before at a foreign watering-place, where he had been captivated by her beauty, and had been powerfully struck with a character of mind which, in its courage and independence, was similar to his own. Circumstances had separated them at the time; but the impression which Helen had made on him was too powerful to be forgotten, and he had taken much pains to trace out the place of her abode, in England and abroad, but without success.

To meet with her again, after his vain search for her in Europe, struck him as the most romantic coincidence in his life; and it added not a little to his zeal in recovering the vessel, and in capturing the marauders, to think that he should at the same time do a most important service to one whom he now regarded as reserved, by a propitious destiny, to enable him to show to the world a gallantry and courage, for the exercise of which he had never yet found an appropriate occasion. Full of ardor, therefore, for the enterprise, and bearing in mind the possibility of the thirty additional prisoners having joined Mark Brandon's party, he lost no time in consulting with the constable, who was an experienced hand in the bush, as to the best means of regaining possession of the vessel.

The shades of evening were now fast drawing in, but as the nature of the business was pressing, and as it was possible for the brig, by a sudden turn of wind, to be carried out of the bay by the bushrangers who were supposed to have possession of her, he decided on making an immediate attempt to recover her, and at any rate to establish his party in a position commanding the outlet of the bay.

As the wind and sea were too rough and high to allow of their making progress in the boats, it was resolved that a sufficient guard should be left for their protection, and that the ensign, with the soldiers under his command, with the addition of the constables as guides and assistants, should proceed at once to a convenient spot in the vicinity of the bay, and then to act according to circumstances.

They moved on accordingly, guided by Jerry and one of the constables; but as the darkness increased, and as the country was difficult, interspersed with loose rocks, and intersected continually with deep ravines embarrassing to cross, and as they were obliged to be cautious to avoid a disgraceful surprise, their progress was necessarily slow.

In the mean time Mark Brandon had not been idle. He had viewed from a convenient ambush the whole proceedings of the pursuing

party—the arrival of the reinforcement, and the arrangements which he partly saw and partly guessed for the advance of the military. But as night was approaching, he judged that no attempt would be made in the dark to recover possession of the brig; and he calculated, therefore, that he had eight hours before him to form his own plans, and make his own preparations.

But at this point his ingenuity was for a time at a loss. He had fully succeeded in impressing on the fears of the crew, that an attack from the natives was to be apprehended—a delusion in which he had been materially assisted by the admirable acting, unconscious though that individual was of his pantomimic talents, of the excited Jerry; but the time was now come when some other scheme must be contrived, either to put off the threatened attack of the soldiers, or to repel it successfully when made. Any attempt to persuade the major and the mate that it was an attack of bushrangers he felt would be idle, as, at the first appearance of the rescuing body, and especially of the red coats of the soldiers, they would be aware that it was a party sent to their succor, and they would be prepared to assist in their own liberation. Could he contrive to get the mate and the major again in his power with the crew, and then, by keeping the vessel in the middle of the bay, which was of an oval shape, and about two miles across in its broadest part, fight it out with the parties on shore, and trust to chance for the favorable opportunity of a change of wind to run the vessel out to sea?

That was a bold thought; but it was the best plan, if it could be done. But how to do it, with the major and his chief officer on their guard, and the crew ready to resist! Still it was his only chance of escape from the colony, and a life in the bush was both hazardous and unprofitable. Such an opportunity might never occur again; the vessel was small and handy; he had possession of her; she was ready for sea, for under the directions of the mate her deck had been already disencumbered of the main-top-mast, which had been shattered in the gale, and the vessel had been put in as good trim as circumstances allowed. If he could once get to sea he could repair damages, he considered, at his leisure; and as to any boats which might be sent in pursuit, he had no fear of being able either to distance them, or to beat them off.

He determined, therefore, on the bold plan; and he immediately bent his thoughts to effect its execution, before daylight and the knowledge of the proximity of their friends should give the major and his party the advantage. As he revolved these thoughts he arrived at the edge of the bank to which the vessel was moored, and stepping on board, hastily gave directions for moving the vessel into the centre of the bay.

"I have been watching the natives," he said, "and they are preparing for a night attack; our best plan therefore is to remove the vessel out of the reach of their spears and arrows."

"I have no great fear of their spears and arrows," said the mate; "there are enough of us, I think, to stand any attack that the natives can make on us; but there's no harm in moving the

brig to the middle of the bay, if you can keep her there. You see there are little eddies and currents of wind flying all round us under these hills, and there's no knowing where a puff may come from; and it's getting darkish, and we don't know what rock or shoal we may light on in this outlandish place. But do as you please, there's no harm in being safe, at any rate. I only wish the wind would change, and then we might get out of this trap; though it has proved a lucky trap for us, for the matter of that. I thought it was all over with the poor brig just before she shot into that opening yonder! But let us thank God for our luck, and keep our eyes open for what's to come next. Your friends there don't look very sociable," he continued, pointing to the six bushrangers, who, with their muskets in their hands, stood ranged in a line on the larboard side of the quarter-deck, while the sailors, unarmed, were congregated together in the fore-part of the vessel: "is this to be the game all night?"

"Sorry to hurt your feelings," said Mark Brandon, "but you know it's a truce at present; but my people feel more easy in their minds that way; no offence meant, however."

"Well," replied the mate; "but that's not the way to make other people feel easy in their minds, to have loaded muskets cocked at them that fashion, all night; it's not very polite to the ladies—mister—mister pilot!"

"Perhaps the ladies might prefer to go on shore," replied Mark.

"But who are to protect them from the natives?"

"Take your own crew to protect them, if you will, while I take care of the ship."

"But our sailors have no arms."

"Let them take arms," said Mark; "you see, Mr. Northland, I am inclined to trust you, though you will not trust me."

"Eh!" exclaimed the mate, a sudden and, as he flattered himself, a brilliant thought occurring to him; "and you say you will let us take arms on shore with us!"

"To be sure I will, to protect the ladies."

The mate immediately dived down to the major, who was in the cabin with his daughters, and proposed to him to accept the bushranger's offer.

"But that would be abandoning the vessel to the bushrangers," suggested the major.

"No matter," said the mate; "they cannot get the vessel through the narrow entrance of the bay without our help; those fellows could never do it, so that we should have them at our mercy; besides, what can we do on board? They have possession of the arms, and if it came to a struggle, although we might make a fight of it, we could scarcely expect to get the better of them. But with arms in our hands, although outside the vessel, we might do something; besides, we should fight together, and without being embarrassed with the fear of the women being hurt. Only let us get arms in our hands, and trust to fortune for the rest."

"But the natives!"

"We must do as well as we can with them; besides, I can't help having a suspicion that there is some sham about this threatened attack of the natives. I never read nor heard of such a large body of natives collecting together, and

this is the first I have heard of their bows and arrows."

"But we saw one of their scouts on the height," said the major, "shaking his spears at us; he was a most ferocious-looking monster, though it struck me he was shorter and fatter than the natives are represented to be in the books which I have read about them."

"It's a great point," said the mate, "to get ourselves out of the immediate power of this man and his fellows. It is not easy to fathom his plans, but it seems to me we can't be worse off than we are, and with arms in our hands we may be better. What do the young ladies say to it?"

Helen and Louisa, who were lying exhausted on their couches, rose up at this appeal, and added their entreaties that their father would take advantage of the bushranger's offer, and take them on shore. It was not without some difficulty, however, that the major could bring himself to leave the vessel which contained nearly the whole of his property:—

"Why," he remonstrated with the mate, "I should have thought you the last man in the world to quit the ship, and abandon it to the bushrangers!"

"Will you fight it out now, then," said the mate; "and take our chance of the result?"

"We are unarmed," replied the major; "we can have no chance against men with fire-arms, fighting, too, with halters round their necks."

"That's just it," replied the mate; "we are unarmed, and what can we do! That Mark Brandon can drive us all below when he pleases, and put to sea, if his men can work the vessel, and what are we the better for that? Better have our liberty on shore, than be bound hand and foot here, to be heaved overboard whenever it may suit him to do so. If it came to that, I would rather trust to the natives than to rascally convicts."

"Agreed then," said the major; "we will go on shore, and trust to chance for the rest."

The mate lost no time in communicating the major's acceptance of the offer to Mark Brandon, who, on his side, seemed quite ready to perform his part of the treaty with good faith and sincerity. But first he desired to have an interview with Major Horton.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW "DODGE."

"MAJOR," said the bushranger, assuming, with immeasurable impudence, the tone of the injured party, "I am sorry to find from your officer that you do not trust me!"

The major was exceedingly embarrassed; he was summoned into the presence of the man who had fraudulently taken possession of his brig, and monopolized all the arms for his own followers, having committed violence on his mate and on the crew, and he found himself suddenly called on to exculpate himself from a charge of want of confidence in the very man, who with consummate duplicity had succeeded in committing an act of piracy on his own vessel! The scene would have been ludicrous from the absurdity of the accusation, if the appearance

of the six bushrangers with muskets cocked and presented had not given too serious an aspect to the affair, to allow him to deal with it lightly.

"You do not trust me," repeated Mark Brandon, with an air of outraged virtue which was highly melodramatic; "but, as I have said before, I will trust you, if you will pledge your word of honor not to take advantage of my confidence by turning your arms against me."

"What is it you propose?" demanded the astonished major.

"Your officer," continued Mark Brandon, "has expressed his suspicion that I may take advantage of your defenceless condition during the night, and endeavor to confine your crew below as they were before."

"Well," said the major.

"Now to prove to you that I have no such design, but on the contrary that I am desirous to act together to resist the attack of the natives, I am ready to allow you all to go on shore immediately."

"But the arms!" said the mate.

"Just so; and not only will I do that, but I will allow your men to take arms and ammunition for their defence should they be attacked; when you can either return on board, or we will land and assist you as may be thought best."

"That sounds all fair enough," said the mate, shaking his head, and trying to penetrate into the secret object of the bushranger, if there was one:—"that sounds all fair enough. What do you say to it, major?"

"I have no objection to pledge myself not to make use of arms against you for twenty-four hours," replied the major; "that is, presuming that you will allow us at the same time to supply ourselves with provisions, and that you will let us take such necessaries on shore as we require."

"And you, major, and you, Mr. Northland," said the bushranger, "now pledge your word of honor for yourselves and your crew, that for twenty-four hours you will not use your arms against us!"

"We do," said the major and the mate; "and so do we," echoed the sailors, who had gathered aft to witness the conference.

"It is agreed then," said Mark Brandon, rejoiced at the success of his scheme. "And now the first thing is to get the ladies on shore."

"We will just land a couple of men first," said the mate, "to see that the coast is clear; we don't want to be eaten up by the natives."

Two of the sailors, accordingly, after having first received arms and ammunition according to compact, stepped on shore; and the rest of the sailors being employed to convey to the land various articles of comfort from the principal cabin, together with provisions, with wine and spirits, the party was quickly transferred from the deck of the vessel to the greensward by its side. Mark then adjusted the sails so as to propel the brig into the centre of the bay, where, by proper manœuvres, he kept it nearly stationary, praying heartily for a change of wind, which would enable him to take the vessel through the narrow entrance of the basin into the open sea.

In the mean time the party on shore prepared for their night bivouac. It was more than dusk,

and they could not see far beyond the immediate spot which they occupied, but the major, not forgetful of his military habits, soon pitched upon a place where they were secured by a high rock in their rear, and having in front loose masses of stone which would serve as obstructions to an advancing enemy, and afford a shelter to the assailed party, behind which they might defend themselves with advantage.

They thought it prudent not to light a fire, as it might attract the observation of the savages; but the major having fortified the spaces in his front with logs and branches of trees, and disposed of his daughters behind a projecting mass of rock, sent out a scout to gain intelligence of the enemy. After a short absence the scout returned with the information, that to the left of the major's post, there was the reflection of a fire, which was burning brightly.

This was a piece of news too serious to be neglected; and the major commissioned the mate therefore to proceed with great caution to examine into the state of affairs, and to report the numbers and the apparent intentions of the natives. This the worthy officer proceeded to do; advancing slowly and stealthily towards the fire, and surprised not to observe any appearance of the natives of whom Mark Brandon had discoursed so largely. As he got nearer to the light he crawled on his hands and knees, expecting every moment to light upon a native, and admiring the cunning with which they had contrived to conceal themselves from observation.

It happened that Mr. Silliman had volunteered, in the excess of his enthusiasm, to keep watch at that point, and although the ensign in command was too prudent to trust the safety of his men to an inexperienced person, he permitted him to occupy a position in advance of his own sentries to give notice of any distant alarm.

It was while the romantic Jerry, unconscious of danger, was looking up to the stars of the southern firmament, and was comparing their light with the gas-lamps of Cheapside, that he felt his leg suddenly grasped in the rough embrace of the worthy mate, who was silently groping his way round the rock near which Jerry was standing. The first thought of the affrighted Jerry was that he was seized by some ferocious animal indigenous to the country; by some immense boa-constrictor perhaps, or by the native hyæna, of whose fierceness and voracity he had read frightful accounts in books of travels.

Too much terrified to cry out, he stood for some seconds paralyzed! while the mate, on his side, finding that he had got hold of a man's naked leg, did not doubt that he had clutched a native, and waited, it must be confessed not without some anxiety, for the yell which he expected would bring to the spot a crowd of black fellows to the assistance of their brother.

Jerry, however, had strength of mind and strength of finger left to give a desperate pull at the trigger of his musket, which, in virtue of his quality as a sentry, had been entrusted to him by the constable. The noise of the report amazed the mate, who, with a seaman's pertinacity, however, did not relinquish his grip of Jerry's leg, albeit that it overturned all his

calculations to find fire-arms in the possession of a native.

The major's quick ear caught the well-known sound immediately, and he redoubled his diligence to secure his fortification from a sudden attack. The ensign and his soldiers stood to their arms: while the faint echo of the musket-sound conveyed to the watchful bushranger the fatal intimation that some discovery had taken place on shore which could bode only ill to him, from the junction of the parties now united for his destruction, and which required the exercise of all his cunning and unequalled daring to guard against and to repel.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. SILLIMAN INSISTS THAT HE WAS NOT DROWNED.

THE mate, astonished to find a native, as he supposed, in the possession of fire-arms, was a little at a loss for a few seconds to know how to act; for there seemed to be as much danger in retreating as in remaining where he was. But as the report of the musket was not followed, as he expected, by a yell from the other savages, and as the ensign's party was too far off for their movements to be heard, the sturdy seaman quickly recovered his presence of mind, and with professional audacity conceived the design of carrying in the native as a prisoner to the major's encampment.

He still kept a firm grip of Jerry's leg; and that astounded individual, persuaded that his limb was clutched either by a real native or by some ferocious animal of the woods, was too terrified for some time to give vent to his fright by vocal exclamations. Nor did his enemy give him time; for the mate starting on his legs, suddenly clasped him in his arms, and before Jerry could cry out, threw his prisoner on the ground, and ramming his handkerchief into his mouth in a moment with a bit of lanyard which, sailor-like, he always carried about him, he tied Jerry's elbows together, and so had him hard and fast.

Poor Jerry finding himself trussed up after this fashion, with his face to the earth, and his antagonist's knee in his back keeping him down, immediately concluded, from the celerity and dexterity of the operation, that by some horrid mischance he had again fallen into the clutches of the dreadful bushranger, and he gave vent to his anguish in a doleful groan!

But the mate, who had possessed himself of the musket and bayonet of the captured sentinel, immediately endeavored to make the native sensible that any noise would be promptly punished; and "unshipping" the bayonet, as he mentally expressed it, that it might form a handier instrument for his purpose, he applied it gently but decidedly to the fleshy part of his prisoner's person, which caused the party afflicted to perform an undulatory contortion of his body, wriggling it snakelike, and digging his toes into the ground with a quick and convulsive motion, strongly expressive of his dislike to the operation.

Several attempts at crying out were repressed in the same way; but the mate could not help being exceedingly surprised to find a native so

Van Diemen's Land clothed like a European; which was altogether at variance with all that he had heard on the subject. But his astonishment was increased when Jerry, not being able any longer to bear the arguments *à posteriori* repeatedly applied by the mate to keep his prisoner quiet, with a convulsive effort contrived to disengage the handkerchief from his mouth, and in the extremity of his despair roared out "Murder!"

Sailors are proverbially superstitious. The voice was the voice of Mr. Silliman, whom the bushrangers had chucked into the sea, and whom the mate had supposed long since to have become food for the Australian fishes! Utterly unable to account for the resurrection of the drowned Jeremiah at such a time and in such a place, the amazed mate—his faculties wearied and confused with the events of the day, and the strangeness of an unknown country, and the darkness, helping, as he afterwards explained, "to flabbergast him entirely"—was struck with the notion that he was the sport of the Evil One!—or else that it was with the spirit of the murdered passenger that he was now contending!

For a moment the courage of the hardy seaman was at fault. As to bushrangers, or natives, or anything living, howsoever dangerous, he snapped his fingers at them; but to have to do with an unreal thing! the ghost of one who had met with a violent death! that was more than his nautical philosophy could bear; and he meditated a hasty retreat, when his prisoner, who had recovered his breath, set up a second shout:

"Murder! help! Here are the bushrangers on us! Help! murder!"

It was certainly the voice of the deceased Jerry! But the sincerity of his terror as exhibited in the energy of his cries, and the plump substantiality of his person so indicative of a real living body, struck the worthy mate, and dispelled the superstitious feeling of ghostly apparitions or supernatural agency. Wishing to test still farther the fact of the body under his knee being that of a real living man, he applied the bayonet in a manner calculated to elicit that fact by some further demonstration.

"Don't," beseeched Jerry; "pray, sir, don't; good bushranger! Mr. Mark Brandon! I'll do what you please; but don't—don't keep sticking that ugly bayonet into me every instant...."

"Why!" exclaimed the mate, "who the devil are you?"

"Mr. Northland! By George, it's all right after all! What! don't you know me? Don't you know Mr. Silliman, the passenger on board your ship?"

"But that Mr. Silliman was drowned," returned the mate, still keeping his knee stuck into Jerry's back, as a precautionary and preventive measure against sudden retaliation; "I saw him go down myself."

"I know I went down," replied Jerry; "but I came up again:—I wasn't drowned. The boat that we thought was full of bushrangers, contained a party of soldiers and constables, who were in pursuit of Mark Brandon and his gang, and they saved me."

"And where are they?" asked the mate. But before Jeremiah had time to answer the ques-

tion, the mate uttered a peremptory "Hush! I hear footsteps approaching."

"Who comes there?" said a voice, which Jerry recognized as that of the ensign; "Mr. Silliman, is that you?"

"Ay, ay," said Mr. Silliman, getting on his legs, to which the mate assisted him; "it's me, and more than me. Here's the mate of the brig, Mr. Northland. He caught hold of my leg in the dark, and I fixed off my musket."

"Are you sure it is the mate of the brig?"

"Sure! Haven't I made all the voyage with him! and do you think I don't know his voice as well as I do my own?"

"Where are the bushrangers?" inquired the ensign.

"On board the brig," replied the mate. "They offered to let us go on shore with arms to protect us from the natives; and as they had us completely in their power, the major thought it best to agree to it. When I gripped Mr. Silliman's leg, I thought I had got hold of a native."

"There are no natives in this part of the island," said the constable; "what put that in your head?"

"Why, Mark Brandon declared there was a mob of at least three hundred natives preparing to attack us! And I saw one myself, a most ferocious-looking rascal, brandishing his spears at us from the top of the hill...."

"That was me!" said Jerry. "It was that confounded bushranger who made me paint myself like a native with his filthy black mud, and stuck me at the top of the hill to frighten you."

"By Jupiter," exclaimed the mate, "I see it all now! And that confounded bushranger, with his jaw, has been persuading us all the time that you were a party of natives; for we saw the smoke of your fire over the hills. That we could ever be such fools as to be so bamboozled!"

"Don't be ashamed," said the constable, availing himself of the freedom of the bush to put in his say; "Mark Brandon has bamboozled as good heads as yours; but now we must see if we can't bamboozle him."

"Come on to the fire," said the ensign, "and then you can explain more of this matter to us. There is something in it that I can't altogether comprehend. This Mark Brandon seems to have the art of the devil himself to deceive you all in the way that he has done."

The mate, during this colloquy, had freed his prisoner from the cord, and at the invitation of the ensign, he moved on with Jerry to the spot where the fire was blazing brightly. They were duly challenged by the sentries as they approached; and having reached the light, it was with considerable curiosity that the mate surveyed the well-known podgy person of his fellow-passenger of the brig; not without some vague lingerings of doubt, however, as to whether he could be the real Silliman after all, so strongly was his mind impressed with the remembrance of having seen him going down to the bottom of the sea in D'Entrecasteaux channel. He was glad, however, to sit down by the side of the fire with the ensign, while Mr. Silliman endeavored to rest himself on his knees.

The ensign, observing that he continued in that unnatural and inconvenient posture, asked him, good-naturedly, why he did not sit down ! But Jerry shook his head, and rubbing himself behind with a most lugubrious expression of countenance, intimated that the mate's vivacious hints with the bayonet had incapacitated him from enjoying that luxury for some time to come.

The mate having explained the meaning of Jerry's pantomimic action, the bystanders, as is usual on such occasions, set up a hearty and simultaneous laugh, which was rendered the merrier by the comical seriousness preserved by the smarting Jerry, who did not laugh at all ; and, as he observed, " couldn't see what there was to laugh at. How would they like it themselves ! "

Their merriment quickly gave way, however, to the more serious consideration of the steps to be pursued for the recovery of the brig. The major's daughters were safe ; that was a great point ; and George Trevor's heart beat quick as he thought that the Helen, whom he had sought over a large part of Europe in vain, was even now within a short distance from him, and that in a brief space he should have the happiness of beholding her again !

In his romantic enthusiasm, he was almost angry that circumstances had disappointed him of the opportunity of showing his courage, by rescuing her from the power of the bushrangers ! But that idea soon gave way to more sober thoughts. Her father, by the mate's account, would be ruined by the loss of the brig, in which had been embarked nearly the whole of his property ; besides, it was his duty to leave no means untried of capturing the runaway convicts, who were in arms against the government, and whose escape it was important to prevent, lest it should operate as an encouragement to similar attempts.

He turned his attention, therefore, firmly to the business of retaking the brig, without allowing the thought of Helen, whom he burned to see again, to distract him from his duty ; but, as he considered that the major's military experience would be valuable in deciding on the proceedings to be adopted, he determined on joining him without delay.

Desiring his party to follow in Indian file, and requesting the mate to act as guide, they proceeded as rapidly as the darkness and the inequality of the ground would permit to the spot where the major, with his daughters and the crew of the vessel, held their entrenched encampment.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE IN THE BUSH.

In the meantime the major, with the vigilance of an old soldier, had kept a good look-out. On the departure of the mate he had pushed forward a couple of scouts, to give notice of anything indicating danger.

It was not long before one of them came back with the intelligence that footsteps were heard approaching. The major went to the outside of his fortifications a little in advance, and placing his ear to the ground, was enabled to distinguish

plainly the sound of the tread of many men. Giving instant directions to the crew to be on their guard, and retiring his two scouts within the breast-work, the sturdy sailors stood with their arms ready and prepared to repel the attack of the natives, which they now were convinced was on the point of taking place.

The major was by no means at ease in respect to the result of the conflict ; for he was aware of the power of numbers, and the advantage which a night attack, under such circumstances, gave to the attacking party. He hastily spoke a few words to reassure his daughters' confidence, with some brief instructions as to the course they were to pursue in the case of his being overpowered by numbers.

Helen, and especially Louisa, could not help feeling the alarm natural to their sex, at the prospect of an encounter with savages, not only on their own account, but for their father's sake, who was not a man, as they well knew, to be backward where fighting was going on, or to shrink from danger when his presence and example were needed to encourage others.

But, with the strong-minded Helen, the tremors which the first alarm had excited, quickly subsided, and, arming herself with a ship's cutlass, she planted herself before the entrance of the rock to guard from harm her less courageous sister.

" Shall I fire, sir ? " asked one of the sailors, who held in his brawny arms a huge blunderbuss, the threatening aspect of which was alone sufficient to scare away a whole mob of natives, had there been light to distinguish the capaciousness of its expanding muzzle : — " I can hear them coming on, and my blunderbuss covers them nicely ; shall I let fly ? "

" No, no, " said the major, " never fire, man, till you have hailed your enemy ; always give fair play ; don't fire. "

" Avast, there ! " cried out the mate, who heard the word " fire, " and was by no means desirous of receiving such a compliment from his friends. " Avast ! we are friends, all of us. Here is Mr. Silliman come to life again, and a party of soldiers come to join us ; and now, by Jupiter, we'll have the old brig again ; and I'll take the liberty to tell Master Mark Brandon a bit of my mind. And, with your leave, major, we'll make up a fire, for we are strong enough now to defy the bushrangers, even if they were to come on shore, which they won't do, for it's not their game ; they will be trying to get the vessel through the opening and out to sea ; but we'll put a stopper on that, or my name's not Jack Northland. "

" Major Horton, " said Ensign Trevor, introducing himself by name, " I think I cannot do better than put myself under your orders ; your knowledge and experience in these matters are far superior to mine. "

This deferential offer Mr. Trevor made by no means with the desire of propitiating the major, but entirely from the impulse of his natural modesty, so becoming in youth. But the major replied with military decision, in terms not less courteous :

" By no means, Mr. Trevor ; you are on duty, and I am retired from the service. But I shall be happy to give you the benefit of my advice if you should think it worth having. But, you

name! I had the honor to be acquainted abroad with a gentleman of the name of Trevor; is it possible that I can have the pleasure of meeting him again in this most extraordinary manner! And now, that the fire begins to burn up, I can see by the light that I am not mistaken. Helen, my dear, you may come forward; Louisa, my love, there is no danger. I have a surprise for you both; here is an old acquaintance. Mr. Trevor, my dears, whom you knew in Germany, is in command of the party that has joined us. Strange meeting this, Mr. Trevor! My poor little girl, you see, has not recovered from her alarm at the thoughts of the natives. Where is Helen, my love? She is generally foremost when there's danger; not that there's any danger now, and especially from you, Mr. Trevor. I see that the expectation of a brush has excited you a little. Oh! here comes Helen! My dear, why do you walk so slowly? Are you ill? Is anything the matter with your sister, Louisa? I am afraid, Mr. Trevor, that her spirits are too much for her! She is quite a heroine, sir; an Amazon! I believe to defend her poor father and her sister she would fight like a lioness! Helen, my dear, look up; this is Mr. Trevor; don't you remember Mr. Trevor? Surely you can't forget the long walks we used to take with him at Vienna! There—there—don't be making formal courtesies in the bush! This is not a place for ceremony, nor a time, neither. You are heated and flushed, my dear, with the excitement of our preparations for the natives. Well, upon my word, I never saw so much bowing and courtesying before! Mr. Trevor, I admire the deference due to the ladies as much as any man, but there's no need to be so very formal among gum-trees and opossums."

"I am happy to see Mr. Trevor," at last said Helen, in a low voice, which faltered slightly, and with an air of dignity which might have become a queen on her throne receiving an ambassador.

"Circumstances," began Mr. Trevor,....

"Major," said the mate, coming forward from the rock, by which another fire had been kindled, "we want your assistance here about the provisions: our men say they ought to have some grog."

"Excuse me," said the major, "for a moment; I must attend to my fellows. Sailors, you know, Mr. Trevor, are an unruly race wherever rum and brandy are in question."

So saying, he withdrew.

His daughter, Louisa, feeling, with the instinct of her sex, that George Trevor and her sister would prefer that their conference should take place without the presence of a third person, had the complaisance to accompany him; and the ensign and Helen were left alone together.

The spot on which the two found themselves in this most strange and unexpected meeting, was one of the most romantic of that beautiful island, abounding, as it does, in varied and romantic scenery. It was a spot worthy of the pencil of Salvator Rosa. Nothing could exceed the gloomy grandeur of the scene, and the lights and shadows cast by the fires around added to the solemn beauty of the picture.

Scattered about were huge masses of rock, interspersed with dwarfy shrubs, among which

appeared one or two umbrageous peppermint trees of enormous height, whose leaves presented towards the fire the vivid tints of their bright green, while the masses of boughs behind were involved in impenetrable shade. In the background, about a hundred yards from the fire, near which George Trevor and Helen were standing, arose a lofty mass of brown and rugged rock, disclosing in its front a natural cave of gigantic proportions, the entrance of which was now revealed by the light of the fire which had been kindled by the sailors, and who, with their muskets in their hands, were grouped around it in picturesque disorder. To the left, the bay, on which the moon now shed a feeble light, might be faintly traced to the base of the hills in the distance; and on its tranquil bosom the masts of the devoted brig were indistinctly visible. Still further, and to the left of the great rock, the open sea appeared, its undulating surface still crested with foams which glistened in the white beams of the rising moon beyond.

As George Trevor and Helen were standing on the side of the fire farthest from the rock, their persons could be but imperfectly seen by those in the vicinity of the sailors' fire, and the sentry in advance was removed from sight and hearing by the obstruction of the temporary fortification of timber and branches which had been thrown up for the protection of the major's party. Thus secured from the observation of eyes or ears, the two had full opportunity to make their mutual explanations; but it was some time before the ensign could muster up courage to break silence, as Helen stood, with her arms slightly folded, in an attitude of freezing rigidity.

"Miss Horton may think, perhaps," he began, "that she has reason to complain—"

"Sir," said Helen, "I make no complaints."

"I mean," resumed the gentleman, "that my seeming neglect—after what had passed—I mean, the declaration which I made—"

"Mr. Trevor," interrupted Helen, "I require no apology for the neglect that you speak of, and it is superfluous for you, therefore, to offer it. This meeting, in these wilds, is not of my seeking—nor of yours, doubtless," she added, with some degree of bitterness; "but such as it is, sir, we must be to each other as if former meetings had never been. I require from you, sir, nothing but respect—and forgetfulness of all the rest. Permit me, sir, to join my father."

"Stay, Miss Horton! Helen! for God's sake do not go away with such an erroneous notion of my feelings! When I quitted you at Vienna, I was called away by the sudden and dangerous illness of my nearest and dearest relation...."

"And the lady, sir, who accompanied you? Was she a near and dear relation too?"

"That lady was the betrothed of one of my dearest friends. It was to serve them both that I accompanied her to a village not five miles off, where her future husband awaited her. It was for the purpose of giving a false scent to those who might pursue her, that I consented to act the part I did, and which I have felt since might have given rise to the most fatal misconception. The lady is long since married to my friend; and as I am sure that you will not doubt my sacred word of honor, I hope I may trust

that you will believe in the truth of what I tell you, which I now sacredly affirm. I addressed a letter to you at Vienna....."

"I never received it!"

".....to which I received no reply; but as the letter was not returned, I conceived, perhaps, an erroneous opinion of you from the slight, as I felt it, of your silence; and feared..... but I will not dwell on that point. In short, I do not hesitate to avow, that I searched for you through a great part of Germany, and afterwards in England; but, as you are aware, without success. My travels in pursuit of you occupied me for an entire year....."

"Can this be true?" said Helen, her voice faltering with emotion.

"You cannot doubt my truth, Helen. At last, wearied with a vain search, and suspecting from your not having replied to my letter, that—that—I am ashamed even now to breathe such a suspicion—in short—that you were trifling with my affections....."

"Oh, no! it was not that!" said Helen, her eyes suffused with tears.

"And wishing to fly from the misery of remembrances too bitter to be borne....."

Helen sobbed!.....

"I determined to try if a total change of scene and new occupations would have the effect of making me forget one whom I had loved so tenderly, and who had treated me, as I thought, so capriciously—but whom I was determined to forget!"

"George—George! you have done me wrong; I never was capricious. I thought you had wronged me; and it was the thought of that neglect that reconciled me to exile—to this distant part of the world—where I might bury my grief and disappointment far away from the eyes of all observers. And I, too, have tried to forget—but I could not. No! a woman cannot forget! How often have I wished that she could!"

"Then, at this spot," exclaimed George Trevor, "I repeat the declaration of my love; and by this token," unbuttoning his vest and displaying a locket, in which his mistress had formerly inclosed a lock of her beautiful hair, "I claim the promise which I received....."

"George, you have it before you ask it. There is something so strange and so romantic in this singular meeting on the other side of the globe, after so long a separation, that I think it is fated that we are to belong to each other! You know," she added, smiling, "it is said that marriages are made in heaven! There is my hand; I need not tell you that which you have made me so often tell you before: but be sure that where my hand is given, there my heart is also."

The happy ensign bent down in reverence, and kissed devoutly the proffered hand that was extended towards him in sign of reconciliation; and he was about to repeat the homage, when the voice of the major suddenly interrupted his devotions.

"Hulloa! hulloa!" said the major; "what is the meaning of all this! Kissing of hands in the bush! Why, Mr. Ensign, you make your military approaches with promptitude, at any rate. We want you to join a council of war with me, and the mate, and the constable; as

we are the four dignitaries, it seems, on whom the fate of the bushrangers depends. Well, upon my word, sir, you do me very great honor. You tuck my daughter under your arm as if she belonged to you! That's the military fashion of modern days, I suppose!"

"You forget, major, that our acquaintance is of old date: it was begun at Vienna."

"Eh! what! acquaintance! Mr. Trevor, what do you mean!"

"I mean, major, that the acquaintance and the addresses which your daughter permitted in Germany, she allows me to renew in Van Diemen's Land."

"Addresses! and, renew! Upon my word, you make quick work of it, you young fellows. This, I suppose, is a new edition of an old story. Love in the Bush! And you say that all this nonsense began at Vienna. Well, I think, Helen, you might have made me a confidant in the affair. You know I never would cross you in such a matter; but a father is something, after all! One likes to be consulted, at any rate!"

"My dear papa," said Helen, in her most winning tones, "it was our intention to ask your permission."

"What! after you had fallen in love you intended to ask my permission to do it! Ah! that's always the way."

"My dear papa!" interrupted Helen, in great confusion, "pray don't talk so! I assure you it was our intention—but—you forget we were more than a year in Germany with Mr. Trevor."

"Well."

"A whole year!"

"Well—what of that!"

"Miss Horton means to say," said the soldier, gallantly coming to the rescue, "that it was impossible for me to be in her society for a whole year, short as the time was, without becoming penetrated with a sense of her many excellent qualities....."

"Ah! you're both in the same tale, that's clear enough: the one keeps the other in countenance."

"Dear papa, if I had thought that you disapproved....."

"Of course! If you had thought that I disapproved. Oh! then you would both have fallen out of love again, I dare say! But let me tell you, although you thought yourselves so clever, that your old father saw plainly enough what was going on; and if he had disapproved, he would not have allowed Mr. Trevor to improve his opportunities as he did: your father was too old a soldier for that....."

"Oh! my dear papa!"

"Oh! my dear sir!"

"Well, let me see; some explanations are necessary, Mr. Trevor."

"Oh, papa! George has explained everything."

"But not to me, miss. Mr. Trevor, you can do that when we have more leisure. Our first business is to get possession of the brig, and to capture these rascally convicts. Now, Mr. Ensign, you will have the opportunity of showing what mettle you are made of. Mark Brandon is a desperate fellow, and he will not be taken without bloodshed, depend upon it."

"Oh, heavens! Papa, what does it matter

about the brig now? we are all safe out of it, and I cannot bear to think that any lives should be sacrificed in attempting to get it back again."

"We are all safe out of it," replied her father, "but all my property is safe in it; and we must endeavor to get it again. Besides, it is the duty of Mr. Trevor to leave no means untried to take the runaway convicts. He is in the king's service now, and is not his own master."

Their further conversation was interrupted by the mate, who, at the suggestion of the constable, took the liberty to break in on the conference of the higher powers, to warn the major that it was near midnight; and that if the boats which had been left at the creek were to be brought round, no time was to be lost in effecting that desirable object, in order to intercept the brig, should a change of wind enable the convicts to attempt to force their way out through the narrow entrance of the bay.

The constable was summoned to add his advice to the council; and it was resolved, that all the crew of the brig, with the two constables, should make the best of their way to the place where the boats were left, and under the direction of the mate, lose no time in bringing them round into the bay, where the military under the command of the ensign would meet them. A corporal's guard was to be left at the rock for the protection of the women; and as the corporal was a veteran whose looks inspired confidence, this arrangement was agreed to by Helen and Louisa with tolerable resignation, although Helen ventured to throw out a hint that she should like to be a spectatress of the fight; and Louisa insisted a little on the propriety of her father remaining to protect them. But, soldier's daughters as they were, they would have been ashamed to urge the absence of their father or their lover from the dangers to which others exposed themselves.

The resolutions relating to the boats were put promptly in course of execution, by the departure of those appointed for that service; and the ensign, after having posted sentinels to prevent surprise, desired the rest of his men to lie down with their arms at hand, and to take such rest as they could snatch from the fleeting hours of the early morning. For himself, he determined to remain on the watch.

The major, with his daughters, returned within the cave, and soon the whole party, with the exception of sentinels and their officer, were buried in profound sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. SILLIMAN'S STUDIES IN NATURAL HISTORY.

THE report of the musket discharged by Mr. Jeremiah Silliman in the excess of his fright from the sudden clutch of the iron fingers of the mate, the faint echo of which was wafted in the silence of the night over the waters of the bay where the brig was temporarily moored, was not unmarked by the watchful desperado who had possession of the vessel.

The bushranger felt that the sound boded no good to him! It must have been heard, he feared, by some prying scout from the party in the boat; and the junction of the parties of the major and the constable was thus certain; but

although that was an anticipation, in point of time, of a mutual discovery which could not fail to take place, it was not an event which he had left out of his calculations. But he had hoped that the junction would have been deferred until a late hour in the morning; and, in the mean time, he trusted to his good fortune, that, at the dawn of day, a change of wind might take place, which would enable him to make his way through the narrow passage which formed the entrance of the bay; but now it was likely that he should have the two parties to contend against instead of one, and it was possible that the boats might be made use of to intercept his passage.

However, he reckoned that he should be able, from the vantage ground of the higher deck of the brig, to beat off the boats; and he trusted that the fire of the shore party would not be sufficient to clear his decks, and prevent the manœuvring of the vessel, before the wind would take him out to sea, and place him beyond the danger of further pursuit.

He busied himself, therefore, during the night, with putting the vessel into the best state of defence against boarding of which she was capable and the materials at hand afforded; and, taking care that each sail was ready to be set to the wind, and that every rope was in order, he scanned the sky with eager gaze, and waited anxiously for the change of wind which the experience of his smuggler's life told him was preparing.

In this way the night was passed by the respective parties; the sailors attached to the pursuing body, with the crew of the brig working vigorously at their oars to bring the boat round to the entrance of the bay before the change of wind,—which, with nautical foresight of the weather, they were aware, from the appearance of the clouds, was likely to take place in a few hours,—should come, the convicts in the brig, with the wakefulness of the fear which accompanies crime; afraid to trust themselves to sleep lest they should be surprised, they knew not when or how, remaining in anxious watchfulness; and the united party on shore seeking, in a brief repose, for the renewed strength which would be wanted on the morrow.

Their peaceful slumbers, however, were suddenly broken at the earliest dawn of day, by loud cries for help from the vicinity of the encampment.

The luckless Mr. Silliman was unable to close his eyes that night, partly from his excessive joy at being restored to the presence of his divinities, Helen and Louisa, and partly from the inconvenience of the flesh wounds which had been inflicted by the mate, when that active officer mistook him for a native. It was with extreme apprehension of the fatal consequences that he reflected, that bayonet-wounds were, of all others, the most dangerous and the most difficult to heal, from the triangular form of the weapon, which prevented the orifices from closing and healing, as the surgeons term it, "with the first intention."

Full of these thoughts, and sorely grieved with the smart, he cast about, being, as he was apt to boast, of a reflecting turn of mind, for some means of relief. Fortunately, as he thought,

It occurred to him that then atives of some islands in the South Seas, the name of which he had forgotten, made use of chewed leaves to apply to the wounds made by their spears and tomahawks. Much pleased with himself at this ready recollection of his reading from books of useful knowledge, he resolved to lose no time in turning it to account on the present occasion. He looked about, therefore, for a tree or shrub of an aspect sufficiently inviting for his experiment.

Seeing a noble tree at no great distance from the fire, he threaded his way cautiously to its base, and then he had the satisfaction of learning the cause of a particular sort of squealing and scratching which he had heard during the night, and for which he had been unable to account. Looking up to a projecting bough over his head, he saw that it was almost covered with some furry little animals resembling cats or squirrels, and which his knowledge of natural history enabled him at once to recognize as opossums. There was sufficient moonlight to allow him to see that the creatures devoured the leaves of the tree with much apparent relish.

This was another fact in natural history which he considered was of infinite advantage to him on the present occasion; for he had learned from descriptions of foreign countries, that travelers might safely venture to eat of that which they observed animals, and especially the birds, to feed on. He was by no means inclined to carry that theory into practice in respect to thistles, but, fortified by this demonstration of the taste of the opossums, he plucked some of the leaves of the luxuriant tree, which was one of those known by the name of "peppermint trees," which abound in Australia, and whose odors perfume the air very pleasantly at a distance. Collecting a handful of these leaves, he forthwith set to at chewing them.

If the opossums were as curious in studying objects of natural history as their spectator, doubtless they would have admired the extraordinary contortion of countenance exhibited by the venturesome Jerry, as he became aware of the horrible nastiness of his first experience in practical botany. But the smart of the tattooing of the bayonet at that moment becoming sharper, and acting, as it were, as a counter-irritation to the filth in his mouth, he recovered his surgical courage; and, calling to mind that by some curious ordinations of Providence, almost all medicines are valuable and curative in the inverse ratio of the pleasingness of their gustation, he resolutely chewed on; and having reduced the leaves to a proper state of pulp, he applied it in the form of a poultice to the part affected, and reclining himself in a convenient posture, endeavored to compose himself to sleep.

But alas! little was he aware of the potent effects of the leaves of the fragrant peppermint tree! The acrid juices of the leaves acting on parts already vulnerized, had the same effect as cayenne pepper on an excoriation.

Wild and energetic was the dance now performed by the burning Jerry under the branches of the deceitful tree. His dance of the polka with the kangaroo was not to be compared with

it. In vain he hastily divested himself of his torment, and threw it in his rage at the opossums chattering above his head. The smart grew sharper and sharper! and still the opossums, as it seemed, chattered and grinned at him from the bough, and hung by their tails, and turned over head and heels as if in scorn and mockery of the intruder on their retreats.

Stung with indignation at their taunts, and furious with the pain, the angry Jerry determined to take signal revenge on the little wretches, and he looked about for the means of climbing the tree, that he might secure some of the animals as offerings to his mistresses, opossum skins, as he had heard, being useful to make up into tippets and coverings for footstools. Presently spying out some inequalities on the bark of the tree, he climbed from knob to knob, till he reached the base of the branch on which he had watched his prey, which now, however, had retreated into the interior of the decayed trunk.

Nothing doubting that he should easily make prizes of some of those Australian curiosities, and balancing himself as well as he could, over the interior of the cavity, he dived his arm down boldly, expecting to reach the heads or tails of some of them. In this attempt he was, unhappily for himself, too successful; for the attacked opossums, as if with one consent, instantly seized upon his arm with teeth and claws.

The astonished Jerry, terrified at these unexpected assaults, and losing his presence of mind and his balance at the same time, fell into the hole among the opossums; when the enraged animals, looking at this fresh aggression as an overt act of hostility, fastened upon him with the most vehement squeaks, which were exceeded, however, by the violent shrieks of Jerry for assistance.

The horrid noise of the combined squealings and scufflings of the opossums, and the excited lamentations of Jeremiah, quickly roused up every one from his sleeping place; and the soldiers starting from the ground, seized their ready arms, and stood prepared to repel the enemy, who they supposed was close upon them.

"Now, major," said the ensign, as the former emerged from the interior of the cave, "we shall have a brush, those impudent rascals are upon us!"

"Give me a sword," said the major, seizing a ship's cutlass. "Now, Trevor, I consider that you are in command! Where is the enemy?"

"Murder!" shrieked a stifled voice from the interior of the tree, about a hundred yards from the fires; "murder! help!"

"That's Mr. Silliman's voice," said the major, "surely; but where is he?"

"Murder!"

"It is Mr. Silliman's voice," said both the girls, who, unable to restrain their curiosity, had come to the cave's mouth. "It's impossible to mistake it!"

"Murder!"

"It comes from that tree," said the ensign.

"Corporal, take two file to that decayed tree yonder, with the thick wide-spreading branches, and see what's the matter."

The corporal, making his military salute, immediately obeyed, and took his way rapidly but warily to the point.

At this moment, the head of the unfortunate Jerry appeared for an instant above the cavity, and as all eyes were directed to the spot, it was visible to the whole party. The head cast an imploring look at its friends, and then, with another voiciferous shout of—murder! instantaneously disappeared.

"Some wild beast must have got hold of him," said the ensign. "This is a false alarm it seems, excepting so far as it concerns that poor gentleman! It is the same person, is it not, whom your mate punctured last night to keep him quiet?"

"It is the same—poor fellow!—he was nearly drowned too, yesterday."

"Indeed! He seems to be unlucky. But I see the corporal has extricated him from his trap. What has happened, sir! What made you cry out so loudly?"

"Oh, the little devils! They have got claws like cats, and teeth like rats. Look at me!" said Jerry, displaying his hands and face, which were scratched and bitten in a hundred places. "In trying to catch an opossum, I fell into the hollow of the tree, and a whole host of brutes fastened on me with all their teeth and claws! and all smelling like essence of peppermint!...."

A general burst of laughter saluted the mortified Jerry at this pathetic account of his reception by the opossum family—so prone are people in general to treat with ridicule such comical disasters as do not harm themselves; but the general attention was suddenly turned from the spectacle of Jerry's damaged person, by the information of a sentinel posted on an adjacent eminence, which commanded a view of the bay, that "the brig was in motion!"

CHAPTER XIX.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIGHT.

THE sentry's announcement of the brig being in motion at once turned the attention of all parties from Mr. Silliman's disaster to the business of the day. The few light clouds which were floating over their heads had already made them aware that the wind had changed, and that unless the boats arrived in time, there was little hope of their being able to prevent the escape of the brig from the bay.

The cheering light of dawn now enabled the major and his daughters to take a better survey of the spot which had formed their first resting-place on the shores of their adopted country; and although the southern and western coasts are remarkable for their general rugged and barren appearance, the sheltered nook in which they found themselves presented some of the most pleasing features of the country: and the more so from its contrast with the bare hills and sterile character of the country beyond.

The girls felt the influence of the scene; and had it not been for the expedition of danger on which their father and Mr. Trevor were intent, they would have keenly enjoyed the change

from the boisterous storm at sea of the preceding day to the present tranquil scenery of their encampment.

The morning was clear and bright. The cold southern gale, which had driven the shattered brig into the land-locked bay, had been succeeded by a gentle air from the warm north; and the rising sun gave promise of one of those genial spring days in September, which delight so much with their enlivening freshness in Van Diemen's Land.

The melodious note of the native magpie was heard welcoming the dawn. A flock of white cockatoos from a neighboring gum-tree surveyed the strangers with curious eyes, as they elevated their yellow crests and chattered among themselves, without betraying the slightest alarm at the presence of their enemy—man. Mr. Silliman wanted to have a shot at them; but the sisters prayed him to desist, and with some reluctance he obeyed; for with the true instinct of a cockney, he wanted to fire at everything he saw, without caring much what it was that he killed, so long, as he expressed it, he "brought 'em down."

A kangaroo rat would now and then hop across the grass, and scurry away when Jerry tried to catch it by the tail; and the shy bandicoot would timidly poke its nose out of a bush to see what was going forward.

On the withered branch of a distant tree sat a pelican, gravely watching the waters of the bay, on which a group of black swans were departing, unconscious of danger.

A pair of black cockatoos, in a thicket hard by, were busy building their nest. Numerous Rosina parrots, with their bright green plumage, and pink heads and throats, flew hither and thither; and Mr. Silliman horrified the gentle Louisa by informing her that, according to the information of his vulgar friend, the constable, they made excellent pies.

A pair of eagles, soaring in circlets close above their heads, gave indication that the nest of those kings of the air was somewhere near, as with discordant screechings they strove to scare away the intruders from their haunts; while the singular cry of the little bird, not inappropriately called by the colonists "the laughing jackass," and which particularly attracted Mr. Silliman's attention, added variety to the sounds of the awakened bush.

These novel sights and sounds were little heeded, however, by Mr. Trevor and the major, who had other matters of more pressing import to attend to.

The one had to consider the best means of regaining possession of the vessel, in which nearly the whole of his property was embarked, and the loss of which would leave him almost a beggar in a strange land, where the worst of all conditions is that of a poor gentleman unskilled in mechanical employments and without capital; and the other was impressed with the serious responsibility that attached to him, as the official commander of the party, if, in spite of him, the convicts should succeed in effecting their escape with the brig from the island; and, in defiance of the measures taken by the colonial government, set the dangerous example of a successful piratical expedition for the imitation of the other convicts, too many of whom

would be ready and eager to make similar attempts at plunder and escape.

He had plenty of force to cope with a much larger body of bushrangers than those on board the brig; but without the boats his men were useless, and many accidents might prevent the arrival of the boats in time; and in such case it was impossible to prevent the escape of the brig to the open sea, where pursuit would be difficult, and perhaps impossible. Under such circumstances, all he could do was to take the best means in his power to intercept the brig at the entrance of the bay, with a faint hope that by a lucky shot some important rope might be cut in two, which would lead to a confusion on board, of which he might be able to take advantage.

Having refreshed his men, therefore, and seen that nothing was deficient in their equipments, he marched them to a platform on a rock which commanded the passage.

As it was of importance to have as heavy a fire as possible directed against the sails and rigging of the vessel, he did not think it consistent with his duty to leave a single man behind; but as Mr. Silliman could hardly be considered in a condition fit for active service, he left him in charge of the cave, which was turned into a temporary fortress for the protection of Helen and Louisa, and, with the aid of some dead timber, scientifically disposed, it was deemed that the safety of the ladies was secured against any sudden attack of the natives, should any be lurking in the vicinity; an event, however, which was regarded as quite beyond all possibility.

Mr. Silliman therefore remained on guard, to his infinite satisfaction; and, stifling his feelings in respect to the ills which remained behind, the warlike Jerry placed his hand upon his chest, and assured the major that before any harm should happen to Miss Helen or to Miss Louisa, the savages should eat him, musket and all! Shouldering his weapon with martial energy, he gave the departing body a military salute by holding up his firelock in a style which was a very good imitation of that military courtesy as performed by the soldiers, and which, to judge from the smiling sign of approbation of their officer, and the grins of the men, seemed to afford to those professionals not less amusement than satisfaction. The scene, however, presently grew more serious.

The sails of the brig meanwhile became gently distended with the favorable breeze which had sprung up from the north with the rising sun; and it was observed by the major that a sort of screen had been erected aft on the starboard side of the vessel to protect the man at the wheel from the fire of a hostile party on shore. Saving this indication of the presence of a steersman, there was no sign of a living soul on board; the sails seemed to act without the direction of human agency, and the gallant brig glided slowly through the tranquil water as if by the power of its own volition.

"That bushranger," said the major to the commander of the party, "neglects nothing; my principal hope was shooting down the man at the helm and taking our chance of the vessel being swayed against the wall of rock on either side; and now there is no hope of that, for so

far as I can make out, he has raised an effectual bulwark between us and the wheel. Musket balls will be of no use against that mass of canvas and stuff that he has built up so ingeniously. What is become of the boats?"

"They are here," said the ensign, as he pointed to the head of one of them, which at that moment came in sight from behind the projecting cliff, and which was quickly followed by the second, the largest of the two; "and they are just in time, for in another half-hour the brig would have been out at sea. Now, major, what do you advise to be done?"

"We must try to board them at once, and without giving them time to prepare themselves; although I fear that crafty freebooter has not left anything undone for his defence; but we must try at any rate. Let the brig come up close enough to allow the fire of half of your men to take effect from the shore, which will clear their decks, and give the opportunity to the boats to get alongside without loss. That shall be my duty in the large boat, while my mate commands the other. Do you back me up with your party from the top of the rock, and keep up as brisk a fire as you can, and try to keep the rascals on board below till we get alongside."

The boats were not long in coming within hail, and the plan of the major was immediately acted on; with the difference only, that Trevor insisted on going in one of them, as it was the service of danger, leaving his sergeant in command of the remaining military on shore, with directions to support the movements of the boats, by keeping up a sharp fire at all who appeared on the deck of the vessel.

In the meantime the brig advanced slowly on towards the entrance of the bay, where the boats were lying to intercept her.

The vigilant bushranger, however, who surveyed the preparations made for his reception with a cool and deliberate eye, was well aware that if he persisted in attempting to force his way out through the enemies who were assembled to greet him, the chances would be prodigiously against his success.

He had only six followers, making, with himself, seven in number; whereas the party in the boats could not be less, as he calculated, than twenty persons or more, many of whom, he could see, were soldiers; and besides, there was a party of a dozen soldiers at least on the top of the rock at the entrance, in a position to sweep his deck with their fire. Under these circumstances, it was clear that while his enemies remained together he was by far the weaker party. His game therefore was to entice the boats from the entrance of the passage, and if possible to divide them.

He was inclined at first to run the gauntlet and take his chance; but his usual habit of cool and cautious policy prevailed; and he judged it best to endeavor to gain time and wait for the breeze to freshen, which it seemed likely to do, and which would give him a better chance of baffling the boats and of shooting through the narrow entrance of the bay.

With this intent, he kept the vessel steadily on her course, the sails requiring no trimming, as the wind was nearly fair; but when he had advanced within a quarter of a mile of the boats

he suddenly changed her course, and directed the head of the vessel towards the opposite side of the bay.

"Now for it!" called out the mate; "we have him now. Give way, boys!"

"Stop!" said the constable, standing up and addressing his commander, who was in the other boat; "don't be in too great a hurry; depend upon it, Mark Brandon has not made that movement for nothing: he has some design in it, I'll swear. You see, sir, so long as we stay here we are sure of him, for he can't pass us—he sees that—but if we go after him, we may not catch him, perhaps, and we shall leave the passage open."

"You are right," said the officer, who was by no means offended at the interference of the constable, who was an experienced hand, and bush expeditions always allowing liberty of speech and of advice to those qualified to give it; "but suppose the other runaway convicts that we have had notice of should come up and join the party on board the brig? They might be too strong for us then; or at any rate it would cost the loss of more life in the capturing of them."

"That's true," said the constable; "but all I say is this, that Mark Brandon has not made that move for nothing; he is up to some dodge, depend upon it."

"I am inclined to think," said the major, "that our surest plan is to wait for him here: if we leave our position we leave the passage free, and he might slip through before we could come up with him."

"No, no, major," said the mate, whose head was too clear not to see at once the best course to be pursued in a case requiring nautical skill and judgment; "it will never do to stick here: it's all very well so long as there is but little wind, because we can be on him before he can help himself; but if it was to come on to blow a stiff breeze, d'ye see, he might bang through us, and run down one of the boats, perhaps, before we could be aboard of him. My advice is to go slap at him. Lord! we are enough to eat him; and with two boats he can't get away from us. There he goes about again: you see what he's after; he's manœuvring for the wind to get up, and then he'll pass us with a wet foresail, and leave us to grin at him."

The harangue of the mate was received with a general hurrah by the sailors, who had their own wrongs to avenge, and the soldiers showed by the restless handling of their firelocks that they were not less pleased at the prospect of getting at the possessors of the brig; although the habit of military discipline prevented any outward expression of their inclination.

"Why," continued the mate, "we can take them with one boat, and the other can remain here, to catch 'em, if they get away from us. If the major will say the word, I'll be bound to have the rascals under the hatches, with our own men, without troubling the soldiers."

"I think that is a good plan, Mr. Trevor," said the major; "sailors are best for boarding. But we will alter Mr. Northland's plan a little, this way. I will go with him and the blue-jackets in chase of the vessel; while you, with your own boat, can keep steadily on in a straight

line, so as to intercept her either way, and then we shall be able to close with her fore and aft."

This plan was instantly adopted, and an interchange of the men in the boats having been effected, the major, in command of the blue-jackets, having his trusty mate as his lieutenant, immediately started in pursuit.

These arrangements were not unobserved by those on board the brig. The dimensions of the bay being about five miles from the entrance, and three broad, it seemed impossible for the brig to escape one or the other of the boats, although the wind was most favorable for her manœuvres, as it blew directly from the north towards the open sea, and gave the advantage to the vessel to make tacks on her quickest point of sailing from one side of the bay to the other.

But this game the bushranger was aware could not last long, if both the boats did their duty, and his only chance of escape was to delude them into pursuing him to the bottom of the bay, from which the fair wind would enable him easily to emerge; and then, as he calculated, if the breeze would only freshen a bit, he should be able to distance the boats, and get out to sea. As to the party lying in ambush for him on the rock at the entrance, he cared very little for their opposition, as the worst that their musket balls could do would be to riddle his sails here and there; and if the wind kept up, he should soon be out of their reach.

But when he saw the systematic plan adopted by his enemies, he began to fear that for once he had met with his match, and that his fate, so far as the brig was concerned, was sealed. With these thoughts he turned his attention to the possibility of making his escape to the shore; but before he did that, he was resolved to try every possible means of getting the brig out of the bay, either by stratagem or force. An unexpected accession of strength seemed to favor most opportunely the latter plan.

The second body of convicts who had taken to the bush, as the ensign had informed the constable when he first joined that party, and whose escape had caused the authorities at Hobart Town to dispatch the auxiliary detachment of soldiers under an officer's command, had made their way to the southern part of the island, whither, the report was, Mark Brandon had led his followers.

They had formed part of a road gang stationed about six miles from Hobart Town, on the road beyond Sandy Bay, and were most of them characters of the worst description, having been returned from settlers' service up the country to government employ, on account of bad conduct and insubordination.

It was the monotonous work, the restricted indulgences, and the severe discipline to which they were subjected when working on the roads, that had prompted them to the desperate expedient of taking to the bush, to which they had been stimulated also by the report that was abroad of a brig having been telegraphed which had not come up the river, and which led them to surmise that its capture was the object of Brandon's flight, a man who was well known to all the prisoners as one whose cunning in difficulties and daring in danger was sufficient

for the successful execution of almost any enterprise howsoever difficult.

By dint of forced marches, which nothing but the desire of liberty could have enabled them to sustain, the runaways had contrived to make their way to the southern part of the coast, and to reach the hill which overlooked the bay—and which was the same on which Mr. Silliman had performed the part of a native with such dramatic effect—by daylight, on the morning when the boats commenced their active hostilities against the brig.

For some time they were doubtful how matters stood, and which was the party of Mark Brandon—that in the boats, or in the brig; and they watched the proceedings of both parties with intense interest from their covert behind the crest of the hill. But when the brig neared that side of the bay where they were concealed, and the rising sun glancing on the polished firelocks revealed the presence of the military, they had no doubt of the presence of enemies in that quarter; the more especially as the ensign standing up in the boat betrayed in a moment by his dress and demeanor his soldierly character.

They could see only four or five figures on board the brig, which confirmed them in their belief that it was in the possession of Mark Brandon, who was reported to have taken to the bush with half a dozen followers. Fired with the prospect of escape which this state of things afforded to the runaway convicts, and seeing the disproportion of strength between the attacking party in the boats and the small number which they concluded to be on board the brig, they saw at once that if they could add their additional numbers to Mark Brandon's force they might be able to beat off the boats, and fight their way successfully to the open sea. A consultation was immediately held between them.

They found that all their party were in an efficient state, notwithstanding the fatigue of their forced march through the bush, which nothing but the fear of pursuit and the desperation of their condition could have enabled them to perform. They had among them one musket and five fowling-pieces, which they had contrived to purloin previous to their escape from camp, with a dozen axes. They had no doubt of finding more arms on board: once there, they felt sure of the result. But how to apprise Mark Brandon of the arrival of friends—that was the point!

It was proposed that one of them should endeavor to swim on board; but that experiment was rejected as too hazardous. Another suggested that a signal should be made to the brig from the shore; but that course it was feared was as likely to attract the observation of the boats as of the vessel, and then their project would be defeated: besides, how was Mark to know from whom the signal proceeded—from friends or foes?

The attempt of communicating with the brig might have been altogether baffled if one rogue more ingenious than the rest, who had been a long time in the colony, and was well acquainted with bush expedients, had not thought of making a bark canoe after the manner of the natives, which would enable one of them

to get afloat and reach the vessel. This idea was unanimously approved, and half a dozen immediately repaired to a cluster of stringy-bark trees, which were observed about a quarter of a mile off, in a hollow, sheltered from the cold and boisterous south winds.

One of them being mounted on the shoulders of the rest, cut the bark horizontally all around, while the same operation was performed below; then slitting the bark in a vertical direction from top to bottom of each cut, they peeled the bark from the tree, which came off in a single piece, about ten feet long. Gathering up the two ends, they tied them firmly with such materials as they had about them, at either end, so as to prevent the admission of water, and the machine then presented the appearance of a long and narrow canoe, in which two men could sit easily, but which, from its shape and frail manufacture, was liable to overturn, or to split at the slightest impediment.

The man who had suggested the expedient volunteered to make his way on board, and "whether he was drowned or whether he was shot," he said, "made little odds, for he was tired of his life of slavery, and he would as lieve die as live any longer in such a wretched state."

Two branches were cut down and shaped as well as the hurry and circumstances permitted, to serve as paddles, and the man, putting the canoe on his shoulder and taking the paddles under his arm, went stealthily down to the edge of the water. Having launched his canoe, and crept into it carefully without his shoes, to prevent its upsetting, he balanced himself in a sitting posture in the centre, and by the aid of his paddles propelled his light bark over the water in the direction of the brig.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BUSHRANGER'S NEW STRATAGEM.

THE canoe lay so low in the water, and the two boats were so intent on the movements of the brig, and the brig of them, that it entirely escaped the notice of both parties; but as it was directly in the course of the vessel, the man on the look-out forward presently sung out to the bushranger, who was aft attending to the steering of the vessel, that "there was a canoe right ahead with a man in it."

Brandon had scarcely time to put the helm hard up before the brig was close upon the frail machine, and at the same moment the man in the canoe recognizing a fellow-prisoner on board, called to him by name. His comrade without hesitation threw a rope to him, which its occupant instantly securing round his body, he was pulled out of his canoe and dragged for a few moments astern as the vessel continued her course.

When he was hauled up on board he quickly explained to Brandon that there were eight-and-twenty of them ashore, some with fire-arms, and all with weapons of some sort or other, ready to join them, and to take their chance on board the brig.

Mark, who was as quick as a bandicoot and as cunning as a platypus in perceiving and avoiding danger, was not less ready to take ad-

vantage of all opportunities in his own favor, without regard to the interests or safety of those whom he made use of for his purposes. Despairing of making his way out by force, but seeing at once the advantage of making a diversion so as to draw off one of the boats from the pursuit of the vessel, he pretended to hail the news of such an accession of strength with delight, and proposed that the messenger should without delay assemble all his comrades on the beach, from which the brig would manage to take them off by means of ropes and other contrivances, which he would invent by the time they were ready to avail themselves of them.

To this effect he kept on his course towards the land till he had arrived within less than a quarter of a mile of the beach, and then urging the messenger to do his best in swimming on shore, he dropped him into the water, and turning the vessel's head round on the other tack, shot over to the further side of the bay.

The hoisting of the man on board from the canoe which had been just visible on the surface of the water, but which had turned over with the jerk of his being pulled out of it, and was no longer seen, was not unobserved by the vigilant mate, who was standing up in the boat, and who was at a loss to comprehend the meaning of it; and which was rendered more puzzling by the vessel running the needless risk, as it appeared to him, of keeping so close in-shore.

He kept his eye on the spot, and, shortly, he saw a something which he presently made out to be a man emerge from the water, and make his way rapidly up the slope of the bare hill. Struck with this circumstance, he bade the men lay on their oars a moment while he pointed out the object to the major.

"What can be the meaning of that?" said the major: "that's a man making his way up that hill as plain as can be; but whether it is a native or not, is more than I can tell."

"Whatever it is," said the mate, "I saw him come out of the water in that direction, and he must have come out of the brig; where else could he come from?"

"There he goes," said the constable: "now he has disappeared over the top of the hill. What the deuce is the meaning of this? Some new dodge of Mark's. Depend upon it, whatever Mark does he has a reason for it; but what his game is in sending that chap over the hill beats my guessing."

"Can it be to see what we have done with the girls at our fortress?" asked the major of the mate, with some anxiety—natural under the circumstances. "There is only that poor fellow Silliman to protect them."

"No fear of harm there," said the constable; "if the young ladies' sentinel only keeps himself close, and shows the muzzle of his musket through the barricade at the cave's mouth, no single man will venture to attack him; but after all, the man's leaving the vessel in that way means something. Mark is as full of tricks as a hunted fox; but what this new move is, is more than I can tell."

"Never mind," exclaimed the mate; "don't lose time in guessing; our business is to get possession of the brig, and have her we

must; for you see we are regularly chasing her into a corner, and we must bring her to close quarters at last, and then we will at her, and hurrah for the first in! Now, my men, give way."

"Stay," said the constable; "keep the boat steady a moment longer. I see a body of men coming over the hill; there are twenty or thirty of them. What's the game now?"

"I see them," said the mate; "and look! the brig has gone about to meet them. Hulloo! we shall have a spree by-and-by! If those chaps are Mark Brandon's friends, and they get aboard the brig, we shall have more work to do than we reckoned on. And here comes the soldiers' boat, pulling with all their might: hold hard, my sons: the soldier officer, I suppose, wants to speak to us."

"Have you observed that body of men?" said the ensign eagerly to the major, as his boat came up alongside. "From all appearances they are friends of those on board, and I have no doubt that they are the other body of prisoners escaped from camp. If they join those who are on board they may prove too strong for us: I have counted nearly thirty of them."

"Bless your heart!" said the mate, "they will make no difference; it's only a little more fighting, and it's all in the day's work! Why, such fellows as those can do nothing when it comes to downright hard knocks. We can take 'em easy. Hulloo! what's that lubberly bush-ranger doing with the brig, knocking her about that way! Going about again—what's that for? Isn't he going to take the other fellows on board? No: he's about again. Major, we are only losing time; we had better make way and join him in the bottom of the bay; we must have him then."

"Those fellows on shore," said the major, "may be making their way to our fortress. Don't you think your party on the rock would be well employed in making head against them before they do mischief?"

The ensign eagerly caught at the suggestion. There was no knowing what outrage a band of desperate miscreants might commit on defenceless women. Their only protection at present was Mr. Silliman; and the party of soldiers on the rock was at least half a mile from the fortress,—a long distance, as he had already learned, in the pathless bush.

"I will make my way back to the rock," he said, "and direct the sergeant to march his men against this new body of marauders. If it be done promptly, it may have the effect of preventing their junction with their friends on board the brig."

"Do so," said the major: "we will lay on our oars till you come back; and then as the brig cannot escape us now, we will attack her in concert, and bring this affair to a conclusion. The sight of the two boats together may perhaps frighten the rascals and cause them to surrender without bloodshed."

"Not he," said the constable, as the ensign's boat left them. "If you think Mark Brandon will let himself be taken without fighting, you are mistaken, I can tell you that. Mark will have a tussle for it, depend upon it; but I think we have him at last. I don't know, though; he has so many schemes in his head—has that

man—that you never know when you have got him and when you haven't. After all I should not be surprised if he was to slip through our fingers—sure as we are of him.”

“Never fear,” said the mate, rubbing his hands impatiently, “I only wish I was as sure of the command of an East Indian as I am of grabbing that rascal. I wouldn't give up my chance for . . . See! the fellows on the beach are going back; and now the brig goes about again. Ha! they see it; and now they are coming down to the beach again. What is all that backing and filling for? Is the brig going to take them on board or not?”

“That's more than any of us can tell,” said the constable; “nobody knows Mark's plans but himself: but depend on it, whatever he does, is done with a reason. He is watching us now, and knows what we are about as well as we do ourselves, I'll be bound. He has seen the ensign's boat join us, and go away towards the rock where the other party of soldiers is, and I'll swear he knows at this minute what it's for. But why he waits for the soldiers to attack his fellow-prisoners on the beach is more than I can tell. You might as well try to fathom the middle of the sea as Mark's deepness.”

“Our friend Trevor has reached the rock,” said the major; “I see the men saluting. Now he is giving orders; now they move on. That's right; double quick time, my men. Now—I lose sight of them;—I see; they are going to take the rascals behind, and hem them in between themselves and the sea. Only twelve file though. However, they are soldiers, and the others are ragamuffins; so there's force enough; and they can fire three times for the others' once. Here comes Trevor again. Now, my boys, we shall wait no longer; the brig can't escape us. We will board her while the red-coats engage her attention in another way. Hard case this, Northland, to be obliged to take our own vessel again by force of arms.”

“Force of arms!” said the mate disdainfully, and with a contemptuous motion of his hand towards the brig; “force of a fiddlestick! Those fellows will never stand us; we have only to show ourselves on board. And suppose they do fight! all the better. I'm blest,” said he, with a jovial grin at his brother blue-jackets, “if we arn't all of us getting rusty for want of a scrimmage! Hurrah! here's the red-coats! Now, major, I suppose we may be moving!”

The breeze from the north in the mean time had freshened considerably, and it threatened to blow hard, so that the advantage on the side of the brig was considerably increased, and she made her way so rapidly through the water as to give hope to the bushranger that he should be able to baffle his enemies by her speed of sailing. The boats, however, neared him every minute, and he made up his mind to make a dash through them with the fair wind which he had in his favor—when one of those changes occurred, so frequent at that season of the year. The wind suddenly lulled; the boats set up a cheer, and pulled vigorously to their mark. They were within half a mile of the brig when a blast of air from the high hills on the other side of the bay suddenly filled her sails, and she again shot through the water.

At this time the party of convicts on shore had caught sight of the soldiers coming down upon them over the bare hills, and they hastily retreated, keeping within reach, however, of the margin of the bay, in the hope of being taken on board the brig.

But the wind now began to blow from all quarters of the heavens, and it was impossible for the brig's crew to lend their assistance to those on shore, even had they been willing; and as Brandon had accomplished his object in making use of them for the purpose of the diversion which he desired, and had succeeded in drawing away the party of soldiers which had been stationed on the rock at the entrance of the passage, he would have had no objection to receive them on board had the opportunity been afforded to him. But it was too late; it was as much as he could do to attend to the sails and steering of the brig, feebly assisted as he was by his companions, unused as they were to manœuvring a vessel.

In the mean time the retreat of the convicts on shore had drawn the sergeant's party round the bay to the further side, and a few shots were faintly heard, indicating that the fray was becoming serious in that quarter.

The elements also seemed to be mustering up their strength, and a squall from the south-east twisting round the brig, drove her furiously, and before those on board could trim the sails, or avoid the danger, to the bottom of the bay. There was a low sandy shoal stretching from the shore far into the water, towards which the brig was propelled rapidly. There was no help for it. The bushranger saw that all exertion was vain; all hope of escaping by the brig was lost.

Making up his mind on the instant, with the rapid decision for which he was so remarkable, and which in an honest course of life might have raised him to high fortune and distinction, he summoned up all his energy to bear the bitter disappointment with fortitude. He knew that if he allowed his mind to be depressed by the failure, his ideas would become clouded and his invention blunted, so as to lessen his chance of escape from the imminent danger which now hung over him.

In a very few minutes he had formed in his head a new scheme, by which he calculated he might make terms for himself in case of extremity; and in any event, he considered he could take to the bush, and wait for another chance, though he did not disguise from himself that taking to the bush was a desperate expedient, and to be had recourse to only in case of the failure of all other means of safety. He had no sooner made up his mind as to the best thing to be done under the circumstances than he set about its execution.

He immediately collected in the cabin, which at the moment was the place most easily got at, all the combustibles that he could readily heap together, which, with the assistance of his companions, was quickly done, and he then disposed it so as to be readily fired, taking care that the materials were so placed as to make as large a blaze as possible. The sight of the brig on fire he calculated would cause his pursuers to occupy themselves in the first place with extinguishing the flames, without buying

themselves about him, which would give him time to execute his ulterior project.

He had scarcely made this arrangement, and prepared himself and his companions for leaving the vessel, when the brig struck violently on the shoal, and swinging round, while the mainmast went by the board with a shock, presented her broadside to the sands.

Mark Brandon instantly set fire to the lumber in the cabin, and then descending the ship's side, with his confederates, they made their way to the top of a low hill in the immediate vicinity of the shore.

In pursuance of the plan which he had formed, and knowing well that numbers are an inconvenience in the bush, unless so great as to defy attack, which in the present case was out of the question, he immediately selected two men on whom he thought he could entirely depend, and who had not the ability to outwit him, but on whose dogged courage he could rely; and at the same time he directed the remaining four to lose no time in joining the party who kept up a running fight with the sergeant's party of soldiers.

"Our only chance, my mates," he said, "is to keep together; but we must try to draw off the attention of the soldiers in the boats, and lead them in a different direction. Tell our friends to keep up the fight and retreat towards the north, while I will, with Jim and Roger, entice the boat party to the westward. And, do you see that high hill yonder, quite in the distance—may be a dozen miles off, or more? Well; rally round that hill, and before night I will meet you there, and then we can consult together as to the best course to be taken. See! the soldiers have turned our party of friends somehow, and they are retreating inland. The sergeant's party will not follow them far; it's only for every man to make the best use of his legs, and get at once into the bush. Now, my men, start, and do the business cleverly, and leave me to do mine."

The four subordinate ruffians, unable or unwilling to dispute the direction of a leader, whom they had become accustomed to obey as much from the superiority of his force of mind, as by their voluntary adoption of him as their chief, lost no time in following Mark Brandon's directions, and in a brief space they had joined their new companions, and given them the word.

But the soldiers in pursuit had pushed them too closely to allow them to put Mark's advice in execution, and, by a quick military movement, they contrived to place the convicts between their fire and the water; and the fugitives, thus turned, were driven in the direction of the burning brig, towards which the boats were rapidly hastening.

"It will do," said Mark, as he cautiously peered over the top of the hill and observed the progress of affairs below; "it will do; and now for my work. Roger, tread like a native: there must be no noise. Jemmy, my man, wind yourself after me like a snake; sharp's the word; but there must be no sound—not a word spoken; and mind, the report of a musket would ruin all my plan."

So saying, he proceeded by a circuitous route, and at as rapid a pace as possible, to the

back part of the rock which had formed the site of the major's temporary encampment the preceding night, and the exact locality of which he had marked from the light of the bivouac fires which had been made on the occasion of the junction of the ensign's party of soldiers with the ship's crew of the brig. The bushranger went on with confidence; and conscious of his powers in plots and stratagems, with a sort of joyous prescience that his artful and diabolical plan would be successful.

It is necessary, however, to return to the scene of the advancing boats and the devoted vessel, from the stern windows of which volumes of smoke and flame now broke out with appalling fury.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SKIRMISH.

It is impossible to describe the mingled rage and sorrow of the mate, when he beheld the gallant little brig, which he had brought safely fifteen thousand miles over the sea from the other side of the globe, with its mainmast lying shattered on the deck, and its stern-ports evolving clouds of smoke and flames—the wicked work of the ignorance or the malice of the pirates.

All the epithets of execration which nautical or other phraseology could furnish, were lavished on the rascally bushranger and his villainous crew. Regarding, as the affectionate seaman did, his ship as his mistress, and personifying it, as sailors love to do, as a thing of life, he felt the ravages inflicted on her beautiful frame as much almost as wounds on his own body.

Nor was the major less exasperated at the sight of his burning vessel, on board of which was nearly the whole of his fortune, and which now seemed consigned irremediably to the flames. He forgot the bushrangers and everything else, in the all-absorbing desire to save his property, without which life would be to him a weary exile in the colony of Van Diemen's Land.

The ensign, also, was quite alive to the ruin which threatened to overwhelm his anticipated father-in-law, and he urged his rowers to put out their utmost strength, in order to reach the vessel before the flames should render all assistance hopeless.

But of the three, the mate was the most energetic in his action, as he was most eloquent in his exclamations:—

"Give way, boys," he said, as he stood up, and endeavored by the motion of his own body to add impetus to the movement of the boat; "give way, as you would save your souls! Oh, the infernal rascal! To set fire to her! What harm had the poor little brig done him, I should like to know! The dirty, sneaking, cowardly, shore-going, long-tailed blackguard! There goes the sergeant after the other fellows! Pepper them well, my lads; stick it into 'em; they're all alike! There comes more smoke from the stern port-holes! It's only smoke, perhaps, after all! No: it's flames too! Give way—bend to it; stretch to it; that's the stroke; hurrah! now she goes! -Shouldn't I

nke to put out that fire with the lubberly carcasses of the villains! Hanging's too good for them—the murdering, fire-raising thieves! Hurrah! my boys, we are just on her. Hold hard; jump ashore; no ceremony; follow me.”

So saying, the mate, seizing a rope which was hanging from the bowsprit, quickly slung himself on deck, and was followed with cordial promptitude by the crew of the brig, and with not less alacrity by the sailors belonging to the government boats. As in all cases of difficulty and danger, where the most skilful and courageous are instinctively looked up to for advice, he at once assumed the direction of those on board.

“Major, make half a dozen fellows clear away the mast. Carpenter, come along with me. Get the buckets, and pass them aft down the companion-ladder. Boy, get the swabs and soak 'em well; and quick! be alive! I'll try to find my way down below, if it's a thing that's possible.”

Thrice did the sturdy mate endeavor to force his way through the smoke and flames: and thrice was he repulsed by the heat and vapor. But at last he was able to reach the cabin door, and he contrived to throw in a few buckets of water: he was relieved by the carpenter, who in his turn was compelled to retreat; and in this way the crew, taking it by turns, were able to withstand for a brief space the stifling effects of the smoke, and to deluge the cabin with water.

In the mean time the sergeant's party had driven the convicts close to the brig, and the ensign, seizing the opportunity, added his own force to that of the assailants, and hemmed in the prisoners on the beach, in a hollow crescent, close to where the brig was burning.

“Surrender yourselves!” he called out; “you have no chance of escape; you see we are too strong for you. Surrender yourselves, and trust to the governor's mercy.”

There was a pause for a moment on either side. The convicts looked at one another, and looked at the soldiers. There were only nineteen against them; and their own party, by the accession of the four from the brig, was raised to thirty-two. It was nearly two to one in their favor; and the four muskets of their new comrades were an important addition of strength. But their habitual dread of the military, and the smart of the wounds which one or two of them had already received, made them waver in their determination. At last one of them acting as spokesman, came a step forward, and asked, “If, on surrender, their lives would be spared?”

“I have no authority to promise that,” replied the officer; “but as my desire is to prevent the shedding of blood, I will promise to make the most favorable representation of your submission to the governor; but your surrender must be unconditional.”

“What's the use,” said one of the convicts to his fellows, “of having our lives spared, as you call it? If they are spared, we shall be sent to Macquarrie Harbor, and that's worse than death. If we can't get our liberty, let us die where we are. We are two to one, and it's hard if we can't beat those soldiers: they are only men like ourselves; and when it comes

to close quarters, one man is as good as another. I'm for fighting it out, and taking our chance.”

“If we can only make our way to the hill which you can see from the top of the ridge there,” said one of the men from the brig, “we shall meet with Mark Brandon and two more, and then we may be able to have a try at the vessel again, and get clear off—who knows? There may be luck for us, as well as another.”

“I wish Mark Brandon was with us,” exclaimed several; “we want a leader; there's nothing to be done without a leader.”

“If Mark was with us he would soon hatch a scheme to outwit that young officer, there! Let us take our chance, and try to join him; we can but surrender at last.”

“Hurrah, then! let us make a rush, and break through the soldiers; if we can get into the bush, we shall be more of a match for 'em. Now, then, altogether!”

With a loud hurrah the prisoners fired a volley, and rushing forward, made their way through the soldiers, killing one, and wounding two more. But they had received a deadly discharge from the few whose position in front enabled them to take aim with effect; the soldiers at the sides of the short crescent being prevented from firing, from the consideration that if they did, their balls were likely to take effect on their comrades opposite.

Three of the prisoners fell on the beach; but the main body effected their retreat over the brow of a low hill, hotly pursued by the soldiers, who were exasperated at the death of one of their comrades. Their escape, however, did not avail them long; for as the country was nearly bare of trees in that direction, they were exposed to the practised aim of the military.

Three more prisoners were the sufferers by this running fire, both parties hastening forward at their best speed. But the prisoners, who were weary and footsore with their long and hurried journey from the camp, were outstripped on this occasion by the soldiers; and had not the latter been delayed in their pursuit by their occasional halts to reload, and by the habit of military precision which caused them to keep together, they would soon have overtaken the runaways, and have brought the matter to a sharp conclusion. As it was, the prisoners might have succeeded in effecting their escape had not an unexpected obstacle stopped their further progress. This was the inlet of the sea, branching out of D'Entrecasteaux channel.

The ensign, at the instigation of the constable, had edged away to the left, by which manœuvre he forced the prisoners to continue their flight more towards the right, whither they were gradually propelled, till they were stopped by the broad part of the inlet in which the constable's boat had taken shelter, and in which recess the ensign's boat had afterwards joined the first pursuers.

The prisoners saw the trap into which they had been driven too late; they found themselves inclosed in the angle formed by the channel on the one side, and the inlet on the other; the soldiers' line, which now advanced in order, forming the base of the triangle.

Without giving them time to recover themselves, the officer instantly summoned them a second time to surrender, and seeing that they turned round in an attitude of offence, he at once gave the word to fire.

Three volleys from the military disabled fourteen of the runaways, and their numbers being now reduced to twelve, Trevor gave the word to charge, when the prisoners, bewildered and panic-struck, allowed themselves to be taken without resistance.

Being disarmed, and bound with their hands behind them, they were carefully secured on the spot; and as the number of wounded was too large to be transported to the bay, the officer dispatched half a dozen of his men back to the boats at the bay with orders for the larger one of the two to be immediately brought round by the government sailors, in order that the captured runaways might be transported with as little delay as possible to Hobart Town, where the wounded could receive the necessary medical assistance, and the whole be dealt with according to law.

On questioning the prisoners, he learnt from some of them who were now willing to make terms for themselves by any disclosures they could offer, that Mark Brandon was to meet them at the foot of the hill, which they pointed out in the distance; and that the soldiers would be sure to find him there if they did their office warily, as Mark would have no suspicion of their having been set after him.

This prompt betrayal of their associates by the sneaks who trembled for their own skins, while it inspired the disgust with which it could not fail to strike an honest man's heart, abated considerably the commiseration which the ensign, as a brave soldier, could not avoid feeling for the sufferings which he was compelled to inflict in the execution of his duty.

"The dirty scoundrels!" said the constable; "they would betray their own father, most of them, for a glass of rum! And this, you see," he said to the ensign, "is what enables us to keep them down; they can never trust one another; every rascal knows that his fellow-rascal would sell him if he had the opportunity. Do you know," he continued, "I have my doubts about Mark having intended to join them again. If he wanted to join them, why didn't he do so at once, and while there was a chance of their being able to resist us successfully? That Mark Brandon is up to some dodge, depend on it: no doubt he set the ship on fire that we might busy ourselves about putting it out without going after him; and—that hill! let me see: that lies to the north, and if Mark takes to the bush his game would be to go to the westward. By George, it looks very like it!"

"Looks very like what?" asked the ensign.

"Why, you see, dealing with Mark is like playing at all-fours, or cribbage,—or drafts, more like: it's all a matter of circumventing; but I'm up to his game; I've been after him before."

"And what is his game, as you call it, now?"

"Look!" said the constable; "here's the north, and there's the west. Now, if Mark wanted to draw you and your men away from himself, what could he do better than tell these

poor devils that he would meet them at that hill yonder, and so egg 'em on to fight their way there, and you after them, and that would leave the coast clear for himself?"

"But there was the major's party to watch him," said the ensign, a flush coming over his face, as if struck with some sudden thought.

"He had provided against that by setting the ship on fire; and sailors would never leave their ship, he knew very well, at such a time, to go after all the bushrangers that ever went out."

"You think then that this Mark Brandon, if he took to the bush, would go westward?" said the ensign, with much interest.

"To be sure he would! Why, he never would run into the lion's mouth by going on the road back to camp; and he can't go eastward, because there's the broad channel between him and that side of the island. No; he has started off to the west, depend upon it, and he is going to try his chance in the bush, and that's why he has allowed only two of his six men to be with him, because he knows that in the bush the great point is to avoid being tracked;—besides, it's easier to feed three than seven."

"If he has gone westward," said the ensign, meditatively . . .

"No doubt of it."

"The place where the major left his daughters is on the west side of the bay?"

"To be sure it is."

"Do you think he will visit it?"

"I don't know," said the constable; "it would be running a risk: to be sure there's only that poor Mr. Silliman there. What have they got with them! any money, or watches, or trinkets! anything valuable that is easy to be carried?"

"I rather think the major said he had secured one or two bags of dollars; but there are the young ladies—of more consequence than money."

"I don't know: women are all very well in their way, but they are dreadful troublesome in the bush. I don't think Mark would be bothered with them. He likes a pretty gal, though, if all stories be true, and . . ."

"Could you engage to take charge of these prisoners," said the ensign, suddenly, "if I left you?"

"Ay, ay: leave your sergeant here with his party, and I'll engage to take care of them. We have 'em now as safe as bricks. You are going after Mark, then?"

"I think that unless we take him we shall effect but half our object. I will give instructions to the sergeant, and leave you in charge. The corporal and his two men will go with me."

"Take care," said the constable, as the ensign hastily took his departure, "that you don't lose your way going back: a man's easily lost in the bush, especially a new hand."

"Now, corporal," said Trevor, "we must put our best legs foremost; our work is not half done yet. Are you in good marching order?"

The corporal answered for himself and his men gladly, preferring much the roving and exciting life of such expeditions to the dull

monotony of barracks and daily drill; and full instructions having been left with the constable and the sergeant in anticipation of all accidents, Trevor set out on his way, his mind filled with the most lively apprehensions of alarm for the fate of Helen and her sister, should the bushranger take it into his head, for any purpose of plunder or violence, to visit the place of their retreat.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. SILLIMAN MAKES A DECLARATION.

THE sisters in the cave suffered the deepest anxiety during the events which have been related; but as their father and Mr. Trevor had exacted from them the promise that they would not, on any account, quit the protection of their covert, but wait with patience the issue of the conflict, they were precluded from attempting to ascertain what was going forward in the bay; and their ignorance of the posture of affairs between the bushrangers and their own friends, added to the painfulness of their apprehensions.

"Could not you climb that tree," asked Louisa of Mr. Silliman, who was assiduously keeping guard at the entrance behind the bulwark of dead timber, which had been erected for their defence, "and see what they are doing?"

"I've had enough of climbing," replied their sentinel, with a rueful countenance, at the remembrance of his reception by the opossums; "but to oblige you I would do it with pleasure, only, as I have been left here by the officer, as a sort of sentry, you see, miss, I am doing military duty, as it were, and a soldier must not quit his post."

"I thought you prided yourself more on being a sailor," said Louisa, with that sweet smile which the sex are always ready to exhibit when they want anything to be done for them; "and sailors are always such good climbers."

"I could climb," replied Jeremiah, with enthusiasm, "anything for you, Miss Louisa, if it was the biggest tree on all the island! But...."

"Mr. Silliman is right," said Helen; "he must not leave his post; as soldier's daughters, we know that; but this state of uncertainty is really very painful. I will try to explore the inside of the cave."

"Don't be so foolish, Helen," said her sister; "it is too dark for you to see where you are going; and perhaps there may be savage animals, or snakes, or something."

"I will take care of myself; I cannot bear standing still, doing nothing; perhaps this place has an outlet at the back."

Jeremiah and Louisa were left alone.

Jerry's heart had been excessively touched by the amiable manner in which the major's youngest daughter had recently been pleased to address him; and her preferring to remain with him, to accompanying her sister on her exploring expedition, seemed to him a favorable sign. His heart beat with great bumps, and he experienced, as he afterwards described it, a feeling of alloverishness, which convinced him that it was to Louisa, and not to Helen, that his heart was entirely devoted; a fact which he had doubted before, never having been able to make up

his mind as to which of the lovely sisters he preferred. But his present symptoms decided him as to his predilection. Oppressed, however, with the pleasing sensation, he heaved a prodigious sigh!

"What's that?" said Louisa, ready to take alarm at the slightest sound, and coming closer to Jeremiah. Jeremiah's heart beat quicker than ever! As he characteristically explained the emotion, "it went up and down just like the steam-engine in the Margate packet!"

"It's me!" said Jerry, pumping up another sigh, and looking at the young lady with eyes squeezed into the extremest point of tenderness.

"You, Mr. Silliman! Heavens! what's the matter?"

"Ah! Miss Louisa!"

"Are you in pain?" asked Louisa; for she was a kind and gentle girl, and she spoke with the sweetest commiseration.

"Ah! Miss Louisa! the wounds which you have inflicted on...."

"You mean the opossums?" said Louisa.

"No, miss; it is not the opossums. Sharp as their bites and scratches were, the wounds that I feel are sharper still!"

"Good gracious! Mr. Silliman, what do you mean?"

"Do you not feel," said Jerry, "the genial influence of this beautiful morning! The bright rays of the sun, and the notes of that melodious bird, which the ensign said was the native magpie, although, for the life of me, I can't make out how that can be—but I suppose it is so...."

"I hear nothing at present," replied Louisa, "but the curious cry of the bird that Mr. Trevor calls the laughing jackass."

"Think only of the agreeables," resumed Jerry. "I have been thinking how happy two people might live together, in a beautiful cave like this—loving one another! and listening to the birds, and gazing at the cockatoos as they fly about; eating the wild fruits of the earth, and drinking the water from the spring....all love!"

"What! without any bottled porter, Mr. Silliman?"

"All love, miss, and a little bottled porter! This is a beautiful country—isn't it?"

"You have not had a very beautiful reception in it," observed Louisa, looking round for her sister, and rather desirous to avoid a declaration, which, with the instinctive prescience of her sex, she felt was on the point of exploding; "it was hard to make your first acquaintance with the land, by being thrown into the sea by those wicked bushrangers!"

"It was hard, that! but it was for the best; for my being chucked into the sea was the means of making known to the constables and soldiers that the bushrangers had got possession of the brig."

"Was not the coming to life again, after being drowned almost, as you were, a very curious sensation?"

"Not so curious as the sensation I now feel, Miss Louisa, nor nearly so delightful! I...."

"Dear me! I should have thought it was rather a painful one! And did you not say," she continued, wishing to force the conversation from the point that Mr. Silliman was obviously seeking, "that you were bitten by a

great tarantula spider as big as a cheese-plate!"

"It might have bitten me, perhaps, but I killed the nasty thing;—but do you not think that two...."

"And the scorpions! Didn't they sting you!"

"No; I escaped them; but I was very near sitting down on a whole nest of the little wretches. I was going to say, Miss Louisa...."

"How horrible it must have been when you found yourself again in the hands of that dreadful man!—Mark Brandon, isn't he called? and when the kangaroo had hold of you—gracious! were you not frightened?"

"A man, Miss Louisa, is not easily frightened," said Jeremiah, assuming an heroic air. "I was not aware that kangaroos have such long sharp claws, or I should have killed the plaguy beast at once."

"And when the bushranger put his pistol into your mouth—heavens! what a mercy it was that it didn't go off! Were you not frightened then?"

"I was astonished, miss, but not frightened. A man to whom lovely woman looks up as her protector," said Jerry, putting his hand to his heart, "must have courage. How could I ask you to depend on me, if...."

"But how did you feel when Mr. Northland caught hold of your leg! The mate said that you didn't cry out, but stood as firm as—I forget what...."

"No, Miss Louisa, it does not become a man to cry out in danger like a woman: of course a woman cries out naturally when she is in a fright, because that is all she can do; but I fired off my musket, as was my duty, to give the alarm. But, dear Miss Louisa, this is not what I want to talk to you about. If you could see into my heart...."

"Oh, I have no doubt I should see a great many curious things! but I want you to tell me about the opossums...."

"You would see in it your image," continued the impassioned Jerry; "and your beautiful face engraved...."

"Dear me! that would be comparing it to a wooden one! But I wonder what is become of Helen?"

"She is not wanted at this moment. She is very pretty; but you, dear Miss Louisa," said Jerry, growing dangerously energetic, "are prettier still. You are, indeed! And I always thought so, all the way out, though I never told you so. I never did, because I feared I should offend you...."

"Where can Helen be? Helen!"

"Don't call her, dear Miss Louisa; let me tell you how I...."

"Really, Mr. Silliman, I'm quite frightened that Helen does not come. I must go and see after her, while you keep watch here. Stay; look there! Is not that smoke rising, a long way off, over those low rocks?"

"What is the matter?" asked her sister, returning hastily from the interior of the cave.

"The smoke, Helen! Do you see the smoke? there...."

"I do; and, listen! Was not that the sound of muskets firing?" said Helen, excited.

"The sound of firing!" said Louisa, trembling.

"Yes, the sound of firing. There, again! I

am sure it is; but it is a long way off: it comes from a point to the right of the smoke."

"O heavens!" exclaimed Louisa, "then they are fighting at this very moment, and dear papa perhaps is killed!"

"I hope George will not be rash!" unconsciously uttered Helen.

"It must be the boats attacking the brig," said Mr. Silliman.

"What can the smoke mean?" said Helen, anxiously.

"I know that something dreadful is happening," said the timid Louisa, bursting into tears, and sinking on the log of a tree, which had been placed in the cave for their accommodation.

"Go," said Helen to Mr. Silliman, "and try to see what is going on."

"But, Miss Helen," he remonstrated, "remember that I promised not to leave my post."

"Then I will go myself," said Helen. "Don't be frightened, Louisa; Mr. Silliman shall remain with you, and I will go to the edge of the bay, and try to find out what is going on. There can be no doubt of our party getting the better; but, perhaps.... But the shortest way is to go and see." So saying, notwithstanding the remonstrances of Jerry, who was sorely perplexed between his notions of gallantry, which prompted him to accompany Helen, and his sense of duty, and his inclination also to remain with Louisa, the spirited girl issued forth from the cave with a ship's cutlass in her hand, and was presently lost to their sight behind the rocks and bushes.

"The smoke grows thicker, but the firing is more faint," observed Jerry.

"I hope nothing will happen to Helen."

"There is no danger, miss; the bushrangers are far away, to judge from the sounds; and they say there is no fear of meeting with natives in this part of the island."

"But natives, perhaps, might come?"

"I wish your sister had not gone," said Jerry; "but she will soon be back."

There was a pause in the conversation for some time. Louisa was anxious and nervous, and Jerry was endeavoring to contrive some means of renewing the declaration which the return of Helen had interrupted.

"I wish you would have the kindness to stand up on these pieces of wood, and try if you can see Helen," said Louisa.

Jerry mounted on the wood.

"I can't see anything of her," he said.

"Don't you think she has been gone longer than was necessary?"

"She has been gone a little longer than I expected," replied Jerry, doubtfully.

"Had you not better go and see after her?" said Louisa, anxiously.

"And leave you alone, Miss Louisa?"

"If you wish to oblige me," said Louisa, hesitating, and crimsoning slightly, "you will do what I wish."

"I will go directly," said Jerry, dismounting from the pile of timber. "But I don't like to leave you alone."

"It will be only for a minute; just go to the other side of that rock, and look about you."

"I will run there and back, then, as fast as I can," said Jerry. "Take this pistol; you are

not afraid to fire off a pistol! See, it's quite a little thing, compared to my musket; and if you hear any sound to alarm you, let it off. Not that it will be necessary, for I shall not be away more than a minute or two, and you will scarcely lose sight of me all the time. Now I'll run as quick as I can; and when I come back, perhaps you will allow me to . . ."

"Run—and run quick," said Louisa.

Jerry girded up his loins, and ran enthusiastically.

Louisa remained at the entrance of the cave behind the woodwork for some time listening attentively, and straining her eyes to discover her sister or Mr. Silliman coming back; but to her surprise the latter did not return as she expected. She held her breath and listened, but she could hear nothing; and neither her sister nor Jerry came. She had her right arm extended, holding the pistol as far from her as possible, and in no inconsiderable fear lest it should go off with a terrible shock, of its own head.

In this posture she remained for many minutes, which seemed to be as many hours, waiting, and listening, and trembling with apprehension. She cast her eyes back into the interior of the cave; but on that side all was dark, and the obscurity of its uncertain recesses chilled and frightened her. She began to experience the fear which is apt to overtake the timid, and especially those of the gentler sex, when they find themselves alone and exposed to unknown danger. She tried to fire off the pistol; but in her state of alarm, not understanding how to set the lock, she pulled at the trigger with her soft and feeble finger in vain; and every now and then she endeavored with anxious eyes to penetrate the depths of the cavern, whose darkness filled her with vague fears of some native, or something, on the point of emerging from its recesses.

At last, her fear altogether mastering her, and feeling it less terrible to seek for her sister in the bush than remain where she was, with the courage of desperation she clambered over the fortification of logs, and with her pistol in her hand, which she feared alike to hold or to relinquish, she rushed towards the bay, in the direction taken by Helen.

She looked around her, but she saw nothing. She listened, but she could hear nothing. There was a high ridge of rocks between her and the bay: remembering that it had been planned that a party of soldiers should be stationed to the right, she ran forward in that direction. She wandered for some minutes, lost, and confused, and frightened at meeting with no one, when on a sudden a sight met her eyes which stopped the current of her blood, and froze her heart within her!

She could not scream—she could not move! She sank down behind some rocks, and with eyes glazed with terror, stared through a cleft at the appalling scene before her!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CAPTIVES.

THE scene before her eyes was of a description to strike with terror a far stouter heart than that of the gentle Louisa.

At a little distance, on a loose piece of rock, sat her sister Helen, with her hands tied behind her; over her mouth had been tied a silk handkerchief, which, however, had slipped down, so that she was able to breathe freely. By her side stood a most repulsive-looking man, with a musket which he held pointed towards her in a threatening manner; and he seemed ready at the slightest cry or motion to discharge its contents through her head. Even in that time of mortal peril the heroic girl, though deadly pale, seemed calm and collected; and although her beautiful head and neck, fixed and motionless, resembled rather a piece of marble statuary than the living flesh of a human being, there was a flashing light from her eye which revealed the stirring thoughts that agitated her within.

Not far from her sister, and exhibiting the very personification of surprise and fear, was the wretched Jeremiah, prostrate, on his knees, gagged, with his hands bound behind him, and turning his eyes sideways, with an expression which, had it not been for the horrible reality of the danger, would have been ludicrously doleful, towards a man who stood guard over him with a musket, the muzzle of which touched his ear, and who, with his finger on the trigger, seemed momentarily inclined to relieve himself from the fatiguing restraint of such a posture by a gentle touch which would free him in a moment from the trouble of guarding his prisoner.

"Mark is a long time away," said the man who was guarding Helen, to the other; "we are losing time."

"He is settling the young one," said his companion; "I thought I heard a squeak just now."

"That's the shortest way," replied the first; "but she was a nice gal." Here he exchanged a peculiar wink with the other, nodding his head, and setting his eye at Helen, a signal which she could not avoid perceiving, and which the other responded to by a peculiar grin.

Mark in the mean time had gone to the cave for the purpose of getting possession of the money which the major had taken from the vessel, and which the bushranger wisely judged might stand him in good stead at some future time. Jeremiah, in the excess of his terror, and stimulated by the propinquity of a loaded musket to his head to tell all he knew, had let out the secret that there was a large sum of money deposited in the cave, consisting of sovereigns and dollars, but as their concealment had been effected before he had joined the party, he had been unable to state more than that the money was deposited somewhere.

Mark had no doubt of being able to terrify the youngest daughter into confessing where the treasure was concealed; but to his surprise he found the cave vacant; and after a hasty search for the money, which he was unable to find, he made up his mind at once that his only chance was to get the secret out of Helen: and as time pressed, and as the absence of Louisa was an alarming incident, he hastily returned to the spot where Helen and Jeremiah were held in duress by his companions.

The appearance of Mark Brandon redoubled the terror of Louisa, who now gave herself up for lost, expecting every moment that the searching eyes of the ever-watchful bushranger would spy her out amongst the rocks, and that

she would be suddenly dragged from her retreat to share the fate of her sister! But fortunately for her, Mark passed in such a direction that she was hidden from his view as she lay crouched down in her hiding-place, and she saw him proceed straight to Helen.

Making a sign to his companions, which it seemed they well understood, he took the place of the man who had been mounting guard over Helen, and who, in obedience to some brief directions which Mark gave him, stepped to the margin of the bay, with his face towards the north, on the lookout for enemies from that quarter, in which might be seen the smoke of the burning vessel.

Mark Brandon, with his fowling-piece carelessly thrown over his arm, with admirable coolness commenced his operations.

He was burning with impatience; but he felt that his object was not to be attained by violence. He resolved, therefore, to put in practice all the arts of his deceptive tongue, for which he was so famous among his fellows, and which had often helped him out of difficulties when all other resources failed him. But he took care not to let his impatience be visible.

In this position the parties remained for some little time; and Louisa, seeing that her sister was in the power of the dreaded bushranger, strained her ears to catch the words which presently he began to speak in a quiet, but earnest tone to Helen.

From his attitude, which was in the highest degree respectful, and from the tone of his deep clear voice, which, though earnest and determined, was mild and low, it might have been supposed that he was soliciting some favor from a young lady of his acquaintance which he had a right to demand, but which he nevertheless requested with a polite deference to her sex rather than insisted on as a matter of right which he had the power to enforce; but the appearance of his companion with his cocked musket close to Mr. Silliman's ear, and the fowling-piece which Mark held in his hand, was an overt demonstration of possible violence which contrasted strangely with the bland manner of his address.

"Miss Horton," he began, "I am quite ashamed to say anything that could imply a doubt of a lady's word; but you must excuse me if I cannot understand how the spot where your father has deposited the dollars that Mr. Silliman there speaks of, can be unknown to you! Your frank and immediate communication of the fact, permit me to say, will save much trouble to all parties—and to yourself, perhaps, some inconvenience."

Helen made no reply.

"It is quite useless," pursued the bushranger, "to pretend ignorance of this matter; besides, if I were willing to forego this prize myself, my companions would not agree to it; so that you see, Miss Horton, your best course is an immediate avowal of the truth. That man," he continued, "who has his musket at your friend's head, is one of the most audacious persons you can possibly conceive, and there is no saying what lengths he might go to in his passion, for it would be impossible for me to control him. Jem Swindell," he added, raising his voice, and addressing his associate, whom it would be

difficult to say that he very much calumniated, "take your finger from the trigger of your musket; it might go off at a start, and that would be a pity, for we don't want to inconvenience the gentleman more than we can help; besides, the report might give an alarm, which is best avoided. Mind how you let the hammer down in putting it on half-cock, for it might slip, and then the poor gentleman would receive the contents of your barrel through his head, which is far from my wish; but keep it in the same position, Jemmy, that you may be ready."

It is impossible to describe the agony of poor Jeremiah, as his sentry, at the intimation of Mark Brandon, whom he inwardly thanked in his heart for the considerate suggestion, made the little arrangement with the lock of his musket which removed the immediate apprehension of having his brains blown out by any sudden impulse, or accidental agitation of the finger of the inexorable Jemmy, who, despite the pleasing familiarity with which Mark spoke to him, was one of the most ferocious-looking rascals that ever took to the bush.

But as Helen's eyes were naturally and involuntarily turned to the position and danger of her harmless acquaintance, she could not but be aware of the peril to which he was exposed, and, by reflection, of the immediate danger in which she herself was, and how entirely they all were at the mercy of the desperate men who had them in their power. The thoughts which agitated her mind were visible on her countenance.

Mark observed the change which appeared in her features, and he congratulated himself that his little contrivance to impress on her, unostentatiously but forcibly, the desperate condition of her affairs, had succeeded. He pursued his arguments, therefore, briskly, without giving time for her agitation to subside.

"You may believe me, Miss Horton," he resumed, "when I say that I should be most sorry to see you placed in the position of your friend there; but what can I do! You see my companions are two to one against me, and the money they will have, even if they proceed to the last extremities; and if a man in my situation might presume to offer his respectful deferences to a young lady of personal attractions and accomplishments such as you possess, I would entreat you to believe that your life is what I would endeavor to preserve, even at the sacrifice of my own. But, as I said before, they are two to one, and all that I can do is to endeavor to prevail on you to reveal the place where the money is deposited, without obliging my comrades—who, I confess, are rather rough in their manners—to use the most dreadful means to compel you."

The artful words of the bushranger, whom the constable had not inaptly described as "the most carrying devil that ever got over a woman," began to have an effect on Helen; and she could not suppose that the man who addressed her with a demeanor so respectful, and with such a propriety of language, could be the unprincipled ruffian he really was.

Besides, his mode of proceeding was altogether unlike what she had pictured to herself under such circumstances, and what she had feared at his hands. Instead of the boisterous

threats and the instant violence which she had anticipated, she was met with the most bland expressions, and the most earnest desire apparently to save her from personal insult. Seeing, however, that Mark Brandon was in this complacent humor, she thought that she might turn it to account.

Her principal anxiety at the moment was for her sister. Knowing Louisa's gentle and timid nature, she feared that in her terror she would reveal and submit to all rather than encounter the dreadful death which would be threatened by the bushrangers. The point for her, therefore, was to gain time, in the hope that her father or Trevor would send assistance. But she little thought of the consummate art and duplicity of the mind with which she had to contend.

Mark Brandon, on the other hand, was quite as much alive as she was to the importance of time; but as he had ulterior designs, which she could not penetrate, it was only in pursuance of his plan that he now endeavored to arrive at his object—that of getting possession of the money, by the mildest means; and he had his reasons for treating her with a deference and attention approaching almost to gallantry—his loaded fowling-piece always excepted—which, had Helen been aware of, would have made her shudder, and would have put her effectually on her guard against his insinuating expressions.

It is to be observed, also, that Mark Brandon had had the address to make his companions secure Helen's person and bind her hands, so that he avoided coming into personal collision with her in a way which, he was aware, could not fail to be extremely disagreeable to a young and delicate girl, and which was sure to make her regard her aggressors with aversion and horror. According to his own expression, he did only "the genteel part of the business," leaving to minor and subordinate hands to execute the practical parts of the ruffianism; and, as has been before remarked, having certain ulterior views, not only as to the money, but also with respect to Helen, which he did not allow for the present to be apparent, he was anxious that she should not conceive any irreconcilable hatred towards himself; but, on the contrary, that she should regard him as an unfortunate and perhaps ill-used man, who was the victim of necessity, and who was desirous to alleviate the hardships of her fate by all the means in his power.

Such were the relative positions of these two parties—the one, with the ardor and hope of youth and innocence, fancied that her own purity was a sufficient shield against the refined duplicity and the consummate villainy of the other, on whom it may be said the spirit of a Mephistopheles had been infused, to aid him in his iniquitous designs.

Helen wished to gain time, and with that view she endeavored to prolong the conversation:—

"I thank you," she said, after some little reflection, "for the good intentions which you express toward me; but if you are sincere, why do you allow my hands to remain bound behind my back, which," she added, "hurts me!"

"It is a severity that I could not have brought

myself to practise," replied Mark; "but as it is done, if I was to attempt to remove the cord it would excite the suspicions of my companions; besides, under the circumstances, I assure you it is best for yourself that your hands should be confined, for if you were entirely at liberty, your high spirit, which I so much admire, might prompt you to make attempts at escape which could not possibly succeed, but which would stimulate one of those men to commit a violence on you which I should deplore as much as yourself. You must consider the confinement of your hands, therefore, as a protection against yourself and your own courage; although, if it was not for the presence of my companions, I assure you I would release them on the instant: and, indeed, to see you in such a position gives me more pain than I can possibly express. But you will permit me to observe to you that you have it in your own power to put an end to it, by informing me of the place where the money is concealed."

While Mark was making this little speech, in which he endeavored to convince his victim that her hands were bound behind her back, and that she was reduced to her present state of helplessness entirely for her own good, Helen was revolving in her mind the remarkable circumstance that he made no mention of her sister Louisa, who knew as well as herself where the money was deposited.

It struck her that, perhaps, Louisa, alarmed by the lengthened absence of herself and of Mr. Silliman, had ventured from the cave in search of them, and so had escaped being molested by the bushranger. The possibility of this immediately inspired her with hope. Her sister, she considered, when she failed in finding them, would endeavor to join her father. In that case not only would Louisa be saved, but the news of their being missing would certainly cause her father to dispatch some of the soldiers to look for them, and by that means they might be delivered from the power of the bushrangers.

These thoughts urged her the more strongly to endeavor to gain time: and as Mark Brandon seemed inclined to treat her with respect, she bent her whole soul to the invention of expedients for prolonging the conversation. Her anxiety for her sister furnished her with a ready subject.

"I am waiting for your answer," said Mark Brandon.

"How was it," said Helen, "that my sister did not tell you where the money was concealed?"

"Your sister," he replied, with the slightest possible hesitation and embarrassment, which Helen, however, did not fail to observe, "said that she was not acquainted with the spot."

"That could not be," replied Helen, "because she assisted to place it there."

"Where?" said Mark.

"What have you done with my sister?" said Helen, anxiously and imploringly. "I will tell you nothing till you let me see my sister."

"She is in the cave," replied Mark; "you can see her there if you will. But time passes, Miss Horton, and it is necessary that you should understand that I cannot continue this conversation any longer. We must have the money, or else you will find yourself in the hands of my

companions, who, I fear, would not treat you with the respect which I observe. It is very painful to me to be obliged to insist thus peremptorily; but for your own sake, I entreat you to tell me at once, where is the money?"

"I will tell you nothing," said Helen, firmly, "before I know what has become of my sister."

"In one word, then, Miss Horton, I will tell you the exact truth. I did not see your sister in the cave: doubtless, she had fled into some part of its interior, which I had not time to explore. So far as I am concerned, therefore, your sister is quite safe. You may easily be satisfied that what I tell you is true, by reflecting for a moment that, had I seen your sister, I could not have failed to persuade her to tell me what I wanted to know, that is, without using any violence towards her, which is as far from my wish with her, as it is in regard to yourself. But again, I say, Miss Horton, that my comrades will not longer be trifled with in this matter. If it only concerned myself, I would not care; but those two others who are engaged with me would not have the patience which I have had. Be so good as to say, then, whether you have made up your mind to be taken possession of by Mr. James Swindell, yonder, or whether you will be reasonable, and let me know at once that which they will make you tell at last. Jemmy, my man," he continued, raising his voice a little, "I know what you look at me for, but I can't help it; the young lady will not let us have the money. Yes—I know what you mean; you mean to say that she wants a little of your persuasion."

"What shall we do with this chap?" said Jemmy, with a ferocious grin, cocking his musket again, and putting his finger on the trigger; "settle him at once; or suppose we stow him away with a stone round his neck at the bottom of the bay, yonder? He wouldn't get out again easily, I fancy. Now, Mark, we have had enough of this. If you have finished your jaw with the gal, let me take a turn; I warrant I'll bring her to her senses in no time. Fair play, you know, Mark, among friends; you mustn't mind her squeaking out a bit."

"Stay," said Helen to Mark Brandon. "Promise me that no harm shall be done to us—to Louisa,—nor to me,—nor to Mr. Silliman, and I will tell you."

"You may rely upon my word," said Mark. "If harm was intended, it would have been done already. All that my men want is the money; and, considering their condition, you must allow that their desire is excusable. Now—tell me—speak!"

Helen paused for a short time. She perceived that now, more than ever, time was everything. She felt assured that Louisa had escaped; and in that case, it was most likely that she would fly in the direction of the soldiers. Under such circumstances, she thought that a subterfuge on her part was allowable; and, for the sake of gaining time, which to them was life and liberty, and perhaps to her, even more than life, she told Mark Brandon to look in a recess on his left hand, as he entered the cave, and there he would find two bags—the small one of gold, and the other, large and very heavy, of dollars.

Without losing a moment, Mark summoned the man on the lookout, who bore a most murderous aspect, to resume his position by the side of Helen, and having whispered a few words in his ear, the obedient myrmidon presented his musket at her head—an action which he followed up, as soon as Mark was out of hearing, by a most diabolical threat, which made her wish for the return of his less ferocious principal, who was, however, notwithstanding his polished address, by far the greater villain of the two.

Mark's absence was not long. Although he was much disappointed, and inwardly was savage at not finding the treasure where he expected, his extraordinary mastery over his passions, when it was to his interest to conceal them, enabled him to preserve towards Helen a demeanor, which, although expressive of his discontent, was not indicative of revengeful or hostile feelings towards herself. According to his plan, to which he firmly adhered, he left the threatening and violent part of the proceedings to his subordinates.

"It is of no use," he said, addressing his companions, "to wait any longer; the money is not to be found. You must determine for yourselves what to do. But the money is there, sure enough, if we could only find it."

"But," said the man who had the custody of Helen, and swearing a terrible oath, "have it we will, or else..."

"Of course," said the bushranger, "you will use no violence."

"I tell you what it is, Mark," said the man; "all this gammon is very well between you and the gals, but it won't do for us. The long and the short of it is, we must draw lots for her; that's fair bush play. Jemmy, put your ball through that chap's head, and have done with it. I'm tired of this. What do you say, Jemmy?"

"And so am I too," said Jemmy. "Come, Mark, let us know what your game is. We may settle this chap, I suppose, without more ado. But as to the gal, I'm of Roger Grough's mind—let us draw lots for her; and as to the other young one, why the two that lose can draw lots for her afterwards."

"Stay," cried out Brandon, as Jemmy was coolly going to put his threat in regard to the unfortunate Jerry in execution, "let us give them another chance. Now, Miss Horton, you see how things are; I can't keep my companions from having their will. It is for you to say what shall be done; but you must decide at once, for I can't interfere any further. Where is the money?"

"I will go with you to the cave," said Helen, who had prolonged the result to the last possible moment, and who now saw that any attempt at further evasion was useless; "I will go with you to the cave, and show you where the money is lodged. Only promise me," she said, hesitatingly, "that you will not use any violence."

"I promise," said Mark.

"And I will go with you," said Grough, "to see fair play. No offence meant, Mark, my boy; but the cave, and the opportunity! All on a level in the bush, you know, Mark, and fair play's the word; no gammon with us: better draw lots before you go."

"No, no," said Mark, who had his own reasons for wishing to be alone when he made prize of the gold and silver; "there's no time for that nonsense. Do you keep a good lookout, Roger, towards the smoking vessel; we may have the soldiers down on us before we are aware, and then we shall have to run for it. Let us only get the money; we can have the other at any time."

So saying, he proceeded with Helen, still with her hands bound behind her, in the direction of the cave.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DECEPTION.

NOTWITHSTANDING the habitual caution of Mark Brandon, and his maxim of always sacrificing minor objects to his grand aim of escaping from bondage, it is impossible to say how far the temptation of the presence of the beautiful girl, who was utterly in his power, might have overcome his resolution, had not Helen herself conceived some misgivings of the prudence of being alone with a man of his dangerous character. The fears which assailed her caused her, before they were out of sight of his companions, to refuse to proceed further.

"It will be better for you to go on," said Mark.

"I will not go farther," said Helen, stopping with a determined air.

"Then Grough will take the matter in hand," said Brandon.

"You may put me to death, if you will, but I will not go on with you to the cave."

"And the money?" said Mark.

"The money you will find behind the rock, at the back of the recess."

"You did not say this at first."

"I did not, because I forgot at the moment that the bags were removed from the first place in order to hide them better."

"I will try again, then," said Mark, "trusting entirely to your word: but I fear my comrades are growing savage."

"Could you not untie my hands first?" said Helen, throwing into her appeal just that slight tinge of earnest and confident supplication which has ever so powerful an effect on men, however brutal, when uttered by a woman in winning tones.

"Certainly!" said Mark, readily. "But no," he added, reluctantly, and almost sorrowfully—"their eyes are upon me, and it might cost you your life. I assure you, Miss Horton, I will free your hands and yourself too the moment I can find the opportunity; but at present it would be dangerous, for those men naturally consider that their safety depends on your being secured. And now let me particularly request you not to make a noise, nor move a step, for I could not answer for that man Grough, nor Swindell neither, they are so very passionate and violent. They would shoot that poor Mr. Silliman dead on the instant, and then they would not scruple to use you as they pleased. For your own sake, therefore, be still and silent."

Having thus cautioned her, and it being impossible for her to escape in his absence, bound

as she was, and within sight of his confederates, he repaired with all speed to the cave, and, to his great joy, found the money behind the stone. Judging from the weight of the gold, he guessed that the smaller bag did not contain less than a thousand or more sovereigns; and the bag of dollars was almost as much as he could lift.

With respect to the gold, it was far from his intention to share such precious stuff between his two associates; he therefore looked about for a convenient spot to make a plant of his treasure. Spying at a little distance the hollow tree in which Jerry had made acquaintance with the opossum family the night before, he quickly examined it, and judging it to be a safe place for hiding the treasure, he gently dropped it to the bottom of the hollow, and the clink of the coin as it fell to the ground inside assuring him that it was safely stowed, he immediately returned with the bag of dollars to his companions.

The eyes of Jemmy and Roger eagerly devoured the money, which amounted, as they guessed, to about a thousand dollars a-piece; and at the suggestion of Brandon, having taken as many as each could conveniently carry, the bag was forthwith buried by Brandon and Swindell under a stone at some distance, Grough keeping guard the while over their two prisoners; and it was solemnly sworn between the three that it should be divided between them at some future time in equal shares.

This matter having been arranged, they turned their attention to their prisoners. As they had no time to lose, they resolved to proceed immediately to the cave, and take from the stores deposited there whatever they might want for their use in the bush, trusting to the chance of being able to surprise some boat on the coast, and of making their escape by such means from the colony. Committing Jeremiah to the charge of Jemmy and Roger, and taking Helen under his own care, Brandon at once led the way to the cave. Their first care was to remove, as quickly as possible, all the stores which they thought would be useful to them hereafter to a considerable distance, and to bury them and hide them in proper places, taking careful note of the various "plants." All this they did most diligently and rapidly. Their next step was to load themselves with the various provisions and stores, including an ample supply of spirits: but here a difficulty arose; the articles were so numerous as to be extremely cumbersome to carry; and of all desirable things in the bush, one of the most desirable is to be lightly laden.

"What a pity it is," said Jemmy, "that we have no donkeys in the island; one of the long-eared just now would be the very thing for us. As to carrying these loads ourselves, I can never do it; the toil is more than the pleasure."

"The brandy is worth carrying, at any rate," said the more industrious Roger; "and remember the bottles are sure to get lighter as we go."

"It will never do," returned Jemmy. "What to do I don't know!—I can't carry them; but it goes against my heart to leave them behind. I say, Mark, what shall we do! It's a sin to leave such a lot of lush behind us for those rascals of soldiers and constables to tittle! What do you say?"

"Perhaps this gentleman," suggested Mark,

pointing to Mr. Silliman, "would have the goodness to carry our provisions for us. And as he will not have to carry arms and ammunition, the load would not be an inconvenience to him."

"By George! a capital thought! he will be almost as good as a donkey!" exclaimed Jemmy, in the enthusiasm of his approbation. "But I say, Mark, won't there be danger in that? He may betray us, eh?"

"Not he," replied Brandon; "besides, as I mean to take the young lady with me, he will be useful as a servant."

"No, Master Brandon," said Grough, "that won't do. We are all one in the bush; and if we are to have the gal with us, we must draw lots, as I said at first. I don't see why one of us is to have her more than another."

"Suppose we leave it to the young lady herself," said Mark, "to choose one of us; and the other two must abide by her decision!"

"That is fair," said Jemmy; "that gives us all an equal chance."

"I don't know that," said Grough. "Mark has been carrying her over already. However, I don't want to make words; I agree."

"Who shall propose it?" asked Jemmy.

"I will," said Mark.

"No, no!" said the suspicious Grough, "let's have it all fair and above-board—all three together."

"Then it will be better to postpone this question," said Brandon, "till we make our halt for the night. I don't expect that we shall have the major's people nor the soldiers on us before we have plenty of time to make a long stretch inland. The major is busy about his vessel—we gave him something to do there; and the young officer is after the main body of our fellows out by the hill, that I pointed out as the place of our meeting."

"You don't mean to go there?" said Jemmy.

"I think," replied Brandon, "that, under the circumstances, it will be best for us to keep together by ourselves: too many at a time in the bush is inconvenient. And now, my boys, let us make a start."

When Mr. Brandon communicated to Mr. Silliman the decision of the bushrangers, that he should accompany them in their retreat in the capacity of a pack-horse, and promised him good treatment if he behaved well in his employment, that wretched individual was rather rejoiced than otherwise at his promotion; for anything was better than to have the disagreeable musket of the careless Jemmy Swindell everlastingly set at his head: and while there was life, he sagely argued, there was hope; and the intention of the bushrangers to make him their slave showed that they had no present design of taking away his life.

He acquiesced, therefore, with great submission, and his hands being released and the gag in his mouth a little relaxed, he proceeded to assist Jemmy and Roger in loading himself, with much alacrity, and with a readiness to oblige, which was both prudent and philosophical on the occasion. But when Mark Brandon intimated to Helen that it was their intention to take her with them, she at once refused, and declared she would rather suffer death than allow herself to be removed from the cave.

"You may be quite sure, Miss Horton," said Mark, in his most insinuating way, "that I strenuously opposed this plan; but I found my men so obstinate and determined, that it was impossible for me to persuade them to forego their resolution. They said, that if you were left behind, you would give information to your pursuers of our numbers and our plans, which would lead to our destruction. All that I could do was to prevail on them to consent that you should return with your friend Mr. Silliman, after we had reached a sufficient distance from this place to render pursuit of us hopeless."

"Is it possible that I can believe that you speak truth?" said Helen.

"The alternative," quickly replied Mark, "is too dreadful for me to dare to mention to you; but the loss of your life, I fear, with such desperate men, would be the least of the evils that you would have to suffer. Observe that Mr. Silliman will accompany you."

"And we are to be released when you have reached a place of safety."

"Certainly," replied Mark; "your own sense must tell you that a lady in the bush would be a most inconvenient addition. But to satisfy the apprehensions of my companions it is absolutely necessary that you should go with us for a certain distance, in order to prevent your giving information of our proceedings to those who might be inclined to follow us."

"But am I to be taken away with my hands bound in this painful way?" said Helen, a wild hope flashing on her mind, that if her hands were free she might find an opportunity to escape.

"The moment we have passed from the vicinity of these rocks," replied Mark Brandon, "my companions consent to your being unbound; but for a short distance, however painful it may be for me, Miss Horton, to see you in such a state, we must submit to a force that is stronger than ours."

These words the bushranger spoke in a tone so tender and yet so respectful, that Helen could not help fancying that she possessed a power over him which she might use advantageously for herself and her fellow-prisoner. Mark Brandon, with his usual art, had succeeded in infusing into her the idea that his actions were controlled by his two associates, and that the rigor with which she had been treated was their act and not his; and that, on the contrary, he would willingly aid her escape if he were not bound by ties of fellowship to his comrades, and, indeed, overmatched by them in strength, inasmuch as they were two to one against him.

Possessed with this flattering hope, and little aware of the extent of the diabolical deceit or the man whom she had to deal with, she suffered herself to be persuaded to accompany them without resistance; thus justifying Mark's observation to his associates:—

"You see, my mates, that 'softly' does it."

Helen was so afraid that the bushrangers would commence a search after Louisa that she forbore to mention her name, trusting that her sister had made good her escape in the direction where the burning vessel pointed out the presence, most likely, of her father and the

ship's crew ; and Brandon, considering that the girl had wandered into the bush, and being bent on securing Helen, and of getting away before it was too late, did not trouble himself to look after her : but satisfied with his booty, and with his still dearer prize, whom he had resolved to appropriate to himself, though at the sacrifice of the lives of his two comrades, and Jeremiah being driven before them like a beast of burden, he made the best of his way into the thickest recesses of the bush.

It is easy to be supposed that, while much of the scenes which have been described were passing, the terrified Louisa was a prey to the most dismal apprehensions.

At first she supposed that her sister and poor Mr. Silliman were instantly to be put to death ; and she feared that in such case her own life would be the next sacrifice, for she felt that it would be impossible for her to avoid screaming out ! But when she found that it was not the intention of their captors, as it seemed, to take away their lives, and that Mark Brandon addressed her sister, as she observed, in the most respectful manner, she recovered herself sufficiently to note accurately the whole of the proceedings that met her view.

When the bushrangers, taking with them their prisoners, departed for the cave, she lay close in her hiding-place ; but as she had the advantage of being able to see without being seen, she watched them till they were out of sight.

Now was the time, she thought, to get away, and to endeavor to find her father or the soldiers. If she kept near the banks of the bay she judged that she must fall in with one or other of the party ; though she was sadly in fear lest she should meet either bushrangers or natives on her way. Stimulated, however, by the danger which was close to her, and urged by the desire to save her sister from the hands of the desperate men who held her captive, and not without an amiable wish to save the harmless and good-natured Jeremiah from the fate with which he was threatened, she mustered up courage to set out.

Once in motion, she never looked behind her, but, taking advantage of the rocks and bushes which were scattered about, to screen herself from the observation of her enemies, she fled on the wings of fear towards the spot where she doubted not she should meet with friends with whom she would be safe, and who would promptly hasten to her sister's rescue.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOPES.

In the mean time the major, assisted by his active officer, and ably supported by the crew of the vessel and the government sailors, was vigorously engaged in battling with the fire which had been kindled in the principal cabin of the brig by Mark Brandon, who had perpetrated that most diabolical act in order to occupy the attention of his antagonists, and to prevent them from turning their thoughts to him and to the inmates of the cave.

In this he had fully succeeded ; for so busy were the sailors, with their commanders, in

extinguishing the flames, and in repairing the damage that had been done to the vessel, as well by the fire as by her striking on the shoal, that they could think of nothing else but the urgent work on which they were employed.

The extinguishing of the fire proved a less difficult matter than they had hoped, although the parts which had been ignited continued to send forth smoke for some time after the flames had been overcome.

This being effected, however, and all danger on that score over, the sailors began to recollect that it was near eight bells—that is to say, that it was about mid-day ;—and that they had been able to procure no refreshment, since the night before, more than a bite at some hard ship's biscuit, which was by no means sufficient to satisfy seamen's appetites when "better grub," as they nautically expressed it, was to be got.

With one accord, therefore, they signified to the mate that they would take it as a particular favor if the skipper would be pleased to make it twelve o'clock ; it being the particular function of that omnipotent person on board ship—the captain—not only to make it twelve o'clock every day at his will and pleasure, but on the extraordinary occasion of a voyage eastward round the globe, to make either an extra Sunday or an extra working-day on some one week of the circumnavigation, according to expediency, and to his own particular convenience.

As the major well knew that one most important means of keeping sailors in good humor is to feed them and grog them well, he forthwith gave orders for striking eight bells, according to the request conveyed to him ; and as the brig's cabouse was found to be sadly out of order from the effects of the storm, which Mark Brandon's people had neither the time nor the skill to remedy, he gave directions for making up a huge fire of wood on the beach ; and it was the smoke from this extempore ship's kitchen that the party at the cave mistook for the burning of the vessel.

The dinner from the ample stores of the brig's beef and pork went on favorably, while a judicious distribution of rum completed the general satisfaction ; and the jovial sailors, refreshed with rest and food, rushed joyously to their work, which was to get the brig off from the shoal.

Fortunately for the bottom of the gallant vessel, the part of the shoal where she struck was entirely of sand, so that there were hopes that so far she had escaped uninjured. The mate, also, did not fail to take advantage of the rising tide, by carrying out an anchor seaward, and putting a strain on the cable from the bow of the vessel. The position of the brig, however, was an awkward one, and it required all the skill and exertions of their united strength to warp her off on the rising of the tide, with the assistance of both boats, and with the strain of two cables attached to the anchors besides.

This, however, by the perseverance and encouragement of the mate, who bent his whole soul to the work, and by the liberal promises of the major, was at last effected, and the little vessel was once more afloat on the bosom of the waters. The wind had gone down again.

but there was a broken swell which caused the vessel to toss about like a maimed and crippled thing, filling the worthy mate with a poignant pain which almost counterbalanced his joy at seeing the mistress of his affections swimming with a melancholy flauntness on her native element.

Ah! poor thing! he said, as he stood on the shore and surveyed her changed appearance, you see what has happened to you, you hussey, by letting yourself get into bad hands! But it wasn't her fault neither, he said; but mine, for listening to the blarney of that cursed pilot, with his sea-lawyer's jaw and his damn'd long-tailed coat! I ought to have known better—I ought—and that's the truth of it. I mis-trusted those long tails from the first; it wasn't seaman-like, to say the least of it—it was indecent! and I deserve to be flogged, I do, for being so flummoxed by such a lubberly-looking rascal. But I'll make you all right again, my beauty! I will. There's a lovely foresail in the mainhold, and I'll spread it on her, and she shall look as saucy as a new bride!

"But her mainmast is gone," said the major, interrupting his officer's self-accusatory and affectionate exclamations; "how shall we manage for that!"

"It's a bad job, I confess," replied the mate. "But look at that grove of trees, yonder, with their tall straight stems; those are the stringy-bark trees, I take it. There's a new mast ready-made to our hand; and it is but a light bit of timber that we want for our little boat, God bless her! and we'll ship it in no time, that is, if it wouldn't be better to rig out a jury-mast enough to carry us into port in the Derwent; and then we can do it at our leisure, and more ship-shape."

"Bear-a-hand, my sons," he sang out to the sailors, "and clear away this gear," pointing to the shattered mainmast, which had been cut away from the vessel, and was lying half in the water on the shoal.

"I think," he continued, turning to the major, "that we had better trust to a jury-mast to take us round the headland and through the channel: we shall not make so good a job of it here, and it's best to be in port as soon as we can. There's no knowing how soon we might have another visit from these confounded bushrangers—the devil burn them! the place seems to grow bushrangers! And the sooner, perhaps, we get the young ladies on board the better: to my mind it's safer for them to be on board than on shore any time. When one is on board ship we know where we are, which we never do ashore; for the streets run in and out, and the houses are all alike—and there's no getting a sight of the sun, so that you never know your bearings; and as to your latitude and longitude, it's all a guess! But on board ship you know what to look out for and what to prepare against; there's the wind and the sea—and a lee-shore, may-be, and that's all: but on the land you never know what the danger is, for it is never over! What with land-sharks and fireships of all sorts—let alone the difficulty of keeping steady on one's legs when there's no motion to help one, and not one in a hundred knows starboard from lar-

board, or how to put up their helms when you're bearing up, may-be in Cheapside, against a wind!—for my part, I say the sea for me: and all the use of the land, so far as I can see, is to grow vegetables on!"

"And now, major, if you will take my advice, you will let me tow the brig opposite your camp, over the water, yonder, so that the young ladies can come easy on board; and I should like to see the bushranger that would attempt to take them out again!"

From this long and characteristic harangue, it may be seen that the worthy mate was in excessively high spirits; and, as the major expressed his immediate approval of his suggestion, all the materials belonging to the vessel were collected without delay, and the two boats being manned, they were on the point of giving way, when a shout from the top of the hill overlooking the shore attracted their attention, and the ensign, with three soldiers, was seen coming down in all haste towards the vessel.

The major desired the boats to rest on their oars, and presently Trevor reached the beach:—the vessel being beyond convenient hail, he made the most energetic signs to make the major understand that he wished to communicate with those on board. One of the boats being detached, the major stepped into it and proceeded to the shore.

"Are you aware," were the first words uttered by Trevor, "that Mark Brandon, with two of his comrades, have escaped!"

A sudden fear came over the father as he thought of his daughters.

Trevor then communicated to him, in as few words as possible, that his party of soldiers had hemmed the bushrangers into a corner, and that all who were not killed in the conflict were captured, but that Brandon and two others were not among them. He said further, that some of the convicts had informed him that Brandon had promised to meet them at the foot of a certain hill, about a dozen miles off, but that it was the opinion of the head constable, who was a most intelligent fellow, that this was only a feint on the part of Brandon, and that he would most likely visit the cave where the major's daughters had been left, and where many of the major's valuables had been deposited.

The major changed countenance at this communication, and for a few moments was at a loss how to act; for he could not make up his mind which was the best way of reaching the side of the bay near which the cave was situate, whether by land or water.

Trevor saw that his mind was troubled as if with a presentiment of some disaster, and he immediately offered to go round by land with his men, while the major proceeded by sea. The major, without speaking a word, but with lips pale, and his teeth clenched, immediately agreed to this arrangement, and stepping back into his boat, nodded his head to the men to take to their oars, when a new apparition arrested his sight, and gave rise to sudden hopes and fears, which took from him the power of speech, and it was only by a sign that he could intimate to the boat's crew to remain still.

On the summit of a low green bank he beheld a female, whom the father's eye instantly recognized as his daughter Louisa, descending

with precipitate, but staggering haste. Extending his arm to the object, he pointed it out to Trevor, who, in a moment, started off to meet her, followed by his men.

The major could not move; he saw his daughter, but he saw only one! Where was the other? Where was Helen? It might be, that, exhausted with her flight, she had sunk down on the way;—but was that likely? It was Louisa that was likely to be exhausted, not the strong-minded and intrepid Helen! The courage of the old soldier was destroyed by the apprehensions of the father! He awaited the arrival of Louisa, and the tidings which she brought, in gloomy silence.

She was not long in coming, or rather, she was carried by Trevor down the slope and placed in her father's arms. Frantically embracing him with convulsive jay, she sank down, faint, exhausted, and collapsed, and burst into an hysterical flood of tears!

Hitherto she had not spoken a word; but her flight, her exhausted state, with terror still imprinted on her countenance—all gave evidence that she had been witness of some shocking catastrophe, and was the bearer of terrible tidings. The major, for some moments, could not interrogate her; the sight of her, and the fears which that sight suggested, unmanned him, and for some minutes he mingled his tears with those of his recovered daughter.

The hardy boat's crew, who were acquainted with all the circumstances attending the seizure of the brig by the bushrangers, and the perils to which the major's daughters had been exposed, and who, with the true feeling of British sailors where the safety of a woman was concerned, were generously alive to everything that affected her and those to whom she was dear, regarded the sorrow-stricken father with sympathizing looks, and one or two of them laid their hands on the ship's outlasses, which were in the boat, as if eager to revenge any wrong that had been committed on a female whom they considered especially under their protection.

When the first burst of Louisa's emotion had subsided, the major removed her from the boat, and taking her apart to some little distance on the beach—for he was fearful that she had some dreadful disclosure to make, which it would shock her delicacy to speak of except to himself,—he asked her the reason of her sudden appearance, and of her flight from the place of their retreat, and desired her to tell him without disguise all that she could of what had occurred since he had left her and her sister with Mr. Silliman at the cave.

The poor girl, who was well aware of the necessity of being prompt in affording succor to Helen, stifled her sobs, and, by a great effort, was able to recover her voice sufficiently to narrate to her father, that they had seen the smoke, and that Helen had heard the sound of firing in the distance, and that, unable to control her curiosity, she had ventured from the cave to endeavor to see what was going forward, but alarmed at her not returning, she had prevailed on Mr. Silliman to leave the cave to seek for her; and that when Mr. Silliman did not return, she, being frightened at the continued absence of him and of her sister, went out to look for them.

She then described the scene of her sister and Mr. Silliman in the hands of the bushrangers; and she said, that when she saw Mark Brandon she gave up all for lost!—herself also!—but fortunately, they had not perceived her, she was so well hidden among a confused heap of rocks. She told, also, the conversation which she had overheard between Mark Brandon and her sister about the money which had been taken from the brig and deposited in the cave, and that Helen had been prevailed on by Brandon to tell him where it was concealed; that the three bushrangers—that is, Mark Brandon and two other men, whom she recollected as having been on board the brig, from the remarkable fierceness of their countenances—went away to the cave, taking Mr. Silliman and Helen with them, and that when they were out of sight, she ran off by the shore of the bay to the spot where she saw the smoke.

She added, though with some hesitation, that before the bushrangers went away to the cave, they talked of casting lots for her sister, which she supposed meant that one of them was to take Helen away into the bush.

When she had concluded her narrative, the major beckoned to Trevor, who was within sight, and made Louisa repeat all the circumstances which she had related to him, which Louisa did, nearly in the same words, but omitting that part of it where the bushrangers talked of casting lots for her sister, but stating that she feared from their talk, that it was their intention to take Helen away with them.

It is impossible to describe the agony which overwhelmed the father and the lover at this dreadful communication. The loss of his money was nothing compared with the horrible fate of his daughter. The major sat for a few minutes in silence, stunned with the blow, and unable to exert himself in thought or action. But Trevor, wild and mad with grief and rage, stamped frantically on the beach, and called out to his soldiers to advance and get ready to follow him instantly in pursuit. He ran to the boat, and with vehement declamations told the story to the crew.

The sturdy sons of the sea, albeit they could not understand how the male guardian of the women had allowed the bushrangers to maltreat a girl without first sacrificing his own life in her defence, were roused to the highest pitch of indignation at the idea of the rascally pilot who had played such a trick on themselves, having carried away a nice girl into the bush, and—climax of villainy and cruelty!—with her hands tied behind her! “It wasn't,” they said, “giving the gal a chance, and was altogether contrary to all manliness, and unfair to the last degree; and none but a rascally convict would be guilty of such an abominable action.”

They demanded eagerly to be led in pursuit; and Trevor took advantage of their enthusiasm so far as to urge them to pull with all their might to the opposite shore of the bay towards the right, as he thought that would be the quickest way of reaching the scene of Helen's adventures. The major also, having recovered from the first effects of the shock, was desirous of losing no time in taking measures for the recovery of his daughter, alive or dead; for his knowledge of her character convinced him that the high-minded

Helen would not survive any indignity offered to her by the miscreants who had her in their power. But there was a sadness, and a solemnity, and a quiet sternness in his manner, which contrasted remarkably with the wild restlessness and the extravagant gestures and impetuosity of Trevor.

Hastily making known to the mate, as they passed the brig, the reason of their hurried passage across the bay, and putting Louisa on board under his care, the major bidding him make all speed in taking the brig to the place of her destination, the excited sailors made the blades of their oars bend and quiver as they propelled the boat rapidly through the water, Trevor standing up and urging them by voice and action to put forth all their strength to arrive as quickly as possible to the shore, before the bushrangers had time to make good their retreat, or to consummate their premeditated villainy on the poor girl in their possession.

Urged by such lusty arms and such willing hearts, the boat soon touched the sandy beach abreast of the lofty rock at which the major had established his encampment on the previous night, and without waiting for the major, Trevor leaped on shore, followed by his soldiers, and made his way to the cave. The sight of the remains of the ransacked trunks and packages told him in a moment that the bushrangers had done their work, and had doubtless escaped with their plunder.

While he was still gazing at the wreck of the property, the major arrived with four armed sailors, among whom was the carpenter, who had acted as second mate of the vessel, leaving the rest of the crew to guard the boat. Paying little attention to the loss of his goods, he directed his sailors to light torches from the branches of a peppermint-tree which grew close by, and to explore the interior of the cave, while two of the soldiers were directed to use their best endeavors to discover the track of the bushrangers and their captives.

In the mean time Trevor, with the corporal, made a circuit round the place, with the hope of meeting with some object which might serve as a hint for their future proceedings.

He readily recognized the spot amongst the rocks where Louisa had hid herself, and the relative positions of the parties during that agonizing scene. Then ascending a high mass of rock, he took a view of the surrounding country, but he could not see far, owing to the intervention of low scrubby hills and occasional clumps of trees; he saw enough, however, to impress him with the feeling that it was a most romantic part of the country, though of a rugged and savage character, and affording opportunities, as he judged, for successful concealment of a most embarrassing nature.

But considering the "lie," as it is colonially called, of the country in a cooler and more attentive manner, it became clear to him that the fugitives could have taken their flight through one particular segment only of the semicircle which extended from the end of the lake on his right to the sea-coast on his left. Mark Brandon, he argued, would not dare to proceed northwards in the direction of Hobart Town; nor was it likely that he would attempt to keep along the sea-shore to the left, from the high and pre-

cipitous cliffs which he was aware bounded much of the coast on that side; nor would he try to skirt the coast, from the extreme difficulty of making progress over a line of country so unfavorable for pursuing the rapid flight which was necessary for his safety.

There was only one direction, therefore, left open for him, which was comprised within a small angle; but still there was room and scope enough for them to baffle their pursuers, unless the most prompt and energetic means were adopted for getting on their track.

Carefully noting all the points which might serve him for marks of distance, Trevor descended from the rock, and keeping the direction in his mind's eye, he immediately started off, accompanied by the corporal, on the line which he judged would be the probable course of the bushrangers, and proceeded without stopping several miles.

He then made a halt; and, after surveying the scenery narrowly on all sides, he made excursions from right to left, like a sportsman beating for game, inspecting the ground narrowly to discover some indication of the track of feet. This toil he continued for some time in vain; but at last his exertions were suddenly rewarded with success.

Passing near a low rock he saw, to his surprise, something lying on it which he was sure could be neither leaf nor twig, and eagerly running up to examine it, to his excessive joy he found that it was a woman's glove!

In a moment he felt sure that at such a time and in such a place the glove could be no other than Helen's; and it was partly with the gladness with which it inspired him from this discovery of the track, and partly with the rapture of a lover at beholding an article of dress which had been worn by his mistress, that he was about to snatch it up and carry it to his lips, when it struck him that its position as it lay was remarkable, and, as it presently occurred to him, was intentional.

Three of the fingers and the thumb, he observed, were bent together as if with a hasty compression, while the fore-finger was, as it seemed to him, purposely left free and pointing in a particular direction. He followed with his eyes this direction, and saw that it pointed to an opening between two hills at a considerable distance.

Taking into consideration all these circumstances, which, howsoever trivial they might be thought at other times, were now most important signs for his guidance, he felt sure that Helen had contrived to leave one of her gloves on the rock, and that she had bent the fingers into the shape in which he found them as a sign to her friends, should they be so fortunate as to light on it in their search. The corporal, also, whom Trevor consulted, was of the same opinion, remarking, "that it was evidence also of the young lady's hands having been set at liberty."

This was a fresh source of satisfaction to Trevor, who argued from it also that Helen had hopes of being succored, and that her mind was cool and ready enough to devise this means of indicating the direction of their retreat.

The shades of evening were now beginning to encompass them, and the corporal counseled his officer that he should return to the cave for

the other two soldiers, and for such materials and provisions as would be necessary for them to take with them in their pursuit.

But Trevor, who had now become warmed and excited, would not listen to any such proposal, as it involved a certain loss of time,—and time was everything; besides, it was, for many very powerful reasons, extremely important that they should come up with the bushrangers before night. Trevor had his own motives for this, but from some secret feeling which perhaps it would have been difficult for him to explain in words, he did not communicate them to the corporal.

He contented himself with asking him whether he could depend on him to stand by him in the conflict which would be certain to take place on their coming up with the enemy.

The corporal, who was a cool and brave old soldier, although he had not a lover's enthusiasm to excite him on the present occasion to a dangerous enterprise, slapped the butt-end of his firelock with his hand, and assured Trevor with energy that he would stand by his officer to the last drop of his blood, and wherever his ensign would lead, he would follow him!

Thus encouraged and supported, Trevor wrote on a leaf which he tore from his pocket-book, his intention to pursue the bushrangers accompanied by the corporal only, and directing any friend who might see the writing to take the direction of the opening between the two high hills in the distance, which was nearly west-north-west. Having written this, he stuck it on a small stick, which he secured to the rock with a heavy stone; and having set up a pole from a neighboring clump of thin trees, known in the colony by the name of the tea-tree, used by the natives for their spears, and to which he affixed a tuft of native grass to attract attention, with the corporal for his companion, he set out rapidly in the direction indicated by Helen's glove, which, loverlike, he had deposited in his bosom.

As they had now got on the track, which was occasionally visible, they kept their arms in readiness, in the hope of coming suddenly on the freebooters, to whom the corporal secretly vowed he would grant no quarter, and on whom the ensign was determined to take summary vengeance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PENALS.

TREVOR had conjectured rightly when he supposed that the glove which he had found on the rock had been left there purposely by Helen to indicate the direction in which her captors were conveying her.

It was at this spot that Mark Brandon had released her from her bonds on her obstinate refusal to proceed further without such liberty being granted to her; and she insisted also on the performance of Brandon's promise to permit her to return to the cave, now that they had reached a distance which placed them beyond the risk of immediate surprisal from pursuers, should any be on their track.

But to this the other two men were vehemently opposed. Having succeeded in "planting" the bag of dollars, and in rifling the major's effects with impunity, and having got the girl so far along with them, the ruffians were unwilling to let go their prize; and as their obstinacy favored Mark's scheme, he took care, when not in Helen's hearing, to throw out such suggestions as would irritate and confirm them in their determination.

But he kept the merit to himself of releasing Helen's hands, which he did with apparent gladness and great gentleness, taking care to drop some expressions in a low tone of his extreme sorrow that his companions would not consent to her release, and giving her reason, though ambiguously, to understand that on the first opportunity he would favor her escape.

At the same time, the bushrangers untied Jerry's hands, as he had already made several awkward falls, and as the restraint of his being so fettered impeded the celerity of their march. They also ungagged his mouth in order that he might breathe more freely, and be able better to bear the task of being the pack-horse of the company. In order to prevent any attempt on his part to escape, and to insure his good behavior on the journey, the ill-featured Grough preceded him at a little distance with his loaded weapon, while the hang-dog looking Jemmy kept close to him behind, with the bayonet of his musket fixed, and handy to act as an incentive to the unfortunate Jerry to be active in his motions. This was the order of march prescribed by Brandon, who continued to retain his supremacy as the leader of the party, although he was well aware that the roughness and hardships of the bush would soon endanger his present insecure authority. For his own share he took on himself the charge of Helen, endeavoring by all possible means to ingratiate himself in her favor by the way, and assiduously offering to her all those little attentions, for which it may be easily imagined there was abundance of opportunity in their rapid and uneven path.

Although Helen refused his assistance, and would not allow herself to be touched by him, it was impossible for her to avoid hearing the artful discourse which he poured into her ear with a skill and tact which he had found so effectual with women on other occasions.

Fully aware that all the ordinary forms of flattery were inappropriate with a high-spirited girl like Helen, of whose character he had been able to form an accurate estimate during her trials on board of the brig, he confined himself to the idea which he well knew must be uppermost in his mind, and adroitly insinuated his willingness to promote her escape if it could be done without exciting the suspicion of his comrades, whom he described as two desperadoes of malignity so atrocious and violence so furious, that it would be in vain for him to endeavor to contend against them by open force; besides, as he affected to say with much regret, he was bound to them by those ties of honor which forbade him to make any attempts on their lives, even for her sake.

By this consummate duplicity the arch hypocrite contrived to make his captive regard him as an unexpected friend;—the more valuable

under the circumstances, as without him she felt she should be entirely at the mercy of his unscrupulous comrades; and with this feeling, she was glad to have him by her side, considering him as a sort of protection against coarser villains.

Mark, with his usual quickness of discernment, penetrated her thoughts, and inwardly congratulated himself on his progress so far in her good graces; as he had succeeded in causing her to look on him not as an object of repugnance, but as one whom, as he held favorable intentions towards her, she was inclined to regard with reciprocal good feeling. In this way they journeyed on, at a rapid rate, till both the overburthened Jerry and the anxious Helen showed symptoms of exhaustion.

It was now nearly dark, and they had traveled many miles from the cave. The bushrangers were desirous of continuing their march some distance farther, in order that their track might be lost in the dark; but as Helen now sank to the ground, it was found impossible to proceed without adopting some contrivance for assisting her steps. Helen prayed them, earnestly and imploringly, to allow her to remain where she was, and to continue their course without her; but as this by no means squared with the intentions of the two bushrangers, although Mark Brandon pretended to be inclined to consent, they were determined to urge her forward. Seeing that such was the determination of his comrades, as Mark whispered to Helen, he proposed that they should cut a convenient branch from a tree, and by placing it under her arms, two of them would be able to carry her forward, while he took charge of Jerry in the rear.

This arrangement he proposed, in order that, according to his plan, he should not bring himself into a personal collision with Helen, which, he was aware, could not fail to be most unfavorable to his designs; and he trusted also that the savage countenances and rude language of his coarse and brutal mates would make his own mildness and silky tongue appear afterwards in favorable contrast for himself, and that the young lady would be glad to seek refuge in his protection against the horrible insults of ruffians so revolting: with such devilish art did this most consummate villain turn every circumstance to his own advantage, and wind his way, like a serpent, into the confidence and comparative good opinion of his destined victim.

With all their endeavors, however, the bearers of Helen were unable to proceed far on their way over the rough country which they were traversing, encumbered as they were with a burthen so embarrassing to their steps; but, fully alive to the importance of cutting off their track, by the dark, from any one in pursuit, they persevered in their laborious course till the sun went down, and the gloominess of the night approached. They continued their course for about a mile farther, till they felt sure that all traces of them must be lost.

A low valley, at some little distance out of their direct course, in which mimosa trees were growing abundantly, forming a convenient place to spend the night, they came to a halt; and first unloading Jerry, and then binding his hands

and feet together, notwithstanding his most energetic protestations and promises that he would make no attempt to run away, they prepared to make their supper, in which they set forth a liberal allowance of rum, as a principal part of the entertainment.

There was light enough for them to see what they were about, although not sufficient to enable a pursuer to distinguish their footsteps, which, indeed, was a difficult matter even in open day; and they sat down, notwithstanding their fatigue, in very good humor, promising Jerry when they had finished their meal, that they would give him a turn; "for it would be a pity," they said, "that so able and willing a pack-carrier should be knocked up for want of grub."

As to Helen, they left her to the care of Mark, first taking the precaution, however, to tie her hands behind her back, which, they assured her with many jocular phrases, was always their custom when they took young ladies into the bush, till they got used to their ways, which, they said, they had no doubt she would soon be, after she had had the benefit of a little experience.

But before they confined her hands, Mark Brandon offered her food and drink, which she at first refused; on consideration, however, she determined to support her strength in order to facilitate her escape; but she refused to taste the rum, which the two men were inclined to force on her had they not been remonstrated with by Brandon.

Brandon had the consideration also to cut down with his axe, which he carried with him, a quantity of the bushy boughs of the mimosa, with which he formed a sort of hut for her accommodation; and leaving her there to await her fate, but keeping a wary watch over her at the same time, the three set to at the provisions and liquors before them, and the raw rum presently getting into the heads of Swindell and Grough, they were soon ripe for any deed of brutal atrocity.

Mark Brandon now found that his refined scheme of setting his two associates to do the work which could not fail to render aggressors still more hateful to the lady, operated against himself, for Grough and Swindell having borne the burthen of the girl for some miles unassisted by Mark, they considered that their right to her was thereby so far increased as to give them a prior claim on the captive.

This they urged with impudent confidence, and being inflamed with liquor, they determined to carry their claims into effect without further delay, and almost, without caring to consult Brandon's mind in the matter; for in the madness of their drunken excitement, they lost all respect for the superior intellect of which at other times they felt themselves under the invincible control.

"What do you say, Roger?" said he who among his companions was familiarly called Jemmy, to which the epithet of hang-dog was occasionally added, taking one of the major's dollars from his pocket, "shall it be a toss-up?"

"There's not light enough for that," replied his mate; "let us put a lot of dollars in a hat, and guess odd or even."

"And who is to be the umpire?" said Jemmy; "a fair toss-up is the best way; the moon gives light enough to see whether it comes down man or pillars."

"You forgot, my mates," said Brandon, interposing, "that I have a vote in this affair; the girl is as much mine as yours."

"And who was it that carried her the last four miles?" said the pair, both at once.

"We have worked for her," added Jemmy.

"We have brought her here," said Roger, "and we will have her. Who says nay?"

"But I have an equal right, surely," said Brandon: "who was it that persuaded her to come on so quietly?"

"Oh! we all know that you have a devil of a tongue for the girls, Mark; but those that do the hard work ought to have the first chance—that's what I say."

"Come," said Brandon, "don't let us quarrel about a girl when we are running for our lives, as I may say; and when our only chance of escaping from the colony is to agree together; with the money that we have got safely planted, we may have half the women in the colony."

"I tell you what, Jemmy," said Roger Grough, "fair play is fair play, all the world over. Share and share alike—that's bush law. Let us all three cast lots, and he who wins has her."

"Agreed," said Brandon, who trusted that his own sober state would be more than a match for the united wit of his two drunken companions; "I will prepare the lots."

"What shall they be?"

"Here are three sticks," said Brandon; "come closer. See, they are all of the same thickness. Two shall be short and one shall be long; he who draws the longest wins."

"And who is to hold them?"

"You, Jemmy, if you like."

"And who is to have the first draw?"

"I and Roger will toss for that."

"Agreed," said Roger.

The sticks were prepared, Brandon making a dent on the longest with his thumb-nail, so as easily to be able to distinguish it from the rest. Then taking a dollar from his pocket, he offered it to Grough to toss.

"Do you toss?" said Grough.

"No!" said Brandon, whose game was to deprive the other two of the right to accuse him of foul play; "you shall toss, Roger; then you will be sure you have had a fair chance."

Roger tossed; Brandon won.

"Now for the sticks," said Roger, a little dissatisfied.

"You have still an equal chance with me," said Brandon, wishing to soothe him. "For my own part, I don't care much which way it goes."

"Gammon!" said Jemmy Swindell.

"Now!" said the holder of the sticks, "try your luck, Mark."

"Hold!" said a voice which startled the three.

"What the devil is that?" cried Grough, starting up.

Brandon immediately went to the hut of boughs in which Helen was placed. He listen-

ed attentively. She was sleeping. Happily for her, she had not heard the conversation between the wretches, who, like wild beasts, were contending for her as their prey.

"Hold!" said the voice again.

"It is our pack-horse!" said Jemmy, with a gruff laugh.

"Pack-horse, or what you please," said Jeremiah, his good-natured sympathy excited by the horrible fate impending over the sister of Louisa; "I say hold!"

"Hold your jaw," said Roger, "or I'll put a ball through your soft head."

"You may put a dozen, if you like," said Jeremiah; "but, I say, Mark Brandon—listen to me."

"You had better hold your tongue," said Brandon.

"But I won't hold my tongue. Listen to me, I say. I have a thousand pounds in dollars to my credit at Hobart Town. Now listen to me; let the young lady go free, and those thousand pounds I will divide among you."

"Go to the devil with your dollars!" said Swindell; "what's the use of dollars to us here—and now? It's the gal we want, and the gal we will have. Now, Mark, draw your lot."

"For God's sake, don't commit such a horrible outrage on a poor defenceless girl; such a deed as this would be sure to hang you, and damn you, too, past all redemption," cried out Jeremiah, excited by the imminency and the terrible nature of the peril to the poor resistless girl.

"Gag him," said Brandon, quietly, "his noise may do mischief."

Such practised hands were not long in carrying this recommendation into effect; and as Jeremiah was bound hand and foot and incapable of resistance, the brutal Grough had no difficulty in preventing him from giving them further molestation by his cries.

"Now," said Swindell, "time's going on; it is for you to draw first, Mark; here are the lots."

Brandon stretched out his hand; but during Jeremiah's generous-expostulation, the sticks had become mixed and turned in his hand, and Brandon could no longer distinguish the longest of them by the furtive mark which he had made before he had delivered them to the holder.

"Draw," said Swindell, impatiently; "what are you fiddling about? draw and have done with it; the longest wins."

Brandon still hesitated, and endeavored to devise some expedient for confusing the operator.

"Draw, I say," repeated Swindell; "there's light enough from the moon to see the sticks, isn't there? There—look at them; and now take your chance, or let Roger draw first."

"Let me see," said Brandon, "that the sticks are broken right, two short, and one long; that was to be the way."

"No, no, none of your gammon with me, Mark; I'm as good a man as you any day of the year, or night either. Why, you broke the sticks yourself! Do you suppose I'm so green as to let you feel which is the longest before you choose? That would be making a precious fool of me, wouldn't it, Roger?"

"Now, Mark," said Grough, getting impatient and suspicious as well as the other; "fair play in the bush, Mark. Don't keep the lady waiting; let one of us win; and an equal chance for all. Well, if you won't draw, I will, and if I win, by — I'll have her." So saying, he stretched out his hand to the stakes.

Brandon, thus urged, and seeing that his companions were not in a temper to be made fools of, hastily drew a stick.

"Now, Roger," said the holder

Roger Grough drew.

"Lost, all of you, by —," vociferated Swindell, measuring his own lot against the other two.

"Jem," said Brandon, in a low deep voice, "you can't have that girl."

"Why not? I've won her!"

"Give her up," said Brandon, "and I will give up my share to the bag of dollars at the cave."

"No! keep your dollars and be —; I'll have the girl."

"She is tired and ill," said Brandon.

"Oh, I'll soon rouse her up!"

It was at this moment that the raised voices of the disputants awakened Helen from her feverish slumber, and she overheard the rest of the parley; but exhausted with fatigue, and with her hands bound behind her, she had neither the spirits nor the strength to attempt to fly.

"I won't have her touched to-night, at any rate," resumed Brandon; "it would be cruelty."

"Gammon! Mark; that blarney won't do for me."

"He has won her," said Grough, sturdily, "and he has a right to her; that's bush law."

"I say again," said Brandon, coolly and firmly, "you shall not molest that girl to-night."

"And who is to hinder me?"

"I will," said Brandon.

"Nay," said Grough, "we are two to one, Mark, anyhow; and I stand by Jemmy; there has been a fair draw, and Jemmy has won the gal fairly; and what he has won he must have; that's the rule of the bush, Mark; and I'll stand by our rules; and Jemmy shall have her!"

"Wretched fools!" said Brandon, in a voice thick with passion, "what would you be without me in the bush, or anywhere! and how are you to save yourselves except by my head? Sit down, I say, and give up. I have said the word; the girl shall not be touched this night."

"And I have said the word," said the obstinate Swindell, excited by the double stimulus of lust and liquor; "and if there were ten thousand Brandons in the way, I will have the girl; I have won her, and she is mine."

"Once more, I say, leave her alone," said Brandon, taking a step back.

"We are two to one," repeated Grough, sulkily; "it's you who must give way, Mark; we are one too many."

"Then thus I make the odds even," said Mark, discharging one of the barrels of his fowling-piece through the exulting Jemmy's head, and instantly leveling the other barrel at Roger; "and now, mate," he said, before the other had time to recover his musket, which was lying on the ground, "you see you are at

my mercy; but you are a man whose courage and faithfulness I respect: say—is it to be peace or war?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DISCOVERY.

TREVOR and the corporal made good way as long as the daylight lasted; but when darkness began to encompass them, they were obliged to pause; and the corporal, whose spirits were not sustained by the same feelings which animated his officer, ventured to suggest, that trying to discover a track in the dark was not likely to be successful.

But the ensign, reminding him that the young lady's glove pointed out that their course was the opening between the high hills which loomed in the distance, encouraged him to proceed, not forgetting to be liberal in his promises of personal reward—a motive, however, which the corporal indignantly repudiated, averring that it was stimulus sufficient for him to save the poor young lady from the clutches of "those blackguards," and "to have a slap at the rascals who had run off with a girl against her will!"

They kept on, therefore, till they reached the entrance of the opening and began to climb the ascent between the hills.

But Trevor was not long in experiencing the difficulty of going over unknown ground at night, obstructed at every step by dead timber and loose stones; and although the moon lent its light, it was not sufficient to help them much in their difficult way; and when they came to the entrance of the gorge, which was thickly covered with trees, even that light was obscured, and they were soon compelled to come to a stand-still.

"I am inclined to think that the bushrangers must be somewhere hereabouts," said Trevor, sitting down on the ground, in which he was followed by his companion, "for they must have had the same difficulty as we have, in making their way through this pass."

"That is, if they came this way," remarked the corporal, with much sagacity.

"They must have come this way," replied Trevor, "if it was their intention to pass this tier of hills, for there is no other opening. But, as I say, their difficulty must have been the same as our own, and more—for they had a lady with them, and she could not walk like a man."

"What shall I do?" asked the corporal, who, although it was too dark to distinguish objects, himself included, clearly, did not neglect to make the usual military salute, as he stood before his officer, waiting for orders.

"That's just what I am at a loss about," replied the ensign, who was apprised by the sound of the "present," more than by the sight of it, that his one soldier was standing in the accustomed respectful attitude. "But, my good fellow, sit down and rest yourself; you must be tired with this long march. You are used to the bush, I understand; what do you think is best to be done?"

"I cannot pretend to know so well as your honor," replied the corporal, speaking deferentially; "but, in my opinion, the best thing to

be done would be to light a fire, and try to get something to eat."

"I am not at all hungry," said the ensign.

"Of course, if your honor is not hungry," replied the corporal, "it would not be proper for me to be so; but a good fire would warm us, and make us feel more comfortable; not that I feel cold, unless your honor feels so too."

"The light of the fire may discover us," observed the ensign.

"Never fear, your honor; those blackguards will be thinking more of our discovering them, than of their discovering us. Besides, I will mount guard while your honor sits by the fire; and, who knows! perhaps the young lady may see the light, and give us a screech, and then we can be down upon 'em in no time."

"You are a clever fellow, corporal; I could not have a better friend to second me, I see; for I must allow our attempt is somewhat venturesome."

"Oh! we shall do very well; only it's awkward to have nothing to eat in the bush; though, as to drink, there is water; and that's the best drink, after all, when you can't get any better. And now to look for a bit of punk...."

"Punk! what's that?"

"Oh! it's a—a sort of big wart that grows on the trees; and it's the handiest thing in nature to catch fire; better than rag-tinder, any day. All that you want is a little fire to set it a-going."

"But it strikes me," observed the ensign, "that if you have the fire already, you don't want the punk, as you call it, to make it. By-the-by, corporal, you are an Irishman, are you not?"

"Not exactly, your honor. I am neither English nor Irish, quite; because I was born, by mistake, on the sea between England and Ireland; so that the land of my birth was the Irish Channel, your honor. But my father and mother were Irishmen, and they always said I was as good as English; and that no one, let him be English or Irish, or both, could be so mean as to take advantage of an accident like that. And I didn't stay long in Ireland neither; for, before I could walk, I was marched with my father and mother, and the rest of the regiment, over the sea to America."

"It must be in the air!" said Trevor, musingly to himself.

"Just so: the air, as your honor says, is very cold; and it's that makes us chilly. But you'll have a beautiful fire in a minute," said the corporal, snapping his flint on a slip of decayed punk, which he had removed with his nail, and placed in the pan of his firelock.

"Stop," said the ensign, "your piece will go off, and that will give the alarm."

"Go off! your honor: how can it go off, when it's not loaded?"

"How is that? I thought your piece was loaded—ready for work."

"Oh! she is always ready for work, your honor; but there's no use dirtying her without occasion. I gave her a scrub out at the cave yonder, and made her as bright as a new pin inside. Why! I can load my firelock before one of those bushranging rascals could get his piece up to his shoulder."

"How are you off for ammunition?" asked the ensign, a little anxiously.

"Box full; I emptied two of the men's, who were hit, into my own, before I came away from the creek. I hope your honor is well provided?"

"I have a large horn full of powder," replied the ensign, "a shotbelt full of small shot, and a bag of balls to fit the fowling-piece which the major lent me before we went after the brig."

"All right!" said the corporal. "Nothing like ammunition! Why, we two, back to back, if your honor would permit me to take that liberty, could stand against all the natives in the island! And now for some more wood; there's plenty lying about, luckily. There, sir, don't you think that looks cheery? If we could only get something to eat, we should do very well. A kangaroo steak would be no bad thing; and I'll be bound there are plenty of them hopping about, if we could only see 'em; and if your honor would not mind my banging my piece off at a boomah, that would be worth a cartridge."

"Better not; it is of importance that we should come upon those villains by surprise; and we can do very well for one night without supper. But we are losing time, corporal, we are losing time," said Trevor, fretfully.

"Perhaps your honor would like to have a sleep? Then your honor wouldn't be losing time. I remember, when we were in America, our old colonel used always to bid us go to sleep when he had nothing else for us to do; so that at last we got used to taking it anyhow, like our grub, when we could get it; and when we couldn't we went without. A long march and night air, as we used to say, are the best things in the world to make a man sleep sound; not that I would take the liberty to feel tired or sleepy, unless it was your honor's pleasure. Our old colonel used to say in America...."

"There must be no sleep to-night for either of us," interrupted the ensign abruptly, and starting up, as if stung with some sudden and painful thought. "God knows what atrocity those ruffians may be committing at this very moment. Corporal, are you strong enough to move forward?"

"Always ready to obey orders," replied the corporal, bringing his firelock to the "present;" "but, if I may be so bold as to ask, which way is it your honor's pleasure to go; and how shall we find our way in the dark?"

The ensign cast his eyes in the direction of the opening. The light of the fire, which illuminated the spot where he was standing, made the country in the distance look more gloomy and dark; and he could not disguise from himself the truth, that to wander about at night without a certain path to travel on, and a fixed point to go to, was a vain and fruitless labor.

He had no doubt, from the significant pointing of Helen's glove, that she had become acquainted with the bushranger's intention to make their way to the opening at which he had arrived; but whether Mark Brandon would continue his course through the pass, or turn to the left towards the sea, or skirt the base of

the tier of hills to his right, and penetrate into the interior in that direction, was a question which he found it impossible satisfactorily to resolve; and he was fully alive to the folly and uselessness of exhausting themselves in a pursuit on a wrong track.

While he was anxiously pondering these thoughts, on the one side stimulated to action by the horrible thought of Helen being that night at the mercy of the bushrangers, and on the other, restrained by the consideration that to move without some reasonable certainty of moving in the right direction was a loss of time and a waste of strength, the corporal had stepped to some little distance from the light, in order that his view into the distance for some other watchfire, which might perchance be burning, might not be confused by an illumination under his eyes.

As he tried to pierce the gloom, he observed a white appearance on the trunk of a tree, resembling the "mark" which explorers in the bush make for the purpose of finding their way back, as well as to assist them to keep in a straight line in their progress forward. Surprised at seeing such a sign in a part of the country which was generally supposed to be unexplored by white people, he advanced to the tree, and then he ascertained that the mark was indeed made by the white man's axe, but that it was not a mere "blaze;" it was the white surface of the tree exposed, from the cutting off, intentionally, of a branch; neither was there a similar "blaze" on the opposite side of the tree, as is always the case when a tree is "marked" as a post of direction.

Guessing at once that it was the work of the parties of whom they were in pursuit, he made his way back without noise to his officer, and in a few words communicated the fact, taking the opportunity at the same time to hold the pan of his firelock towards the light of the fire, to see that it was free, and clearing the touch-hole with his pricker, lest any atom of punk should have insinuated itself into the orifice.

Trevor immediately accompanied him to the tree, and was at once convinced that the branch had been but recently lopped off, and that it had been done by the bushrangers. He agreed with the corporal that this seemed to argue that the bushrangers had made up their encampment for the night in their immediate vicinity; but in that case they had surely taken the alarm at the fire, and had, no doubt, reconnoitred him and the corporal while they were standing near it.

On examining the ground farther, however, they perceived the marks of the bough having been cut at both ends, and of having been pruned and fitted for some purpose. On investigating more minutely the part of the tree from which the bough had been cut, they calculated, from the thickness of the base of the excised part, that it must have been a piece of timber some twelve or fifteen feet long; and measuring the two ends which had been cut off from the top and the bottom of the bough, they found that it had been shortened to a length of four or five feet. But they were at a loss to conjecture the purpose for which such a stake had been fashioned.

However, it seemed quite clear that the axe of the white man had been at work within a few hours; and there was every reason to conclude that it was the bushrangers who had been there before them. But although they made a most diligent search for a considerable distance round the spot, they were for some time unable to discover any farther trace of the enemy; and it was not until they had proceeded more than half a mile from the fire that their perseverance was rewarded with success.

On looking forward in the direction of the opening, Trevor fancied he saw something gently agitated by the wind, like a piece of ribbon. It was not far from him; and the moon having now risen high, there was a dim sort of light spread over the ground, sufficient for distinguishing the outlines of objects.

He hastened to the spot, and found on a forked branch of dead wood, projecting across the only path that was available at that point, a strip of a woman's dress. It seemed to have been torn off by accident, not design; but whether by accident or design, it served the purpose of pointing out to him the direction of the bushrangers.

Taking into consideration that he had now proceeded some distance through the opening, and regarding the towering hills on either side, which forbade advance to the right or to the left, he now felt assured that the bushrangers had determined to get through the pass without delay; for it was not to be supposed that they would stop in their flight in the only path that was open for their retreat through the tier, and thereby render themselves liable to be discovered by a pursuing enemy. That would be, as they say, "giving away a chance;" an act of folly which Mark Brandon, by all accounts, was the last man in the world to be guilty of.

Encouraged, therefore, by this discovery, which showed that they were on the right scent, the spirits of the corporal were considerably raised, and those of the ensign proportionably excited; and Trevor determined to endeavor to make his way through the opening, as on the other side the rays of the moon would assist them in their progress, and enable them perhaps to discover some other sign of the retreating bushrangers, or of their captive; and the corporal leading the way, as the one most experienced in bush-traveling, and their hopes raised by the good luck of the discovery which they had already made, they pushed on as rapidly as the obscurity, the difficulty of the way, and the ascent which they had still to contend against, would allow.

As Trevor had youth and love to animate him, and the corporal brought to the task the steady power of endurance possessed by an old soldier, neither of them would allow an expression of fretfulness or fatigue to escape him; but they kept on their way resolutely till they had descended the slope on the opposite side, and reached the level ground, when the corporal halted:—

"May I make so bold as to speak?"

"Speak on," said the ensign; "what is it?"

"It's this, your honor. It strikes me that any one going up that hill which we have left behind us would feel a little bit tired."

"What then?"

"Why then, you see, after being tired at the top of the hill, they wouldn't stop there, especially if they were making a run of it, but they would bowl down hill like a spent cannon-ball, easy-like, till they came to the bottom."

"Good; and what then?"

"Why, when they came to the bottom, do you see, they would find themselves pretty well knocked up."

"Are you knocked up, then, corporal?"

"That's just as your honor pleases. But to my thinking, those fellows, as they have the young lady with them, must be knocked up some time, whether she walks or they carry her...."

"You are right, corporal."

"And then, as they would want some handy hiding-place to pass the night in, they would naturally look out for some hollow or sheltered spot...."

"You are quite right, corporal, and I was thinking so myself. And now we will do this: suppose yourself to be a bushranger...."

"Certainly, your honor, if your honor wishes it," said the corporal hesitatingly; "but I had rather not; it doesn't become...."

"We will suppose ourselves to be bushrangers—both of us," continued the ensign....

"If your honor is pleased to be one—of course your honor knows the rules of the service better than I do—it would not be proper for me to object...."

"Well, then, suppose we were bushrangers, standing here, and looking out for a place of shelter to hide in for the night,—what spot within range should we fix on?"

"Are we to have a gal with us?" asked the corporal.

Trevor winced at this question, which the corporal asked in all innocence, and entirely with the view to make himself as much like the bushrangers as possible, in order that he might be in a better condition to reply seriatim to the question propounded by his officer.

"Observe that hollow to the right," said the ensign, "thick with trees...."

"They look like mimosa trees," said the corporal.

"Does it not strike you that it is just the spot for the bushrangers to choose?"

"I can't say what the bushrangers would do, because I never have been a bushranger myself," replied the corporal; "but if I had a party under my command, and wanted a snug place to pass the night in, that's just the corner I should pitch on."

Trevor looked behind him, up the slope of the hill which he had descended, and then threw his eyes towards the hollow, and endeavored to divine the route which the bushrangers would choose, if they had it in their minds to make that spot the place of their retreat; and he thought he could trace, by the light of the moon, a clear path which it was likely they would take under such circumstances.

He pointed it out to the corporal, and directed him to observe the bearings as well as he could by the moonlight. Then placing himself in the stated direction, and desiring the corporal to keep a good lookout for the enemy, while he concentrated his attention on the keeping of

the "line," the two advanced steadily and warily into the hollow.

Trevor kept on till he reached a point which he judged was about the centre of the mimosa trees, when he espied an object which resembled neither tree nor shrub, and which he at first supposed was some hut built by the natives. He whispered his suspicions to the corporal. But that experienced person, in a similar whisper, informed the ensign that the natives never formed their break-winds of branches of trees, but always of slips of bark, which they contrived to strip from any trees convenient.

"It must be the bushrangers, then," said the ensign.

"That's what I think," returned the corporal, cautiously running down a cartridge.

"Follow me, silently," said Trevor.

Then, with their weapons in readiness, stepping with the greatest caution, and prepared for immediate conflict, but desirous of surprising their enemies, who they knew were resolute men; and lending their ears to the slightest sound that arose in the stillness of the night, they advanced silently to the bush-hut which had excited their suspicion.

The corporal forgot his fatigue and his appetite, in his hope of a "brush" with the bushrangers; and Trevor felt his heart beat with excitement so as almost to give audible sound, as he thought of Helen and her desperate position in the power of relentless ruffians.

Possessed with these characteristic feelings, they made their way, as they supposed, without giving any alarm, to the back of the hut of boughs, where Trevor listened for a few moments in breathless excitement.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NATIVES.

The major, in the mean time, was not a little surprised at Trevor's continued absence, and at the simultaneous disappearance of the corporal.

He was desirous of consulting with him, as the commander of the military, in respect of their future proceedings; and it was in the most fretful state of suspense, therefore, that he looked out for his return. But when the evening wore away, without any tidings of the young officer or his subaltern, the major's embarrassment was changed to alarm, and his mind became troubled with all sorts of painful apprehensions.

This new cause of alarm coming on him in addition to his absorbing anxiety for the safety of his daughter Helen, whose probable fate in the hands of remorseless ruffians was too dreadful for the father to contemplate without the most violent agitation of grief and rage, was almost too much for him to bear, and totally upset for the time the usual equanimity which it was his pride and boast under all circumstances to preserve.

The mind of the major was the more disturbed at Trevor's absence, as it was most important that no time should be lost in adopting measures for the recapture of Helen; and being at a loss to conjecture what had happened to his future son-in-law, or what had become of the corporal, he was unable to decide on his

plan of action. In this state of perplexity he remained until the dark had set in; and then it was too late to move about in the bush without knowing the country, and without having any fixed point towards which to direct his steps.

But the habits of the old soldier, prompting him not to neglect any means of assisting his friends, or of discovering his enemies, he dispatched scouts in various directions, with orders to proceed warily and to listen for the sound of voices; he directed them also to ascend any convenient eminence, and to look out for the appearance of a fire in the distance.

There was some moonlight, but not enough to be of much service; and the men being unacquainted with the country, and unaccustomed to the bush, were not able to penetrate far into the wilds beyond the cave; and they all returned with the same account, that they could neither see nor hear anything of their absent friends nor of the bushrangers. One of them reported, however, that at a particular spot, which he described as abounding in masses of irregular stones and rocks, he had heard noises that resembled the barking and whining of a dog.

But this information afforded no assistance, as the major was aware that there existed a sort of native dog on the island, of a species between that of a hyena and a jackall; and neither Trevor nor the bushrangers, he knew, had a dog with them.

Thus the night passed away very uneasily; for the party at the cave, seeing that Trevor and the corporal did not return, were led to fear that they had fallen into the hands of the bushrangers; and such a circumstance argued that the enemy was in greater force than the party of Mark Brandon only and his two associates. It was possible, therefore, that they themselves might be attacked; and the major sent a message to his mate on board the brig to keep a sharp lookout, while the party on shore kept watch diligently to guard against surprise.

The major, however, knew too well the value of time to allow the hours of the night to elapse without making arrangements for starting at the earliest dawn of day in pursuit of his captive daughter.

In this expedition he decided on taking with him the two soldiers who formed part of the detachment under the command of the ensign, and who, being aware of the major's former rank in the army, though now no longer in the service, readily agreed to obey his orders, and were scarcely less eager to rescue their officer, who, it was to be feared, had been taken by the convicts, than the major was to save his daughter.

He then summoned his trusty mate to the council; and in the first place he gave him written instructions, placing him in command of the vessel in his absence, "which," he said, "might be for some days, or longer."

He enjoined him to be particularly cautious of the approach of strangers, whether in boats or on rafts, and to keep the brig as much as possible in the centre of the bay.

He was at first inclined to send the brig up the Derwent to Hobart Town, in order to convey Louisa to a place of greater security than

the vessel under the circumstances afforded, but, on further consideration, he thought, as he was not acquainted with any family at Hobart Town, that she would be better in the brig, under the care of the trusty mate. Besides, it was desirable that the vessel should remain where it was, near at hand, not only as a place of retreat on an emergency, but for the purpose also of furnishing assistance and supplies, should the occasion demand them.

Neither did the major neglect in his arrangements the captured and wounded convicts, whom Trevor had left under the charge of the constable at the creek beyond the hills; but as it would have been dangerous to leave the brig without the means of communicating with the shore, he was able to send only one of the boats for the removal of the wounded to the town.

This boat he dispatched at once, as the night was fair; and he wrote a letter by the conveyance to the authorities at Hobart Town, communicating the events which had taken place, and stating his fears that the ensign and the corporal had by some means been entrapped by Mark Brandon; and that it was his intention to set off at daybreak for the purpose of rescuing his daughter from the bushrangers who had got possession of her, and of gaining intelligence of the ensign, who had disappeared so mysteriously.

Having settled all these matters in a business-like manner, as became an experienced officer, and having paid personal attention to all the details necessary for their convenient travel in the bush, the major endeavored to snatch a few minutes of repose; but, although he closed his eyes, he could not sleep. The image of his daughter in the hands of merciless ruffians was constantly present to his mind—sometimes, to his disturbed fancy, extending her hands to him for help in her extremity; and sometimes, preferring death to dishonor, in the agonies of a death inflicted by her own heroic hand.

The dawn of the morning, therefore, came to him as a friend, to cheer him with its light, and to brace him up with its cooling freshness for the coming fatigues of the day.

He instantly summoned his companions, for in the wilds of the bush subordinate followers soon come to be viewed in that light, as joint-sharers in privations and dangers; and all having been prepared over-night for their departure, and having taken leave of Louisa, as soon as there was sufficient daylight to enable them to distinguish any track left by the bushrangers, they plunged into the intricacies of the pathless bush.

But the outset of this expedition was by no means propitious; and a less cool and determined character than the major might have been daunted in encountering the dangers by which it seemed he was to be beset in the very beginning of his pursuit.

The unusual circumstance of the appearance of a vessel in that unfrequented bay had excited the curiosity of a body of natives, who, unseen, and at a distance, near the sea-shore to the westward, watched the manœuvres of the brig and the boats on the water. They were able to understand that there were two parties engaged,

but their object was beyond the simple understandings of the natives to comprehend. However, as they had felt the mischievous effects of the interference of the white people with their hunting-grounds in other parts of the island, they were fully alive to the evil effects of the strangers taking possession of this district, and they regarded their proceedings therefore with the deepest interest.

When they observed that a party from the "big canoe" had landed and established themselves on the shore at the cave by the margin of the bay, they began to fear that it was the intention of the white people to take possession of this part of their country also, and to drive them towards the barren wastes of the western coast, where the kangaroo and the opossum were scarce, and where the sweet gum-trees were seldom to be met with.

It was with much alarm, therefore, that they regarded the overt act of aggression, as manifested by the major and his sailors on the morning after their landing from the brig, when Mark Brandon, in pursuance of his schemes, had allowed them to go at liberty.

They watched the white people closely; and they observed a small party, consisting of four men and one woman, depart from the cave and make their way into the interior. This they regarded as an exploring expedition for the purpose of surveying the country, and of examining into the condition of the game, and of the most favorable spots for building houses.

Now it is to be borne in mind, that the natives of Van Diemen's Land had been gradually expelled, by the immigration of the white people, from some of the most fertile spots on the island; that is to say, where the grass land was favorable to the increase of the kangaroo, and the peppermint trees to the opossum. These successive usurpations compelled the tribes of natives who were dispossessed of their hunting-grounds to fall back on the hunting-grounds of other tribes; and the disputes to which these collisions gave rise were the cause of constant fights between the conflicting parties.

The natives, therefore, regarded the white people as most unjust and cruel oppressors; and there was a mischief attendant on the encroachments of the Europeans in this country, greater than usually attends their usurpation of the lands of savage regions.

The native of Van Diemen's Land, the lowest in the scale of human beings, unlike the rudest of the most ignorant of other savages, had no fixed place of residence: he neither planted, nor sowed, nor built a dwelling.

The country being destitute of indigenous fruits or roots on which man could subsist, his only resource for food were the few wild animals which the island afforded, and the gum of the trees, similar to those from which the well-known gum-arabic is produced. To these aliments were added snakes, occasionally locusts, large caterpillars found in the resinous blue gum-tree, and a few other delicacies of a like nature; which, however, were considered rather in the light of a relish than as a substantial food.

Their principal sustenance, therefore, being wild game, it was necessary for them to have a wide range of country at their command, in or-

der to afford them the means of subsistence; and this led to the division of the country into different districts, in each of which a particular tribe reigned paramount, jealously resisting the intrusion of neighboring tribes; which was in fact doing no more than defending the circuit of country from which they derived their means of living, from the invasion of parties who had no right to trespass on them.

It may be said that the necessity of traversing over a large space of country to procure subsistence, and the remarkable absence of anything like a permanent dwelling-house, had a reciprocal action on the habits of the native of Van Diemen's Land. Having no house, he had no home; and he had no tie to bind him to a particular spot; and having the habit of roaming over the country for food, he felt the less necessity for a fixed dwelling-place, and therefore less solicitous about erecting one.

Thus he had ever remained, so far as his history can be ascertained, the only being in the human form without a roof of some sort wherewith to shelter himself from the inclemencies of the weather.

It is to be observed, also, in explanation of the peculiar habits of those aborigines, that the country produces no wild seed similar to any grain, such as wheat, barley, or Indian corn: they had no bulbous root, nothing like the yam, or the banana, or the bread-fruit. Neither have they any nutritive fruit in the whole of Australia.

This singular denial of nature in these countries of the food necessary for the sustenance of man in the shape of grain, fruit, herbs, or vegetables, is of a piece with the other singularities of those primitive regions. There the trees are all evergreens, and shed not their leaves annually, but their bark; almost all that grows there is, in some respects, different from all that grows in the rest of the known globe; and all the animals, and even some of the fishes, possess an organic peculiarity of formation, in the false belly, or pouch, which is different from that of the animals in all other countries.

It is to be observed that the natives of Van Diemen's Land are now to be spoken of in the past tense, for none exist at present in the colony; the remnants of the surviving tribes having been removed to an island, which they have to themselves, under the care of the government; but these records of their customs and habits refer also, mainly, to all the known existing tribes of the continental island of Australia still existing, but fast disappearing before the exterminating approaches of the white people.

The absence of any grain indigenous to the country, deprived the native of Van Diemen's Land of the opportunity of cultivating the arts of agriculture even in their rudest form; for there was no material on which he could exercise his industry, or which could be the means of developing his ingenuity.

Neither was there any animal which could be domesticated. The kangaroo is the only animal fit for food, so far as has yet been discovered, in all Australia; and this creature is peculiarly unfitted for domestication; and all the arts of the settlers in the various Australian colonies have failed to do more than to tame it in a certain degree; and in that semi-domesti-

ated state it seldom lives long ; for such is the fondness of this strange and uncouth animal for liberty, or such is its necessity, that it soon pines away and dies when deprived of its free range of forest pasture.

Thus the native of Van Diemen's Land was compelled by necessity to be what he was, and what he is in other parts of Australia, a mere wandering savage, without a home, and without those arts, contrivances, and tendency to intellectual development and progress, which the possession and the love of home engender.

It is remarkable, also, that the native of Van Diemen's Land had not arrived even at that degree of human progress, which consists of feeling the necessity of some sort of clothing, for decency's sake, or even for the purpose of warmth in the cold season of the year, which in that latitude is sometimes, in the early morning, very severe.

Thus they were mere savages, having only one thought, that of obtaining the day's subsistence, for they never provided for the morrow ; and of preserving for their own use—that is, each tribe its own district—the extent of country which formed their hunting-ground.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that they regarded the white people, from the first, with suspicion and distrust, and that having been already driven from the lands of which they had from time immemorial retained possession, they were exceedingly jealous of the intrusion of strangers on the portions which remained to them ; and that they were ready to resist such aggressions by all the means in their power.

It was with such dispositions that the body of natives already referred to in this narrative regarded the landing and the proceedings of the major and his sailors ; and it was from the circumstance of his companions being divided, first into the party of five, under Mark Brandon,—then into the party of two, being that of the ensign and the corporal,—and afterwards into the party of three, consisting of the major and the two soldiers,—that they conceived the project of cutting them off in detail, and of destroying the enemies whom they supposed had come to deprive them forcibly of their own country.

And the natives of this particular tribe were the more exasperated and savage in their feelings, as they had been successively driven from district to district, first by the white people, and then by their fellows, until they had been forced to content themselves with a part of the territory abutting on the sea-coast, which from its sterile character was scarcely sufficient, with their utmost diligence, to afford them the means of supporting life.

It was a few prying scouts of this tribe of angry and revengeful natives, the main body consisting of about forty individuals, men, women, and children, who now watched the motions of the major and his two companions, as they departed from the camp, the rest of his sailors having returned to the brig, which was shortly afterwards anchored in the middle of the bay.

The major himself, when he had proceeded about two miles from the cave, first caught sight of a moving body, entirely black and naked, which he immediately guessed to be a native.

His curiosity to see these original possessors of the soil of which he had come to take his share by right of immigration, was so great, that he was rather pleased at the circumstance than otherwise, as he was well armed and accompanied by two men used to discipline and to the management of their weapons ; and he had no fear for Louisa's safety, who, being on board the brig, and under the care of the vigilant mate, he considered to be in a perfect state of security.

He pointed out the object to his men ; but before they could catch sight of it, the native had disappeared.

The major expressed his desire to endeavor to come to some parley with the savage ; but he found his men by no means of the same inclination ; and they were full of stories relating to the treacherous and ferocious character of the natives, of whom, soldiers as they were, they seemed to be possessed with a sort of superstitious dread. The major made light of their representations ; but before the end of his campaign, he had abundance of opportunity of arriving at a better knowledge of the aborigines whose acquaintance he was so anxious to cultivate.

The further description, however, of the major's dealings with the savages must form the subject of another chapter, as the course of the narrative demands our attention to the adventures of the lover in pursuit of the more savage captors of his mistress.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A TOKEN.

TREVOR stood for some time in a crouching attitude behind the hut of boughs, his mind tortured by the most horrible fears for the fate of Helen.

He stood ; and he listened ; and he held his breath ; but he could hear no sound.

Presently he protruded his head cautiously round the hut ; but he could see nothing.

The clear moonlight shone on a small open space in front of the hut, but an universal silence prevailed ; and the moon seemed to shed her unimpassioned beams on a cold and silent solitude.

Astonished at this stillness, he touched the corporal on the arm, as an intimation to follow him ; and retiring backwards among the bushy mimosa trees, he made a circuit to the right, under the concealment of their shadows, till he came in front of the hut.

Still there was no sign of living thing ; but he saw between him and the hut a dark mass lying on the ground, which excited his attention.

There were no dead trees encumbering the park-like space where he was standing, and the dark mass looked strange in that place, and incongruous with its general appearance. He directed the corporal to move forward and examine it.

The corporal made the usual salute, and obeyed with military promptitude ; not neglecting to look about him, however, as he advanced from the protective shade of the trees to the open piece of grass.

But he had no sooner reached the appearance which had excited his officer's suspicion, than he stopped suddenly, and cocking his musket, which he directed towards the object, stood in an attitude prepared to fire or charge.

In this position he continued to advance by short steps nearer and nearer, until he got close to it, when he disengaged his right arm from his firelock, and beckoned to the ensign to join him.

His officer was quickly at his side; and then he saw that the mass was a man lying with his face to the ground, and apparently asleep.

The corporal made signs that they should pounce upon the man and bind him, to which Trevor assented by a nod.

Laying his musket, therefore, softly on the grass, the corporal sprung at the supposed sleeping man, and seizing his two arms, wrenched them behind his back, at the same time putting his knees on his body to keep him down; but the man made no resistance, and gave no sign of being aroused from his slumbers, and it struck the corporal that his hands were particularly cold. He turned him over on his back, and then the aspect of that fixed cold face, and those half-opened eyes, on which the rays of the moon shed their faint light, revealed at once that the man was dead.

"He is dead," said the corporal, in a low voice.

"Are you sure?" said the ensign, holding his piece prepared, and looking around him with an uneasy glance; for he was well aware, that as they stood exposed in that open space, they were an easy mark for an enemy lurking behind the trees.

"Dead!" repeated the corporal; "there is no doubt of that. I have seen death too often to mistake it. Now, who is this? One of the bushrangers?"

"Let us examine the hut," said Trevor; "it is possible that our enemies are there."

Saying this, and impressed with an idea that he should either find Helen within it, or some trace of her having occupied it, he proceeded to the front, accompanied by the corporal; and while Trevor in his eagerness pulled down the leafy branches which obstructed his view, the corporal stood ready to defend his officer from any sudden attack.

But a very brief survey convinced Trevor that the hut was empty. He nevertheless proceeded to examine it thoroughly; and he presently discovered the other glove of Helen, and the fellow one to that which he already had in his possession.

This token he in a moment comprehended was intended to convey to him that the poor girl, although still in the power of the bushrangers, had not met with any violent treatment at their hands; although the dead body of the man on the grass seemed to signify that there had been a quarrel among them, very likely for the possession of their victim.

But the finding of the glove was on the whole satisfactory, as it assured him of the existence of Helen; and he felt within him a strong conviction that the heroic girl would not be dishonored and alive.

As he gazed on the token, agitated with these thoughts, he opened the glove, that he might

kiss the inanimate substance which had been in contact with her hand, when he perceived, he thought, something unusual within.

Turning the inside to the light of the moon, he saw written in dark thin red lines the letter "N," and the word "West." He fancied that the thin red lines were not quite dry.

The corporal, seeing that his officer was agitated with some strong emotion, asked eagerly—

"If he had learned any news of the young lady?"

The ensign showed to him the writing on the glove, which was of leather, and of a light color.

"That's blood!" said the corporal, at once, and without ceremony. "And this, I presume, sir, is the other glove belonging to the young lady; and the poor thing has written this with the only ink she could get—with her own blood—to assist us in our search after her. Well—she has a spirit, has that girl! I'll be bound she would snap off a firelock like a regular!"

"Her blood!" repeated Trevor, shuddering; "this is her blood! This is her love-token, addressed to me! My God! what will be the end of this fearful tragedy! Yes, Helen, I understand it! You will shed your own blood rather than yield yourself to the commands of those remorseless villains! If they have no mercy on their own comrades, they will have none on you, poor girl! But, thank God, I am so far on their track; and, at any rate, I have only two to contend against, for their own passions have doubtless slain the third, who lies here food for the eagles and jackalls! It's a pity, though, that the gallows has been robbed of its legitimate prey."

The corporal, who had not the slightest idea of Miss Horton and his officer having been previously acquainted, was utterly at a loss to imagine the reason for the ensign indulging in this lover-like rhapsody; but being aware of the exposure of their condition, he thought himself warranted, as he was almost three times the age of his officer, to recall his attention to actual circumstances. Performing the usual salute, therefore, with his hand to his cap, he ventured to say—

"Your honor is a pretty mark for any rascal wanting to have a shot at you; what shall we do with this dead body? I suppose your honor has no objection to my examining him, to see what he has got about him?"

"Do so; it may give us some information."

Having this permission, the corporal, who had not the slightest fastidiousness about the body being dead or alive, immediately proceeded to turn it about and to examine it for effects. Wrapped round the body he found a stout handkerchief, in which was inclosed a quantity of dollars.

The corporal was by no means of a greedy disposition—but dollars were dollars; and some vague ideas of their being legitimate plunder, for he looked on the dead convict in the light of an enemy killed by the chances of war, involuntarily took possession of his mind. He regarded the silver affectionately; weighed some of them in his hand; and, looking up to the ensign with a dubious air, inquired—

"What shall I do with these?"

"If you like to take the trouble of carrying them, you may keep them for yourself."

"Trouble! your honor; no trouble at all: they are as light as a feather," said the corporal, tying them with alacrity round his own waist. "But how did this rascal come by them, I wonder?" a scruple of conscience suddenly seizing on the old soldier.

"I have no doubt," replied the ensign, "that they are part of those stolen from the major."

"Then they belong to the major," said the corporal, with a disappointed air; "and in that case they can't be considered fair plunder; and they are heavy as lead! I don't think they will make me walk lighter in the bush; and so, with your leave, your honor," continued the corporal, untying the handkerchief from his waist, with a deep sigh, "I will plant them where somebody may find them again, and see whether this rogue has anything else that might be useful."

Nothing more was to be found, except about half a pound of tobacco and a short wooden pipe, which the corporal took possession of without the slightest hesitation.

"This is a something," he said, when he had concluded his search, and had offered the tobacco and the pipe to the ensign, who desired him to keep them; "but I wish the rascal had carried some prog with him. Shall I bury this chap, or leave him where he is? He would lie more comfortable if he had a sod over him; and though no doubt he was a big rascal, your honor, he is dead now, and that makes an end of all."

"You are quite right, my good fellow," returned the ensign, who was as much pleased with his subaltern's right-feeling, as he was amused occasionally by his absurdities; "but without tools we should have a difficulty in making a grave for him;—besides, we have other things to think of. It is clear to me that the bushrangers have made off from this place; but as it is impossible for them to travel rapidly in the night, I am inclined to think they cannot be many miles distant; and we have the clue to their course; it is to the north-west. We must make out as well as we can which way that is, and try to come up with them before the morning."

"Will your honor look at your watch and see what the time is?"

The ensign found that his watch was stopped, from not having been wound up. He uttered some pettish expressions at his own forgetfulness.

"Sure it's only counting from the time your honor's watch stopped," said the corporal, "and that will give us the true time exactly."

But Trevor, albeit that he admired the extraordinary confusion of ideas which had suggested to his subaltern so novel a mode of ascertaining the hour, had recourse to other means for satisfying his mind on that important point; and, regarding the aspect of the heavens, he judged that the night was near its close. But the corporal formed his opinion from less scientific data.

"The morning can't be far off," he said, "for the cold is always greatest just before sunrise, and it nips my fingers just now so that I can hardly handle my firelock; and I fancy I see a difference in the light yonder."

"Now," said the ensign, "we have rested

ourselves long enough. Let us make another effort, and endeavor to surprise these rascals fore the morning breaks."

"I am ready, your honor, to go to the end of the island, if it is your honor's pleasure. I will just throw these loose boughs over the body, with your honor's leave, so that I may feel that I have done as I would be done by. No knowing whose turn it may be next," he added, as he cast some branches over the body; "there, my man, that's all we can do for you, and be thankful for that. You have been a bad one in your time, I reckon; however, it's all over now; so better luck to you in another world."

With this valedictory address the corporal joined his officer, who was waiting for him at a few paces' distance with a little impatience. The two then proceeded onwards at a brisk pace.

But Trevor soon found that to make progress in the bush at night, without any prominent point for direction, was a more difficult task than he had anticipated. He had made his way through the opening pretty well, but then he had the two sides of the hills to keep him right. Now that he was on level ground, amidst trees which prevented his view, and obliged to turn aside frequently to avoid the obstructions in the way, he found that to make progress in the right direction under such circumstances was an impossible task.

Besides, after about an hour's toil, the moon's light failed him, and they were left in almost complete darkness. Fearing, therefore, that he might be wandering from the very point which he desired to pursue, and that their attempt in the dark was only so much labor lost, he came to a halt, and, wearied out with his night's march, threw himself on the grass.

The corporal gladly followed his example, and for some time neither spoke, Trevor being occupied with the most anxious fears for the safety of Helen, and the corporal being engaged in an abstruse mental problem as to how the victualing department was to be carried on.

This interesting question, which always occupies so much of a soldier's thoughts on active service, was the more pressing on the present occasion, as the corporal, from long habits of observation, and from certain admonitions of the inward man, became aware that it was a practical one, the solution of which could by no means be indefinitely postponed. And indeed Trevor, lover and enthusiast as he was, began to feel those symptoms of incipient craving for food which reminded him that, although mental resolution may do much in supporting fatigue, it is necessary to support the corporeal faculties by something more solid than such ethereal aliment.

It was with heartfelt sympathy, therefore, that he responded to an involuntary ejaculation which, in a moment of uncontrollable emotion at the idea of a beefsteak, escaped from the corporal, who had fallen into a dozing reverie:—

"By the powers, wouldn't I give one of those dollars for a mouthful! We must look out for some game.—A cockatoo or a parrot would be better than nothing," continued the corporal, becoming more excited.

"This sort of traveling," said the ensign, "is no easy matter. I wish we had a compass with

us; we shall get puzzled in the bush, I fear, without some guide to direct us."

"Your honor never was out on a bush campaign before?"

"Never: I have always had an inclination to explore the country, but I fear we are not well provided."

"Ah! it's all very well to explore a country where there are plenty of farm-houses, and villages with inns and public-houses handy; but exploring in this country, your honor, is quite a different thing. It's all a waste, and there is nothing to be got but what you bring down with powder and shot; and that's a sad waste of ammunition when you have natives and savages to provide against. But will your honor allow me to ask if it is your intention to seek for these bushrangers all over the island? It's hard to find a man in the bush when he is determined to hide himself!"

"I will not stop till I have rescued the young lady," replied Trevor with determination. "But we must hope that we shall come upon their track as soon as we have daylight to help us; and four persons cannot move about even in the bush without leaving some marks of their steps behind them."

"If we only had one of the natives to help us!" said the corporal. "It's wonderful to see how those black fellows can track in the bush, where a white man can see nothing!"

"We must hope that we shall have no occasion for that," replied the ensign. "I am strongly of opinion that these rascals are not far off. And see—the daylight is coming. Do you observe the faint glow in the sky yonder? That is the east; now we have a guide to the north-west. It was lucky that we stopped where we did. We were going quite out of our way. Now to find the track."

"If your honor would allow me to give my advice," said the corporal, "it would be to find our way back to the place that we started from; I mean where the dead man lies by the hut of boughs. There we shall find the track, if there is any track to be found; and when we are once on it, we can keep it. But if we go towards the north-west from the spot where we are, we may travel on all our lives and never come up with the enemy; for you see, sir, we may be going to the north-west, and the enemy too, and yet we may never hit on them, because we are marching side by side all the time."

"In parallel lines," said the ensign; "I understand."

"The best line," continued the corporal, "is to be in the same line as they are, and then we may stand a chance to come up to them, which we might never do by the lines that your honor speaks of."

The ensign thought that his subaltern's advice was good; and as the light of the morning was now increased sufficiently to enable them to look about them, he lost no time in regaining the spot from which they had wandered.

The corporal was not a little delighted, on casting his eyes around him, to observe on the ground on which the unfortunate Jeremiah had been temporarily located the night before, a something which his foraging eye quickly detected to be, as he emphatically pronounced it,

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"prog:" and although it was in the form of two humble ship's biscuits, a supply of which formed part of Jerry's load, it was a prize under the circumstances of which both he and the ensign eagerly availed themselves.

To add to their present good fortune, the corporal in a few minutes was able to make out clearly the point from which the bushrangers had started when they left the place; which was in a different direction from that adopted by Trevor.

Animated by the feeling of certainty of direction, which has such an astonishing effect on the spirits in the bush,—while the contrary fear produces an oppression of the mind, and a confusion of ideas, against which it is most difficult for the strongest mind to struggle,—and refreshed by the modicum of food which they had found so opportunely, the corporal led the way, keeping his eye steadily fixed on the track, which was here and there visible; while the ensign followed at a short distance in his rear, with his attention directed to the general aspect of the country, and eagerly listening for the slightest sound which might betray the vicinity of the enemy.

In this way they proceeded rapidly for some miles without meeting with anything in their course, until they reached the borders of a wide and sterile-looking plain, entirely bare of trees, which stretched out to the base of a high hill beyond.

They looked to the right and to the left, but they could see nothing.

The track, however, evidently pointed to the opposite hill; and the corporal and his officer, girding up their loins, prepared to traverse the dreary expanse, well aware that in their passage they would form conspicuous moving objects to the view of any one on the eminence beyond; and that, if the bushrangers were not too far advanced to catch sight of them, they would become aware of pursuers being on their track.

"It can't be helped," said the corporal: "that cunning rascal, Mark Brandon, seems to have chosen this way on purpose that he might have the opportunity of seeing what was behind him. I'll be bound he is on the hill yonder, watching us all the time. If we were standing on that height, we should be able to see ourselves on this bare place as plain as can be!"

"Let us make haste, then," said Trevor; "that hill cannot be more than a mile off. We may come up with him yet."

"Distances deceive in the bush," quietly replied the corporal. "But I will not fail, your honor, depend on it, now or any time. But that Mark Brandon is not easily to be outwitted. We must be cautious not to lose the track. I must ask your honor to keep at a little distance behind; for nothing distracts more than two going abreast. If your honor will try to keep a straight line to the hill yonder, while I look for marks, we shall have the better chance between us of keeping the track, so as not to lose time; and time is everything now."

"Stop," exclaimed the ensign; "stand still: there they are! but we were going wrong. Look there—to the right. Now, by George! we have them in sight, and it's a fair run for it."

"Where!" said the corporal, looking round, and handling his firelock.

"There!—to the right. Run your eyes along the ground in the direction of my fowling-piece."

"I see!" said the corporal; "but....."

"How many of them do you see? I fancy I can see only two."

"There are only two," said the corporal, with his eyes attentively fixed on the object; "but.....I thought so—they are moving now."

"Which way?"

"It matters little to us," replied the corporal, grounding his firelock, "which way they are moving; but I should like to get within shot; for it is said that their fat is the best thing in the world to heal wounds."

"Their fat! whose fat?"

"Emu fat, your honor. Those are two emus that you see yonder. They deceive one at first, in the distance; but when they begin to move, their long legs tell what they are. They say a plume of emu's feathers is worth something in England. I don't know whether they are good eating; though I have heard, I think, that their flesh is something like beef. At any rate, broiled emu would be better than nothing just now."

"We must not think of eating or drinking till we have come up with the bushrangers. But if you could near one of them, and could knock him down with the butt end of your musket without losing any time, I see no objection to that."

"Get near them! your honor: why, they are the shyest birds in nature, and it's a hard matter to run them down on horseback. And they always take to the mountains when they are chased. It's of no use thinking of them; so now for another march across this plain. There's one good thing about it—there's no dead timber, and no big loose stones lying about, that worry one so in many places. We must keep a sharp lookout, your honor, when we near the foot of the hill, for it will be easy for those blackguards, if they are there, to pick us off as we are coming up. The sooner we are over this plain the better."

"Go on, then," said Trevor, "and put your best leg foremost, corporal, for something tells me that before long we shall come up with the rascals."

"If we do come up with them," said the corporal, handing his musket viciously, "it shall be a bad day for them or for me! They shan't say that I have had this march for nothing."

After this professional exclamation, the corporal kept silence, being busily engaged in following the track; and the two wayfarers continued their march over the plain at a pace which showed that, notwithstanding their previous fatigue and scanty refreshment, neither their courage nor their strength flagged in their spirited enterprise.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PRECIPICE.

THE corporal guessed right when he conjectured that Mark Brandon was on the lookout on the high hill in the distance; but he was

far from divining the ulterior object of the wily bushranger in taking a route which he had chosen for the purpose of better baffling his pursuers.

When he had committed that decisive act, the night before, and with his fowling-piece presented at his remaining associate, with his finger on the trigger of the second barrel, had offered him, in a tone determined but conciliatory, "peace or war," the fellow-ruffian, taken by surprise, and without the possibility of effectual resistance, could do nothing but submit. Mark, however, modulated the tones of his voice so as to convey his own desire for peace; and as it was in his power, by a slight motion of his finger, to render it a matter of indifference which way he was answered, his comrade could not but consider that he was in some degree beholden to him for the life which it was in Brandon's power to take without parley on the instant.

Besides, the coarse and brutal Grough, who had nothing but his animal strength to rely on, was by no means inclined to quarrel with one on whose wit and contrivance he depended for escape from the colony. It was with undisguised satisfaction, therefore, that he received this earnest of his comrade's especial good will towards him in particular; and he expressed his acquiescence in Brandon's little arrangement in respect to the defunct Swindell with characteristic disregard as to there being one more or less in the world, so long as the latter part of the hypothesis did not regard himself:—

"D—— the fool!" he said, "it was no more than he deserved; what was the use of quarreling, when they ought to hang together, and stand by one another; and as to the gal, he was ready, he said, if Mark would only say the word, to cut her windpipe, and have done with her, for she was only an incumbrance in the bush, and that would be the best way of settling the matter; for he had always remarked, he emphatically averred, that wherever there was a woman there was sure to be mischief, and especially where there was only one among three, which was always certain to give rise to words even among the best friends; and so that the shortest way was to get rid of her;" and saying this, he made a step or two towards the hut, looking at Brandon, and with the same sort of air as a man would have about to kill a sheep.

But Mark, with a confidential wink, took him aside, and in a whisper explained to him that it was important that Helen's life should be spared, in order that she might be made use of as a hostage to be played off in their operations against the major.

He said that fathers sometimes had the most extraordinary affection for their daughters; and that no doubt, in the present case, the major would offer them a large sum to restore the girl; but that his intention was to insist on his placing a boat at their disposal, well provided and stored, in which they could make their escape, as the condition for the restoration of his daughter.

To this project, which struck him as a remarkably clever one, and altogether worthy of the reputation of Mark, as being up to more

dodges than any government-man in the colony, Grough at once assented, with enthusiastic expressions of approbation. "But he thought," he said, and this opinion he expressed aloud, in order that the party concerned might have the full comfort of its suggestion, "that there was no use at all in keeping 'that fat little man,' meaning Jeremiah, any longer, for he only ate their grub, and tired them to look after; and that a stick with his knife—for it was a pity to waste powder and shot in the bush—would put an end to that trouble, in a way," as he expressed it, "comfortable to the gentleman and to themselves."

To this Mark said he had no objection, and that his comrade might gratify himself in that trifling matter according to his own fancy; but he recommended him to postpone the pleasure until the gentleman had done his work, and had carried the stores with which he was laden to the place of their concealment.

The unhappy Jeremiah, who, although bound and gagged, was not deaf, and who had the satisfaction of overhearing the amiable conversation of the two bushrangers concerning himself, expressed his personal disinclination to the arrangement by deep deprecatory groans, and by various convulsive rollings and tumblings on the grass, expressive of the emotions to which he was unable to give vent in speech, and which the facetious Grough, softened by his conference with Brandon, good-humoredly checked by a little knock on Jerry's head with the butt-end of his musket, bidding him "be quiet, and thank his stars that he had gentlemen to deal with, and not to frighten the kangaroos with his noises."

But Helen's mind was strangely disturbed with the recent catastrophe, and by the words uttered by Mark Brandon at the close of the altercation with the murdered Swindell, which more strongly than ever confirmed her in the opinion that she possessed a power over the bushranger, which she might be able to use to the advantage of herself and her helpless companion in distress.

It seemed clear to her that Brandon, in order to save her from the violence of the ruffian whom he had slain, had not scrupled to add murder to his other crimes in her defence, and for her sake! And this desperate act, she considered, could not but argue that Brandon's—what should she call it?—"desire to stand favorably in her opinion" had led him to sacrifice one of his comrades; thereby reducing his strength, and lessening his chances of success against the attack of his pursuers, who she had no doubt were on their track. It was also breaking faith with his comrades, rendering himself, as she hoped, suspected by the other, and liable to suffer by the same treachery which he had practised.

Still it was clearly in her defence that he had exposed himself to these risks—as she flattered herself; and she beguiled herself with the hope that, having this clue to the bushranger's motives, and this hold, as she thought, on his actions, she should be able to turn him to her own purposes, and persuade him to set her free. She also set her wits to work to engage him to set free Mr. Silliman, with whose aid she trust-

ed she could not only offer more effectual resistance to violence, if violence should be offered, but, perhaps, even be enabled to overpower the two bushrangers at some unguarded moment, and so escape!

Such were the rapid thoughts which passed through her mind, as Mark approached her, after his brief conference with his unskilled, but sturdy comrade.

Before Mark addressed her, he waited to hear her speak, in order that he might judge, either by the words that fell from her, or the tone in which they were uttered, of the mind and temper of the speaker. But in this expectation he was disappointed. Helen waited for him to begin.

He was obliged, therefore, to say something; and he commenced with what lawyers call a "fishing" observation:

"This is a rough deed for a lady to witness, Miss Horton."

Helen, having in her mind her own plans, made answer with as much composure as she could assume:—

"It is a dreadful deed! But at least I have to thank you for preventing the insult which that wretch contemplated."

"All right," said Brandon to himself. Then, as if penetrated with the extent of the risk which he had run for her sake, he continued:

"It was a dreadful deed, Miss Horton, and a desperate one; but there was no other way of saving you. Had I been thinking of myself more than others," he continued, "I should not have given my enemies the opportunity of adding that which might be construed into the crime of murder to the other excesses of which necessity has made me guilty. Might I hope that Miss Horton would bear favorable testimony to my motives, should this act be at any time brought against me?"

"It is of little use to talk to me of my testimony, while I am a prisoner in your power, with my hands bound thus," said Helen, making an impatient movement with her arms.

"I am now able to fulfil my promise, and to release them," said Mark, cutting the cords with his knife; "and I sincerely wish, Miss Horton, it was in my power to liberate you entirely, as easily as I now cut these painful bonds—not less painful for me to witness than for you to bear."

"But what prevents you?" said Helen, hope glowing in her heart, and already contemplating flight; "you would be sure of the gratitude of my father and of myself; and if any intercession with the government, on his part, could avail in obtaining your pardon—I am sure it would be strenuously exercised in return for your protection of me."

She used the word "protection," designedly, with the hope that it would stir up and aliment the desire which she felt the bushranger had, to be well thought of by her. But she was overmatched in her feminine cunning on this point by the masculine duplicity of her antagonist.

It was Brandon's object to carry her far into the interior, to some spot where he should be secure from pursuit; and under such circumstances, he had little doubt that he should be able to master her to his wishes: but he was

well aware that, without her own consent, it would be impossible to force her much farther forward, as the labor and the delay of carrying her on a litter through the bush would allow time for any pursuers on his track to come up with them.

It was necessary, therefore, that she should be deluded into accompanying them; and with this view he thought he could not do better than deceive her by the same tale with which he had cajoled the brute Grough, which indeed was a plausible one enough, and adapted to the enticing of her to accompany him in his progress onwards without opposition. For he could not disguise from himself, that with a girl of Helen's turn of mind, high-spirited as she was, any suspicion of his own ulterior designs might tempt her to resist on the spot, and to sacrifice her own life, rather than allow herself to be removed to a greater distance from the chance of succor.

He told her the same tale, therefore, which he had invented for his undiscerning comrade, not without some remote and vague idea of carrying it at some future time into effect, after he had accomplished his other purposes. And this plan seemed the more sincere to Helen, as it squared with the known desire of Brandon to escape from the island; and in the innocence of her mind she was far from having any idea of the extent of duplicity and villainy of which such a man was capable.

But with a view of testing his sincerity still further, and with the design to furnish help for her own escape, as well as that of her companion in misfortune, she proposed to the bushranger to unbind Mr. Silliman's hands, and to release him from the gag in his mouth.

To this also Brandon assented, as he had already determined to do so in order to enable Jerry to travel with his load the faster; although he took care to pretend that it was entirely in deference to Miss Horton's wishes that he consented to make the concession.

"It is necessary, now," said Mark, "that we should seek for some place of securer retreat than this, from which we can treat with safety with your father: and if, as you assure me, there is no doubt of his complying with my conditions, your captivity will not be long. And, indeed, I begin to be ashamed that it has taken place at all: but if Miss Horton will condescend to reflect on the condition of my wretched bondage in this country, innocent as I am of all crime, except such as I have committed with her own knowledge,—if it can be considered a crime for a man unjustly condemned to endeavor to recover his liberty,—she will allow some excuse, perhaps, for the offence which I have involuntarily committed against herself, and of which necessity alone has been the unhappy cause."

"What will happen," asked Helen, "if I determine to remain here?"

"My comrade Grough, I fear, and indeed I have no doubt, would force you to go forward, by means which you could not resist—unless," he said, "you would have me add another death to this night's account."

Helen shuddered at this suggestion of further slaughter; besides, she trusted that she should have more opportunities of escape in motion

than in resting where she was, and especially with a friend devoted to her interests and liberty, in the person of Mr. Silliman; and seeing that it would be vain to desist, and that her best course was to feign an indifference as to her being taken further which she did not feel, she signified her consent, asking only for a few minutes' longer repose, in order the better to recruit her strength for travel.

This interval she employed in tracing with her blood, by means of a pin, those words on the glove which was fortunately discovered by Trevor.

The previous talk of the two men who had borne her for some miles on the way before they reached the scene of these transactions, had made her acquainted with the intention of the bushranger to retreat north-west into the interior, a part of the country with which the settlers were entirely unacquainted. She would not divest her mind of the conviction that her friends, when they discovered her abduction, would take immediate measures to follow to her rescue; and it was this hope that enabled her to support herself, and to preserve the equilibrium of her mind, under circumstances so trying and fearful to a young and delicate girl, on whom harm or insult had never before fallen.

In the mean time Brandon talked with Grough, taking care to instil into him the vital importance of preventing the girl's escape, and of the necessity of taking her along with them unharmed, and, as he endeavored to make the insensible brute understand, without insult, in order to insure the compliance of her father with the conditions of her release; at the same time impressing on him the necessity of his so comporting himself, without proceeding to actual violence, as to strike a terror into the girl, in order to urge her forward as fast as possible, and to intimidate her from attempting to escape.

With all these instructions the obedient Grough expressed his utmost willingness to comply, being not only congenial with his own tastes and habits, but necessary for the success of the ultimate design of Mark, which Grough felicitated himself on seeing through with an acuteness which almost equaled Mark's own prolific invention in plots and stratagems.

In good humor, therefore, with himself and the state of their affairs, he gave Helen to understand that the musket which he carried was loaded with two balls, which it was his intention, he said, instantly to discharge through her head, if she did not immediately "stir her stumps," and give no trouble.

Mark Brandon, in the mean time, having released Jeremiah from his fetters, and having intimated to him, though in more polite terms, his own determination to the same effect, that humiliated gentleman, somewhat reanimated by the release of his hands and mouth, reloaded himself with his burdens with a most painstaking alacrity, and stood ready, as submissive as the beast of burden to which Grough compared him.

As they were about to start, Grough hailed Brandon:

"I say, Mark, where are the dollars which that fool Swindell had with him? Why, we

are almost as big fools as he to go away without 'em."

"No, no!" said Mark, who, as he used to boast, never "gave away a chance." "If we take his dollars, it will be said that we killed him to rob him. Now I call this young lady and this worthy gentleman to witness that he met with his death by his own fault, in attempting a most atrocious violence; and, in short, that he was killed in self-defence."

"Well," said Grough, "just as you like. No matter how he was killed, to my mind: he is dead, sure enough. But I must do you the justice to say, Mark, that a cleaner shot I never saw! Why he died, as one may see, all in a hurry, without having time to say good-bye to any one! More fool he for tempting it!"

With this valedictory epigraph on his deceased companion, the ruffian gave a hint with the end of his musket to his prisoner to move on; and the bushranger gently propelling Jerry with a similar intimation, the party resumed their flight into the bush.

Their progress, at night, was unavoidably slow; and Brandon was careful not to hurry Helen too fast, as he wished to reserve her strength until the daylight, when it would be more available, and when he should be able by a survey of the country to choose the course that seemed best for penetrating into that part of the interior. He did not care much for the delay; as he knew very well that the advance of a pursuing enemy, if there was any party on their footsteps, which he had little fear of, must inevitably be slower than his own, inasmuch as they would be obliged to walk more leisurely, in order to preserve the track, should they chance to find it, and to pause also occasionally to recover it when lost.

After he had proceeded a few miles, therefore, he halted, and waited for the dawn of day, to continue their flight. In this also he had the advantage of pursuers; for the faint light which is sufficient to allow a party to run away, is not enough for those who follow; as it is necessary for the latter to be able to see, not only the general face of the country, but the particular marks of the passage of those whom they are pursuing.

But Mark Brandon was not at all uneasy on that point. He was well acquainted with the difficulty of tracking travelers in the bush, in dry weather especially; and he had no suspicion of the clue which the ready-witted Helen had the ingenuity to devise for directing the course of her friends in pursuit.

In this the bushranger, with all his subtlety, failed to be a match for a feeble girl, who, relying on the promptitude of her father and her lover, was able to bear her present fate with a firmness which deceived the bushranger, and which he ascribed to a sort of indifference on her part, which sometimes pleased and sometimes puzzled him; but which was, in fact, owing to her strong reliance on her own courage and her own resources, and the speedy succor which she expected from those who she was sure would sacrifice their lives if necessary to save her.

As soon, therefore, as the first dawn of day spread sufficient light over the ground to ena-

ble them to pick their steps, the bushranger announced that it was necessary that they should proceed; and Helen, trusting that some lucky chance, now that her hands were free, would enable her to effect her escape, and desirous of blinding her persecutors by the semblance of a ready acquiescence in their commands, at once obeyed.

As to poor Jeremiah, he had nothing to do but to comply at once with the hint of the brutal Grough, who, poking him up with his musket, signified to him that it was time for him to rise from the grass and take up his load again. As to any resistance on his part, the horrible sight of the ruffian's loaded musket, and the vividness of Jerry's fears, which made him fancy that he could actually see the cartridge with the ball at the top of it ready to be shot out at the bottom of the barrel, put any such attempt entirely out of the question!

But as he stole a doleful glance at Helen, whom Brandon sedulously kept at some distance from him, she gave him a look which seemed to imply that she was not without hope in the midst of their difficulties.

In what that hope consisted he did not know; but there was a something in Helen's eye which indicated resolution and a sort of triumph, and which so elated him in his misery, that, in the exuberance of his sudden joy, he gave a sort of caper, much to the astonishment of Grough, who declared, that as the man was so fresh, he could carry a little more, and immediately added to Jerry's load his own knapsack, which, from the fear of overloading their package-horse, he had hitherto carried on his own shoulders. Thus admonished to conceal in future any outward exhibition of his feelings, the luckless Jerry trudged dolorously forward, preceded by Grough and Helen, and followed by Brandon, who from time to time incited him to move on faster by well-timed hints of his comrade's unscrupulous ferocity, and now and then throwing a little encouragement into his words, by protesting that the term of Jerry's labors was fast approaching, and that then he would have nothing to do but to enjoy himself and study the botany of the country.

In this order they made their way through a dense forest, from which they emerged into an open plain.

Had Brandon been aware that pursuers were so close behind him, he would not have risked discovery by venturing over a space on which he would be sure to be seen by any one in his rear. But depending on having so taken his course as to have baffled his enemies, he went boldly on, making, as his point, for a high hill, on the other side of the plain, from the summit of which he calculated he should be able to obtain an extensive view of the country beyond.

In their passage over the flat and monotonous waste, Helen watched for an opportunity to make some mark, or to leave some trace of their road, to those who might be in pursuit; but in vain; she saw that she was so closely followed by Grough, and she felt that Brandon had his eye so constantly upon her, that she could contrive no expedient, without betraying her purpose, of indicating her route.

But on arriving at the base of the hill, which

was thinly covered with stunted-looking trees, known by the name of the she-oak, she pretended to stumble with fatigue, and catching hold of a fragile branch, she broke it off in her fall. Mark Brandon was quickly at her side, with many expressions of concern at her accident, which she ascribed to her excessive fatigue, which made her feel faint.

Mark immediately promised that they should rest as soon as they had proceeded a short distance up the ascent, and resuming his place near Jerry, left her to the superintendence of his fellow, adhering in this respect to the system which he had laid down for himself never to appear near Helen in a position which implied his personal coercion of her, and which therefore could not fail to be offensive, and to disgust her with his presence.

Thus compelled and urged by the unceremonious promptings of the unpitiable Grough, she continued her weary course, holding the stick which she had snapped from the tree carelessly in her hand, and contriving to break off small pieces as she went on, which she dropped on the ground.

In this way they slowly climbed the hill, until at last they gained the summit, when, at the command of Brandon, her conductor stopped; and to the infinite satisfaction of Jerry, the bushranger announced that it was his pleasure that they should rest there for some time, in order that Miss Horton might recover from her fatigue.

In pursuance of this intention, Mark immediately proceeded to cut down, with an axe which he carried, some of the boughs of the few trees which were scattered here and there near the top of the hill, and with which he rapidly and skillfully constructed a temporary hut, in which he invited Helen to repose herself. He next made a selection from the provisions carried by Jerry, which he offered for her refreshment, and which Helen, who was intent on escape, willingly accepted.

Brandon then began to examine carefully the appearance of the surrounding country, which his elevated position enabled him to do with advantage; and he noted especially all conspicuous objects towards the north-west, observing, by the compass, with which he had taken care to provide himself from the major's cabin in the brig, their relative points and bearings, as it was in that direction that he intended to bend his steps; not only because it was the interior of the island, but because it was a part of the country untraveled, and unknown to any but a few of the prisoners of the crown, who imparted the secret of their information to the select only among their friends, for the purpose of availing themselves of their knowledge of its localities on occasions such as the present.

The aspect of the country which the bushranger surveyed was, indeed, romantic in the extreme. Diversified by low undulating hills and plains, and interspersed with clumps of trees, the scene resembled an extensive park; while the height, from which he looked down on it, concealed its roughness, and general character of solitude and desolation.

But it was not the beauties of nature, or the romance of landscape, which it was the present business of Brandon to study. His only desire

was to ascertain what tiers of hills lay beyond him, and the openings which appeared in them for the passage of his party to the districts on their other side. Having ascertained this point to his satisfaction, he next turned his attention to the examination of the difficulties and obstacles which intervened.

He observed, stretching to the north, and losing itself in a circuitous course to the south-west, a narrow glistening line, which he was aware indicated water, and which he judged must be a rather considerable river. This river lay between him and the distant tier of hills, through an opening in which it was his object to penetrate; but as he could not see how to avoid it, he was obliged to trust to his own ingenuity to cross it safely, taking care only to choose, as his line of route, a way as far to the northward as possible, without interfering too much with his direct course; as he knew that the nearer he went to the river's source, the narrower would be the stream, and the more easy to be passed over; while towards the coast, to the south, it would naturally become broader and broader, till it emptied itself into the sea.

Having completed his survey to his satisfaction, and formed the plan of his future route distinctly in his mind, he threw himself on the ground.

The wearied Jeremiah, exhausted with the weight of his afflictions and of the heavy load of stores and provisions which he had borne so far, had sunk into a profound sleep, in which he had been quickly followed by the other bushranger; but Brandon, notwithstanding that fatigue and the necessity of constant watchfulness weighed heavily on him, did not dare to close his eyes.

But finding, after some little time, that the desire of sleep was beginning to overcome his senses, he suddenly and with an effort arose, and commenced pacing up and down at some distance, but within view of Helen's temporary habitation; sometimes taking a view of the country in the distance, and sometimes scanning the plain over which he had lately passed. Although he had no fear of being tracked and followed, not having any suspicion of Helen's significant hints for the information of her friends, he did not fail to keep a lookout in his rear, in pursuance of his favorite maxim.

On a sudden, as he threw his glance over the bare plain behind him, he saw, or thought he saw, some moving objects; but whether they were emus, or whether they were natives, he could not at that distance distinguish; but he kept his eyes fixed on them steadily.

Helen also, who was on the alert, had already observed through the boughs of her hut two specks moving on the plain beneath the hill, and which her heart at once told her were friends coming to her rescue. In the eagerness of her joy, she ran out of her hut to the edge of the hill, which in that direction was nearly perpendicular, and with clasped hands and strained eyes gazed on the living atoms on the earth's surface, which by almost imperceptible degrees continued to advance.

At that moment the bushranger caught the expression of wild joy which was visible in her

looks; and there was a something in her eye which conveyed to him the idea that there was some secret intelligence, though by what means he was utterly at a loss to imagine, between his captive and the living creatures which he now made out to be human beings, who were following in his track.

Seizing Helen by the arm with his left hand, and pointing to the suspicious objects with his fowling-piece, which he held extended in his right, he asked in a tone of strong, but restrained passion:—

"Miss Horton, what do you know of those two men whom I see on our track? Have you betrayed me? Speak, girl! As you value your life, do you know them?"

As he pronounced these words, he shook Helen with convulsive passion, as he held her in his powerful grasp, tottering on the edge of the precipice.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE AMBUSH.

THE loud tones of Mark Brandon's voice, as, in a paroxysm of excitement, he shook Helen over the edge of the precipice, quickly roused his comrade and the other prisoner from their slumbers.

Grough was the first to wake; and seeing that Brandon, as he immediately conjectured, was about to cast the girl headlong from the height—why or wherefore he cared not,—he cocked his musket, and, as a matter of business, presented it at Jerry's head, as that astonished individual raised it in a state of dreamy confusion from a little hillock of turf, on which it had been blissfully reposing.

Happy had been that sleep! for the wearied Jeremiah had lain unconscious of bushrangers, or of guns and bullets; and the Fairy Queen of Dreams, as if to recompense him for the sufferings of his wakeful state, had transported him in fancy to the peaceful precincts of Ironmonger Lane, where, it seemed to him, he sat at a luxurious City Feast, amidst the pomp and circumstances of glorious meat and drink, and in all the dignity of his own right as a liveryman of London!

Joyous was that mock festivity! Rich and rare were the costly dishes, where real turtle competed with fat venison! Bright and sparkling was that ideal champagne! and loud were the shouts of the imaginary hurrahs of three-times three when the health of the master was drunk with all the enthusiasm which wine inspires on such magnificent occasions!

But this ecstatic state lasted not long.—A change came o'er the spirit of his dream! Suddenly, it seemed to the sleeping Jerry that the person of the respected and corpulent master who presided over the board dilated to supernatural proportions! his features assumed the likeness of the dreadful bushranger! The roll of paper containing the list of toasts, which he held in his hand, became changed to a prodigious blunderbuss! an awful voice rang in Jerry's ears, which sounded terribly like that which never failed to fill him with fearful emotions; and, roused by the terrible vision, he awoke!

It was indeed the voice of the bushranger! and as he opened his eyes, he beheld the eternal musket of the inexorable Grough pointed at his head; and he became aware that the sound which in his sleep seemed to be the tinkling of the "cheerful glass" was that "click," so disagreeable to the threatened party, which was caused by the cocking of his enemy's abominable gun! Unhappy was that waking! In the agony of his fear Jeremiah gave vent to a dismal groan!

Grough cast his eyes askance at his chief to see if he made any sign to signify that it was his pleasure that Jeremiah's waking should be changed for an eternal sleep, or, as he mentally expressed it, "should have his brains blown out," when Helen, catching sight of this little by-play, pointed it out to Brandon, and, desirous of saving the life of her fellow-prisoner, asked, in a tone of scornful reproach:—

"Would you murder a man in cold blood?"

"Hold off!" said Brandon; "no need to take life without a cause: you can put a ball through his head at any time, if he kicks. Hold off, mate, I say; but be ready, for there's danger abroad."

The obedient Grough, albeit that he was reluctant to be balked a second time, acquiesced; but he bestowed a look on his prisoner, somewhat like that which a hyena casts on the prey which he is baffled at pouncing upon by the bars of his cage, and which made poor Jerry ache to the very marrow of his bones.

"What's in the wind, Mark?"

"There is mischief brooding: but do you attend to your prisoner, and make him pack up ready for a start." Then turning to Helen, who, trembling more with hope than fear, kept her eyes fixed on the specks moving on the plain below, he said, in a low, deep voice:—

"Miss Horton, you know something of yonder men. Nay, do not deny it; I see it in your eye: but I will tell you that there is more danger to yourself in any attempt at rescue than in your remaining in my power unknown and undiscovered. They must be better and cleverer men than I have yet seen who could find Mark Brandon in the bush when he would be concealed, or who could take him when they found him."

Helen did not answer, but continued to observe with breathless anxiety the objects who she felt sure were following in her track: and as they advanced nearer and nearer, it soon became evident that they were not natives, but white men, and that they carried in their hands what seemed to be fowling-pieces or muskets. The bushranger no sooner became convinced of this fact than he called out to Grough to be ready to march.

"What's the use of running away?" responded Grough, who had now become aware of the sort of danger announced by Brandon, as the forms of the two men were visible from the spot where he stood sentinel over Jerry. "What's the use of running away from it? There are only two, and we can easily manage them; and then we can go on comfortably."

"No, no," replied Mark; "this place is too much exposed. But I see a post on the other side of yonder stream, with trees growing down to the water's edge, where we can deal with

them as we please. Now, Miss Horton, you must move on."

"Where is it," said Helen, endeavoring to gain time, "that you wish to take me?"

"No matter where," replied Brandon; "you must move on."

"But this is against our bargain," replied Helen, still trying to gain time. "You promised that you would release me if my father would engage to perform the part you mentioned. And now you have an opportunity to make your terms known to those who are coming."

"You know them, then?" said Brandon, clenching his teeth, and grasping his weapon with a threatening gesture. "But let them be who they may, I will communicate with them when and how I please. Miss Horton, I should be sorry to use violence towards you; but this is not a position for me to negotiate in. You must move on."

"Suppose," said Helen, "it should be my father—and another friend?—Let me go to them; and I undertake, on my word of honor, that he shall do what you require of him. You may trust to my word of honor."

"Excuse me, Miss Horton, but your father and your other friend might not have the same idea of honor as yourself. In the bush it is better to trust to our loaded muskets than to empty honor. But time goes, and we must be moving. Miss Horton," he added, seizing her arm, the hold of which he had relinquished during this brief colloquy, "I say again, you must go on."

"And what if I will not go on?" said Helen.

"Then," said Brandon, "I fear that my companion, there, will make short work of it. Life, Miss Horton, is dear; and no notions of honor will induce him to prefer yours to his own. His musket is loaded; his finger is on the trigger; and his will is ready."

This he said so that Grough could hear, and that obliging person, taking the hint more quickly than his dull nature promised, immediately advanced, with Jerry, whom he ordered to kneel down on the grass, threatening him with instant death if he dared to move or speak; and then deliberately taking aim at Helen, he had the unusual politeness to inquire, as it was a lady:—

"Now, ma'am, are you ready?"

Helen must have been something more than mortal, if she could have withstood unmoved this terrible threat, as she saw the ferocious eye of the miscreant fixed on her with a sort of malicious glee. She turned deadly pale, her knees bent under her, and she would have sunk down on the ground, had not Brandon supported her with his powerful arm; at the same time that he made a sign to his companion to turn aside his musket, which Grough did with much unconcern: but as it seemed to that industrious person that it was a pity that it should not have some object to point at, he directed it in the interim towards Jerry, who, although by this time he ought to have been used to it, had not yet arrived at that state of happy disregard possessed by the skinned eels in the fable, and evinced his emotions by a most piteous supplication!

The time occupied in this little manœuvre,

however, was sufficient to enable Helen to recover her presence of mind. All her efforts were directed to gain time.

"You forget," she said, "that the report of your musket would be the surest way to make known to those who are in pursuit of you who and where you are."

"By —," said Grough, recovering his musket, and uncocking it; "the wench is right! Mark, what shall we do?"

Mark could not help admiring the quick wit of the girl, which had such an instantaneous effect even on the dull intellects of his comrade; but he perceived that she was studying pretexts to gain time, so as to allow her friends to come up, and he felt that already too much time had been wasted.

In a peremptory tone, therefore, he again desired her to proceed, saying that all resistance was useless, and that, if she wished to preserve her life, she must move on instantly to the other side of the hill.

"Miss Horton," he said, "it is a question of life or death with us. You see, my comrade is a desperate man: in a moment more he will discharge the contents of that gun through your heart; and no effort of mine could prevent him."

Helen cast her eyes down on the plain: the figures were coming nearer and nearer.

"He durst not!" she said, advancing to the edge of the precipice, and pointing to the moving objects below; "the smoke and the report would at once betray you."

"Then die another death!" cried Mark, in a transport of rage, and again seizing Helen with a powerful grasp. "Look down, foolish girl, into that depth below your feet! Do you see the rocks on which you would be dashed to pieces if I were to let go my hold? This hand that now clutches you once relaxed, and in a few moments more your body would be a shapeless mass, for the native dogs to feast on! Once more, I say, beware how you tempt me!"

"Don't let the girl hang over the precipice that way," cried out Grough, moved for once with an odd sort of compassionate feeling; "let her go, and have done with her. No need to torment her, Mark! Let her go—she will have time enough to say her prayers before she gets to the bottom."

"Stop! you brute—you beast—you murdering villain!" screamed out Jerry; "you'll be hanged, you will—and doubly hanged; and you deserve it for this brutality."

"Heyday!" said Grough, as he knocked down Jerry, who had essayed to rise from his knees, with the butt-end of his musket; "here's a precious jaw! We must have the gag—what! trying to get up again! Then you must have another tap!"

"Come on with us, miss," continued Jerry, struggling on the ground with his enemy; "better come on with us than be murdered. While there's life, miss, there's hope; but when one is dead. . . ."

What further aphorism the excited Mr. Silliman might have added, it is impossible to say, for at this point the exasperated Mr. Grough dealt him such a blow on the face with his fist, that it put an end for the time to the further

expression of his opinions; and Mark at the same time withdrawing Helen from her perilous situation, his expostulations as to that point were rendered unnecessary.

"Bind his hands behind his back," said Mark.

Grough performed that operation with great skill and dexterity.

"Now," resumed Mark, with an inclination of his head towards Helen—"hers."

Grough did this with equal readiness.

Helen said nothing.

"Will you come with us, or shall Grough drag you?" said Mark to Helen.

Helen remained silent.

"Take her in hand!" he said to Grough.

"Now, my pretty dear," said that most uninviting person, "I think you might give me a kiss for all the trouble I have taken about you."

Helen shuddered: her hands were bound behind her back; she could do nothing. Grough put his rough beard close to her face.

"I will walk," she said.

"There's a beauty: and you can give me the kiss when we stop for the night. Now, Mark, it's all right; the lady says she will be agreeable. A little faster, if you please, ma'am. It will be all down-hill presently. Which is our point, Mark? Had you not better go first?"

"Keep that big tree in the bottom straight before you and in a line with the hill beyond."

"Ay, ay. Now, my lady, stir your stumps."

Helen stopped.

"If you will release my hands," she said, turning round to Mark Brandon, "I promise you I will make no more resistance; but if not, you may kill me if you will: but from this spot I will not move."

Mark hesitated for a moment; and then, without saying a word, untied the cord which bound her, and put it in his pocket.

Helen immediately moved forward at a quick pace; but as she walked she contrived to tear strips from her dress, which she let fall on the ground. But she was not aware that the bushranger, whose quick eye caught sight of the manoeuvre, rapidly, but carefully picked them up, as he followed, with not less diligence than that with which she distributed them.

"Hah, hah!" he said to himself, "this has been the dodge, has it? But an old bushranger, my beauty, knows a trick worth two of that. I don't know, though," he muttered to himself, "whether it would not be best. Her friends are on our track,—that's certain; and this is the way it has been done. There are only two of them: they can travel faster than we can, encumbered as we are with a woman. Yes, better get rid of them; and this clue, which she is taking such pains to give to her friends, shall be the lure to their destruction. And so there let them lie. And now for a good place of concealment, where we may return dodge for dodge."

With these thoughts he urged his comrade to mend his pace; to which Helen, confident in the success of her stratagem, made no objection, and they quickly cleared the space between the base of the hill from which they had descended and a shallow stream which was now before them.

"What will she do now?" said Mark. "Ah!

she has something in her shoe! and she thinks I do not see her stick that little twig into the ground on the margin of the water! That Grough is the dullest ass I ever saw! but the brute has strength, and a sort of courage. Capital! See how she picks her way daintily over the water, stepping from stone to stone; and now she has got to the other side, something wrong with the shoe again! Another twig stuck in! I thought so! Very cleverly done, my pretty one! But you don't think that you are setting springes for the decoyed ducks that are coming after you! Keep on, mate," he said, aloud; "straight ahead! Get into the scrub, and then we will have a 'corrobbery,' as the natives say."

They now advanced among the thick bushes which fringed the banks of the rapid and shallow stream, and beyond which was a thick wood. The mass of bushes was so dense that it was impossible to see far beyond them, and the covert seemed well adapted for the concealment which was desirable. But they had not proceeded many yards when the bushranger called a halt.

"Lie down there," he said to Jeremiah, in a stern voice; "and look to it that you neither move nor speak, or you shall have your brains knocked out without further warning. And do you, Miss Horton, be pleased to sit down there," pointing to a space between himself and his comrade. "Mate," he said, "keep your eye on them both, and leave the rest to me."

Saying this, he examined the primings of his double-barrel fowling-piece, passed his ramrod down both barrels to make sure their charges had not become displaced or loosened in the journey, a precaution which was imitated by his companion; then he cleared away a small part of the leafy boughs of the bush behind which they were all concealed, and arranged a convenient fork of the tree on which to rest his barrels, which he tried, and was satisfied with. Having completed these preparations, and whispered apart with his companion, who nodded his head and slapped his thigh with exultation at the cleverness of Mark's "dodge," he returned to his post, and waited for some time quietly on the ground, employed, as it seemed, in calculating the time. After musing for a while, he abruptly approached Miss Horton, and with much politeness requested a small portion of her dress:—

"As a pattern," he said. "You see, Miss Horton," he added, with a sneer, "it is already torn, so that a small abstraction more cannot materially damage its appearance."

Helen, coloring up, made no resistance, as he gently tore off a small portion, while Grough and Jerry looked on with extreme surprise. Their surprise was greater, while Helen's heart sank within her, when they saw him, through the interstices of the bushes, tearing the piece of stuff into small shreds, which he carefully strewed on the ground in a direct line from the part of the stream's bank which they had passed over, towards the bush where Brandon had tried his fowling piece on the forked branch.

It then became evident to Helen that her own device had been penetrated, and its object discovered, and that it now was being made

use of against her, to the imminent danger of the friends who were hastening to her rescue.

The wondering Grough, when he was made acquainted with the object of this manœuvre by Brandon, after having given vent to his admiration by sundry whispered oaths and exclamations, concluded by declaring, with an awful asseveration, "that it was one of the out-and-outest dodges that ever man contrived, and that no one but Mark or the devil himself could have had the cunning to invent it!"

"Why," he added, in Mark's ear, "it's for all the world like strewing grain for a lot of sparrows to peck at in a farm-yard, so that you have 'em all in a line, and can nick a score of 'em with one shot."

This gleeful exclamation was unheard by Helen, but she saw too clearly by the preparations that it was the bushranger's design to entice her friends on to the other side of the covert behind which he was ensconced, and then, taking deliberate and certain aim, to shoot them both before they had any suspicion of the presence of an enemy. Her color went and came, and her heart beat quick, as she strove to summon up her energies and to rally her thoughts, so as to hit on some scheme for defeating this deliberate plot of cowardly and diabolical assassination.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FEET ON THE SAND.

WHILE the bushranger was making these polite preparations for the reception of Helen's friends, Trevor and the corporal continued their course over the lengthened plain, whose wide expanse seemed to the eager desires of the lover almost interminable.

Even the tough and seasoned corporal felt the wearisomeness of the way, the more especially as he missed his accustomed rations, without which the bravest and the sturdiest are apt to find their spirits and their courage diminish at the time of trial. It was with more than military promptitude, therefore, that he came to a halt at the intimation of his officer.

"Are you sure you are on the track?" asked Trevor, making use of the inquiry as an excuse for a short rest.

"Quite sure, your honor. If you will stoop down a bit, you will see that the blades of grass bend forward slightly, which must have been caused by the tread of feet not long since. And look at this," continued the corporal, kneeling down and pointing to a tiny ant-hill; "some weight has been set upon this, that's certain! and, to my mind, here's the round mark of the heel of a man's boot as plain as can be! We are all right, your honor, so far as the track goes; depend upon that."

"How many of them are there, do you think?" asked Trevor.

"Impossible to say, sir; but, to my thinking, there can't be many. I should say, not more than three or four, at most. If we could come on a bare place now, where there is no grass, we should be able to see the prints of their feet, and then we could tell better; but the young lady, I guess, would not leave much mark be-

hind her: they generally tread light, do those young gals. I remember when I was in the states..."

"Step on," said Trevor, quickly, the image which the corporal had unconsciously conjured up exciting him with fresh ardor in the pursuit; "step on, corporal; if we are tired, those who are before us must be tired also; and it's hard if two men like us cannot run them down."

The corporal made no reply to this more than the usual salute, by bringing the edge of his right hand to the peak of his military cap; and then, throwing his musket over his arm, he marched on with renewed alacrity.

They arrived at last at the base of the hill. The retreating party having separated a little at this point; their track had been less concentrated, and the corporal found himself at fault. He looked about diligently; but whether it was that the fatigue of his long march, and the unremitted exercise of his eyes had wearied his sight, or that the marks were too faint to be perceived, the veteran was puzzled:—

"If your honor will stay there," he said, "so as to mark the point which we struck, I will make half circles up the hill till I hit on the track again."

"Break off a twig from that low tree before you," said Trevor, "and stick it in the ground on the spot, and then we shall be both at liberty."

The corporal did as he was ordered, and advanced towards the tree, which was small and low; and of a gnarled and knotted appearance; but as he was about to break off a small branch, he stopped, and beckoned to the ensign:—

"Look at that, your honor; there has been some one here before us. A branch has been snapped off here not long ago. See, it is a dead branch, easily broken."

Trevor examined it attentively; and, first, he directed the corporal to stick into the ground which he had left, another branch, which he broke off, in order that they might be able to recognize the precise spot at which they had arrived at the base of the hill. He then continued his investigations.

It struck him that it was not likely that a retreating party would willingly encounter the laborious task of climbing that hill, which, he observed, rose precipitately to a great height at a short distance up the ascent. "It was easier to go round the hill than to go over it," he remarked to the corporal, in which opinion that worthy sub acquiesced, observing, however, "that there was never any calculating on what Mark Brandon would do; and that perhaps he had gone over the hill for the very reason that it would appear to his pursuers that it was unlikely for him to do so."

While he was speaking the ensign had proceeded a few paces up the ascent, which at the beginning was gentle, and was throwing his eyes over the grass to discover some indication of footsteps, when he thought he saw a little piece of stick lying on the ground in a place at too great a distance from any tree to allow of its having been dropped from the parent trunk.

He picked it up, and compared it with the broken branch of the tree which he had quitted, and found that it corresponded in color and sort exactly; moreover, it was of the same

dead wood which the remaining portion of the branch exhibited.

Convinced that this branch had been broken off with some design, he returned to the spot where he had found it, and, pursuing his search, he soon lighted on another bit of the same wood; and presently he found another and another, leading on the left in a winding direction towards the top of the hill. Having thus again found the track of the fugitives, he sat down for a brief space, in order that he might resolve on the most judicious course of action.

He considered, that as the bushranger had thought fit to ascend a steep hill, which there was no necessity for his delaying his flight by surmounting, it must have been done with some design. What was that design? It was possible that he and the corporal had been observed all the time, and that the bushranger, with his comrade, one or more, was waiting for him in ambush, in an advantageous position on the top. In that case it was advisable to proceed with great caution; at the same time that the utmost diligence was necessary, in order to overtake them and prevent violence to Helen.

He mentioned his thoughts to the corporal, and asked him his opinion; upon which that experienced subaltern rested his two hands on the muzzle of his firelock, from habit, however, leaving the orifice of the barrel clear, and reposing his chin upon his hands, he set himself to work to resolve the enigma of the wily bushranger's intentions.

"Sir," said the corporal, after a short pause, and after having taken into account the particular shape and bulk of the sugar-loaf hill, on the inclined base of which his officer was resting; "I think our best plan will be to go round the foot of the hill and see if the enemy has made his way over down the other side. If he has not, we shall know that we have him safe somewhere on the top of it, and then we can take him in the rear, where he will not expect us; and if he has passed over it, why then, all we have to do is to follow on. But it seems to me, your honor, that if we go blindly after them up this hill, we shall expose ourselves to their fire, without having a chance of returning it, as they can lie down on their bellies, as the sharpshooters did in the states, and pick us off without our being able to see 'em, or to help ourselves. Depend upon it, that if Mark has been up this hill, as it seems he has, he has had a reason for it, and that reason is to take us at a disadvantage; and our business is to outwit him, by coming upon him before he thinks of it. But if your honor likes to try the hill, of course I'm ready; it's all the same to me: only I can't help thinking that we ought to see clear before us, or else in firing at the enemy we might hit the poor young lady, and that would be a pity, for by all accounts she is an uncommon pretty one, and a spirited one, too, and just the girl for a soldier."

The latter part of the corporal's oration had the strongest effect upon Trevor, who rightly judged that it was especially important to guard against such a disaster as that pointed out by the corporal; and the consideration was of the greater value, as it served to temper his courage and his ardor with more coolness and

circumspection than he would have otherwise displayed.

He agreed, therefore, to the corporal's proposal, and they began to skirt round the base of the hill, on the level space beneath, taking care to inspect the ground with the utmost minuteness, lest their crafty antagonist should have adopted the plan of doubling on his own steps, in order to throw his pursuers off the scent.

In this way they continued their survey round the base of the hill to the left, until they came to a space bare of grass, from which they were able to note the character of the country beyond, which they perceived consisted of dense scrub, backed by thick and dark forests. As they were walking side by side, they both perceived at the same time the fresh traces of human feet on the sandy soil. They stopped simultaneously.

"We have come on them at last," said Trevor, "and it was lucky that we adopted this plan instead of going over the hill direct, for that way we should have missed them; but they must have taken off their shoes, corporal; what is the meaning of this?"

The corporal said nothing, but continued to survey the traces of feet with much earnestness, and with some anxiety.

"By George!" exclaimed Trevor suddenly, "can it be? I say, corporal, these marks must be the traces of natives' feet!"

"That's sure enough," replied the corporal, gravely, and continuing his scrutiny.

"Do you think they have passed this way recently?"

"I think they have," replied the corporal.

"And many of them?"

"Here are the marks of many feet; and they generally go about in mobs of thirty or forty."

"You don't seem to like the looks of them, corporal," said Trevor gaily.

"I don't, indeed," replied the corporal seriously. "It's no joke to meet with the natives in the bush."

"Why, man, suppose there are thirty or forty of them, they are not all fighting men—half of them must be women."

"No doubt, as your honor says, half of the men must be women; but the women can throw spears as well as the men, and they are not a bit less savage; for when a woman is savage at all, she is always worse than a man, and she spits and claws like a tiger-cat; I suppose it's in their natures to be so. I remember there was Biddy M'Scratchem of our regiment in the states . . ."

"But as to these natives, corporal; you have been stationed here several years, and I am quite new to the place. What sort of weapons have they, besides these spears that you speak of. They have no bows and arrows?"

"No, your honor; and it's well for the white people that they hav'n't got them; and it shows what wretched ignorant savages they must be, not to have invented them. For there is plenty of tough wood like the English yew, fit for bows, and there's the sinews of the kangaroo ready to their hand to make strings of, and the same wood that they make their spears of would do for arrows."

"But they can't do much execution with their spears—how long are they?"

"About ten feet long, or a little more. You can't say they make them, for they grow all about, and they have only to cut them down and point them, and then they are fit for use. The native women char the points in the fire, till they are so hard that they will go through a deal board; and they can throw them fifty or sixty yards, pretty sure. But it's the numbers which they throw that worry you. I remember seeing the body of a stock-keeper that the natives had killed, and it was pierced all over with little holes from their spears like a sieve, it was so riddled. Then they have their waddies."

"Those are a sort of clubs?"

"They are not very big; but they are made of some hard sort of wood, and when they come to close quarters, a lot of them will rattle them on your head till they beat in your skull and smash it to a jelly. It's the numbers, you see, sir, that is the difficulty; they rush upon a single man like a swarm of hornets, and he has no chance against such odds, unless he is lucky enough to get with his back to a tree, and has plenty of ammunition; and then they weary him out at last. And, besides that, they have got the womera, which they can hurl to a great distance, and although it doesn't kill, it cripples, and that's almost as bad in the bush."

"I have heard of the womera," said the ensign; "and it is remarked as a most curious accident that the wild and ignorant natives of these countries have hit on the exact mathematical curve which is most effective for their purpose, in the formation of that singular weapon."

"Indeed, sir! it certainly is a very curious weapon, as you say, and a most curious sharp clip they can give with it, as a man in our company can testify, for he had his ankle-bone broken by the brutes; but the Sydney natives are far more clever in the use of the spear and the womera than those in Van Diemen's Land. The Sydney blacks throw the spear with another short stick, with which they are able to cast it with greater force than by the hand; but I should not like to have half a dozen spears sticking in my body from the Van Diemen natives, throw them as they may; not that I mind being hit, but they are nasty, outlandish things to be stuck into one, and the wounds of 'em do no credit to a man. But I hope we shall not fall in with them, after all; they are ugly things to run against, are those natives, any way."

"You have no love for the natives, that's clear," said the ensign.

"Nor they for the white people. They always kill us whenever they can catch us alone, or without arms, and I don't see why we should be sacrificed to such murdering devils. They don't deserve quarter."

"You forget," said Trevor, "that they have some cause to complain of us, inasmuch as we have dispossessed them of their hunting-grounds, and driven them into the interior, away from their usual haunts."

"There may be something in that," replied the corporal; "but I don't see, your honor, what right any set of men have, let them be black or

white, to prevent others from cultivating the lands which they don't use themselves. It's like the dog in the manger, to my mind."

"But they can't understand that," said Trevor. "They see strangers arrive from the sea, and, either by fraud or force, get possession of their country, and they resist it;—besides, hunting-grounds to them are as valuable as pastures and corn-fields to us."

"I cannot pretend to argue with your honor," replied the corporal; "but it seems to me that neither savages nor white people have any right to take to themselves for their hunting or their pleasures the land which others of God's creatures require for the raising of their food. Why, your honor, it takes hundreds of acres of land, in an uncultivated state, to support a few wild animals, which are not much worth the having when you catch them; whereas tons on tons weight of potatoes and corn might be grown on the same land if it was ploughed and sown as the white people know how to do it. No disrespect to your honor, but I never can believe that it is fair for savages to rule over lands which they don't make use of, and which in their power are only wasted and lost."

"What you say may be all very true, corporal, but the difficulty is to persuade the natives of the justice of it."

"Why, your honor, you are never going to compare the natives of this country to us white people! Savage and brutal wretches as they are! black, naked cannibals! who kill every white man they can catch hold of. Why, your honor, they can hardly be called humans; they are more like the animals that eat the grass or devour one another."

"The more reason for civilizing and educating them," replied Trevor; "but this is a vexatious question."

"It's very vexatious to be attacked and eat up by them," said the corporal, "or to have your body drilled full of holes with their spears, or your skull smashed in by their waddies; but it is not of ourselves that I am thinking; it's the poor young lady that I am fearing about; between the bushrangers and the natives she will stand a poor chance!"

"True," said Trevor, whom that idea rendered not less serious than the corporal at their sudden discovery of the propinquity of the natives. "Corporal," he continued, in a grave tone, "we must prepare ourselves for a struggle, perhaps; but, at all events, we must lose no time in trying to discover the tracks of the bushranger; that is, supposing he has descended the hill."

"I can't help thinking," said the corporal, "that things are very curious! Here are the natives close to us, perhaps, and watching for an opportunity to attack us, and we are looking out to attack the bushrangers, so that we have two parties to guard against; and the bushranger is expecting to be attacked by us, perhaps, and by the natives as well, so that he has two parties to fight with, too; and it looks as if we should presently be all fighting ourselves and one another. By the powers! there will be a pretty confusion, if it comes to that! We shall be obliged to fire two ways at once, and stand back and front at the same time! I wish the poor young lady was well out of it, that's

all I can say:—bushrangers or natives, I don't know which is the worst for her!"

"Do you happen to know," asked Trevor, "from your own experience, if the natives of this country are cannibals?"

"I don't know for certain; all I know is, that they never eat me; but some of the old hands do say that the natives eat human flesh sometimes; but whether it is some part of their religion, or that they do it out of relish, nobody seems to know. However, if they have any inclination for it, it is not to be supposed that they would resist the temptation of a nice, white, tender young lady, as Miss Helen Horton is by all accounts; and, for my part, I don't know which would be worst for the poor lady—to be eaten up by the natives, or to be . . ."

"Let us move on," said Trevor, stamping his foot on the ground; "and, whether we have to encounter bushrangers, or natives, or devils themselves, we must stand by each other, and fight to the last gasp."

"I'm your man for that," said the corporal; "I've been getting rusty for this many a day for want of a scrimmage; and, dead or alive, I'll stand by your honor to my last cartridge; and when that's gone, we'll try the cold steel on them;—but those black wretches will never let you get up to them; they hav'n't the sense to wait for the bayonet, like Christians."

"I think they show their sense by avoiding it; but hush! stop! What is that on the ground! By heaven! it is part of a woman's dress!"

"Here is more of it," said the corporal, proceeding in the direction of the stream.

"Halt there," said the ensign; "let us examine the country a little; the business seems to be getting serious."

Trevor found that they had arrived at a spot opposite the point which they had left, as he judged by the bearings, on the other side of the hill; and they were now in a line with the route of the bushranger, which led to a shallow bubbling stream at a little distance. Confident that they were now on the track, they made their way without delay to the margin of the water, Trevor and the corporal having picked up several additional pieces of a woman's dress, which the former did not doubt had formed part of that worn by Helen.

On their arrival at the stream, Trevor remarked the twig which Helen had stuck into the ground as a guide to her pursuers, and casting his eyes to the opposite bank, he observed a similar little stick set up on the other side. Besides these evident hints, the marks of men's boots were visible on the moist ground close by the water, and among the marks Trevor distinguished, with a thrill of hope and fear, the little foot of Helen!

He marvelled at the want of caution displayed by so acute and wary a character as Mark Brandon, in leaving behind him such tell-tale evidences of his route; but he attributed it to the confidence which he guessed the bushranger had of being safe from discovery; and he congratulated himself that this imprudent reliance on the part of Brandon would be one of the means of insuring his capture, and of effecting the deliverance of Helen.

When he had crossed to the other side of the

stream, the first thing that met his eye was a shred of the same dress which he had already observed, and at short intervals, other scraps, in a line pointing to some thick bushes, beyond which was a dense wood of innumerable trunks of tall trees.

He pointed out these circumstances to the corporal, remarking that they had the good fortune to be able, under the cover of the scrub, to advance without detection. Side by side, therefore, and with their arms in readiness, they approached the covert, Trevor full of hope and confidence, and the corporal possessed with the cool determination of an old soldier.

Little did either of them think that they were offering themselves up an easy prey to the human tiger that was crouching in his lair!

CHAPTER XXXIII

A NATIVE VILLAGE.

It is necessary now to return to the adventures of the major, who had set out in search of his lost daughter on the morning after the departure of Trevor and the corporal from the cave.

He was well equipped for the bush with all the stores and appliances which the two soldiers who accompanied him could conveniently carry: but he had forgotten the bush-traveler's companion, a "compass;" neither had his worthy mate, little thinking that so important a part of a ship's furniture could be wanted on shore, thought of reminding him to provide himself with that indispensable article. As the major, as well as the two soldiers, were totally inexperienced in the bush, it will presently be seen to what grave inconveniences the want of that most useful instrument exposed him.

But in the mean time the party strode on confidently, till they espied the native of whom mention has been already made. The apparition of the black man caused the major to make a halt for a few minutes, to consider of the best course to be pursued under the circumstances.

Bearing in mind that it was the object of the bushranger to escape from the island, which he could only effect by prevailing on some vessel to take him on board, or by seizing on some boat fit for his purpose, the major had concluded in his own mind that Brandon would keep near the sea; and it was in that direction, therefore, that he had bent his steps; keeping a good lookout, however, and bidding his soldiers to do the same, for any tracks or signs which might indicate the course of the fugitives.

The appearance of the native was an unexpected incident, but it did not deter him from persevering in his original intention of making his way towards the sea-coast.

In coming to this resolution, the major was little aware of the difficulties which would beset his path, as the sea-coast, on that part of the island, exposed as it is to the whole force of the Southern Ocean, is rocky and precipitous, and traveling is rendered so difficult as to be almost impossible near the shore. But there was another difficulty to contend against, of a more formidable nature; and that was, the

hostile tribe of natives, who had fixed on that district as their present locality, seeking it as a place of refuge from the attacks of the tribes by which they had been driven from their own hunting-grounds in the interior.

Of the presence of this tribe the major soon became sensible, for he had not proceeded far before he came upon a native encampment, which was formed in a little grove of mimosa trees, and near a spring of water flowing from the crevice of a rock. But although the fires were still burning, the camp was deserted.

This refusal of the natives to communicate with strangers was a circumstance, as the major was aware, from the descriptions which he had read of them, that indicated danger. He proceeded therefore to examine these, the most rude of all temporary dwelling-places, with much curiosity, not unmixed with anxiety. The two soldiers who accompanied him did not conceal their apprehension, which they stated respectfully, of an immediate attack, and they kept vigilant watch therefore while their commander pursued his investigations.

The wretched make-shifts which the major viewed were mere receptacles for the creatures to lie down under, for they could not be called huts, inasmuch as the largest of them was not more than four feet high. He counted nine of them nearly in a row, and almost close together. They were formed of bark in huge slices, with their smooth sides inwards, and fronting the fires which were burning about nine or ten feet from them. The slices of bark had been peeled in lengths of four to six feet, and from a foot to eighteen inches wide, and were set on their edges and rudely fastened together. It was under the shelter of these breakwinds that the natives crouched themselves at night, and sometimes in the day, without any covering to their bodies, or any shelter from the rain, more than the scanty bark walls afforded. There was no appearance of food or of weapons about the place; a circumstance which led him to conclude that the possessors of this native village, if village it could be called, had retired leisurely, and had taken away with them all their goods and chattels.

He discovered some heads of fishes, however, and some bones of animals, which were mostly small, and which he conjectured had belonged to the opossums and bandicoots, on which the natives are glad to feed when they cannot kill a kangaroo; and indeed of the opossum they are very fond, as they admire the high flavor of that strongly seasoned animal, which, as it feeds principally on the leaves of the peppermint tree, is always ready stuffed for table, although neither its taste nor its odor is by any means pleasing to strangers.

But the major was not permitted to continue his scientific observations unmolested. As he shook one of the plants of bark to ascertain its solidity and texture, a spear from a neighboring thicket, about sixty yards distant, warned him that he was intruding on the domestic arrangements of the proprietors. The soldiers immediately pointed their guns in the direction of the aggression, and made ready to fire. But the major restrained them mildly, but firmly:

"Stop," he said, "we do not come to kill the poor natives of this country with our superior

weapons. We are intruders here; and it is not surprising that we have excited their suspicions. Let us endeavor to leave this place without shedding blood: it is our duty to endeavor to conciliate the native inhabitants of the country by kind treatment, and by showing that we are come to do them good, and not harm. We will retire."

Saying this he hastily sought for some article about his person which he might leave behind him as a sign of his amicable intentions; and fortunately finding that he had two knives, one of which was provided with a strong hack blade and a saw, he raised it aloft, and then placing it in a conspicuous place on the top of one of the breakwinds, slowly retired.

When he had got to a little distance he stopped, and by gestures invited the natives, whom he could not see, but who, he had no doubt, saw him, to advance; but no one appeared. Another spear, however, which was projected from the same thicket and which fell short, was a very significant expression on their part of their desire to decline the pleasure of his company. He retired therefore to a still further distance, and then faced about again.

But the natives, who viewed his retreat as an evidence of fear, and who were emboldened by his seeming desire to avoid their spears, now issued in a black swarm from behind the bushes and rocks; the men, with waddies in their hands, heading the advance: some of the women closely following them with spears, while a few of the same sex remained further in the rear, one or two carrying infants, while various little black faces might be seen here and there peeping from behind the rocks and bushes.

Seeing this general assemblage, the major made a few steps in advance towards them, being desirous of cultivating amicable relations with the natives, not only for general politic reasons, but for the purpose also of availing himself of their assistance in tracking the bush-rangers and recovering his daughter; but he was assailed with a universal yell of men, women, and children which would have appalled a heart less stout than the old soldier's; and at the same time a flight of spears came whistling towards him, one or two of which nearly reached his feet.

He endeavored by all sorts of signs to make them understand that he wished to speak with them; but as every advance on his part only increased their frightful shrieks, and as the men continued to hurl the spears with which the women assiduously supplied them, and to brandish their waddies with frantic leapings and contortions at the strangers, he thought it most prudent to abandon his design for the present, as it seemed plain that further attempts would only lead to an exasperation of the savages, which would most likely end in the bloodshed he was so desirous to avoid.

His two soldiers, although they were both of them brave and stout fellows, were by no means disinclined to retire from the scene, and they were soon out of sight of the savages; but it was some time before they ceased to hear their yells and screechings, which, as one of the men remarked, "was more like the howling of wild beasts than anything human;" and

the major again paused to consider which way to direct his course in pursuit of his daughter.

It seemed clear to him that the bushranger could not have fled in that direction. He made a considerable detour, therefore, to avoid coming into collision with the natives, and again endeavored to penetrate the country towards the coast. But he found his path so obstructed by rocks and ravines that he began to despair at last of making any profitable progress, the more especially as he had no clue to the course of the bushrangers; and he determined, therefore, to return to his cave, and endeavor to find the track of the fugitives, if track there was, from that starting point. But the major had now to learn how easy it was for a stranger to the country to be lost in the intricate mazes of the bush.

In endeavoring to find his way back, he soon became confused by the hills, mounds, rocks, and trees, all so much alike, that he found it impossible to recognize those which he had before passed; and this difficulty is partly to be accounted for by the circumstance that the traveler in the bush, in going, views objects on one of their sides, and in coming back, views them on their reverse sides, which are usually very unlike the appearance which they present on their first aspect.

So it was with the major; and his followers, though very good soldiers at drill or in the field, were quite incompetent to assist him in finding his way through an unknown country. In this way he crossed the bushranger's track without being aware of it, for he neither knew where he was nor which way he was going.

He endeavored to guide his course by the sun, and frequently thought he had hit on the right direction; but unforeseen obstacles rose in his way, and unknown and unexpected objects puzzled and baffled him; so that at last, bewildered and weary, he sat down under a shady blue gum-tree, utterly at a loss which way to direct his steps.

As they were well supplied with provisions, the two soldiers, at a hint from their superior, quickly produced their stores; and if the anxiety of the major had affected his appetite, it was clear, from the alarming inroads which his followers made in their stock of provisions, that they were not restrained in satisfying their bodily wants by their mental sensibilities.

But towards the close of their refectory, they came to a sudden pause; for as they were pretty well stuffed to their throats, they found themselves in urgent want of some fluid to clear their passages for a fresh supply. They intimated their distressing state to their commander, who, feeling the same want, rose from the grass, and accompanied them in their search for water.

But, as is frequently the case with that important article—whose value is never estimated properly until the want of it is felt, as in the present instance,—the water which they looked for was not so easy to be found; and although they descended, at the cost of much time and labor, into several promising dells and hollows, they could discover no indication of a spring.

Exhausted with fatigue, and parched with thirst, which the sup of brandy which they had had recourse to heightened to a painful degree,

the party again sat down among some rocks between two hills which nearly met, and while the soldiers stretched themselves on the ground uneasily, the major, borne down by the fatigue of traveling in the bush, and by the weight of affliction which preyed upon him at the uncertain fate of his daughter, rested his head on his arm, and became plunged in melancholy thought.

In this position they remained for a considerable time, when the stillness of their solitude was interrupted by a sight which powerfully excited their curiosity.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OIONOO.

It was one of the men who first observed a figure moving up the ravine in which they were lying; he pointed it out to his comrade, who touched the major's foot with a dead branch which lay ready to his hand, and the three remained without moving, their eyes fixed on the object.

The major at once perceived that it was a native, who was advancing cautiously towards them, and who seemed anxiously looking out on every side, as if in search of something.

"It is a spy of those black devils, looking out for us," said one of the soldiers.

"It's a woman, by George!" said the other, as the native continued her advance.

"I wish it had been a man," continued the first, who had leveled his piece sharp-shooter fashion towards the native; "it goes against one's feeling to fire at a woman."

"She is tall and straight," remarked the second, "and if it wasn't for her being black, she wouldn't be amiss."

"She looks like a young girl," said the other, as the native advanced nearer.

But it seems that the sound of his voice had struck her ear; for she stopped, listened; snuffed the air like a pointer scenting game; looked about on all sides; and turning her head half round behind, remained for a brief space in an attitude of fixed attention.

The major regarded the native girl with much attention; and the men seeing that she was alone, were only curious to observe her motions.

She remained for some time fixed and motionless as a statue, her black body shining like polished ebony. She was entirely-naked; there was no mark of paint or of tattooing visible on her sleek and glossy skin; and her hair was not woolly, but hung from her head some inches behind in frizzy curls.

Presently, suspecting, as it seemed, that some danger was nigh, she resumed her walk, but with more caution even than at first. With a timid and frightened look, she turned her large eyes, which were singularly black and bright, towards the spot where the major and his men were hidden, and tried to pierce into the space before her, which the shades of the evening had begun to render obscure, treading lightly, and lifting up her feet in that peculiar manner characteristic of the natives, who walk like a high-stepping horse, in order to clear the dead wood with which their path in the woods is encumbered.

To judge from the supple movements of her well-formed limbs, the major guessed that she was possessed of great agility; but there was a something in her manner which convinced him that she was not abroad with any hostile intentions. Indeed, her countenance, when she was close enough for them to observe it, expressed suspicion and fear, rather than any other feeling.

As she approached the spot where they lay concealed amidst loose rocks and stones, she suddenly stopped again, and snuffed the air with her broad flat nose, and made a step back, as if with the intention of flying from some unusual danger. But after a few moments of anxious scrutiny of the point which she had left, she again advanced a few steps with a quick motion, as if she thought it better to encounter the new danger that was before than that which was behind; and again she stopped and snuffed the air, and seemed surprised and alarmed at some unexpected discovery.

The major whispered as low as possible to his men:—

"We must take this woman."

Low as his whisper was, however, it was heard by the quick-eared native. She gave a frightened look towards the spot where they lay concealed, and at that moment the two soldiers starting up, the girl uttered a loud scream of fear, and darted up the steep ascent before them.

The men followed; but they would have had little chance in pursuing a native in the bush, had not the girl, in looking back to see if her pursuers were nigh, stumbled over a loose stone and fallen to the ground. Paralyzed as she was with fear, before she could recover herself, and uncertain perhaps which way to fly, for it seemed to her that there was danger on every side, the men seized her by the arms. She made no struggle, but, doubling herself up, she sat on her hams, and bent down her head in terror, expecting, doubtless, that she was to be put to death.

In this state the major approached the native with the intention of calming her fears; but for some time she remained in such an agony of terror as to be insensible, seemingly, to all that was going on around her, and her whole body shook and shivered with fear.

The major directed his men to release her arms. They did so, but the native showed no sign of being sensible of the restraint having been withdrawn.

He spoke to her kindly and soothingly; but the girl's teeth continued to chatter with terror.

He extended his hand and patted her on the shoulder as jockeys do horses when they desire to calm them; but the native, supposing, perhaps, that this was done in order to ascertain if she was fat enough to be eaten, only shuddered the more, and shrunk herself up from the touch of the strange creatures, the like of whom she had never beheld before!

The poor major was puzzled to know how to communicate with her, or what to do, now he had got her, with the young lady whom he had so violently taken under his protection. But as he was desirous of making use of the native to guide him back to his cave, he determined to persevere in his attempt to bring about a mutual good understanding.

He desired one of his men to give him a bit of "damper," which he offered to the native, but she would not take it. He then ate a bit himself, and invited her by signs to do the same. She looked wistfully at it for a moment; there was hunger in her looks, the major thought.

He put the bit of damper down on the ground. She raised her head up timidly, and looked at the two soldiers, and then at the bread. At last she took it in her hand, and smelt it, tasted it, and ate it up greedily. The men, as she opened her mouth, could not refrain from an involuntary exclamation:—

"What grinders!"

Seeing that she liked it, the major threw her another piece. The native ate that also.

"Try her with some brandy," said one of the soldiers.

He poured out a small quantity into a metal mug which they had brought with them, and the major, after having taken a little sip to show the lady how the liquor was to be disposed of, handed her the vessel with his arm outstretched, much in the same manner as a visitor hands a morsel to a wild animal in a cage in the Zoological Gardens. She took it, and having smelled at it, let it drop.

"D— her," said one of the soldiers, "the black brute has wasted the brandy!"

The tone of the soldier's voice as he uttered this exclamation, excusable perhaps in the bush, where brandy is scarce, seemed to renew the fright of the native. She looked round her timidly, as if meditating escape.

"Give me some sugar," said the major; "we will try her with that."

The man unpacked his parcel in a twinkling, and brought it to the major, who, grasping a small handful of it, placed it on a piece of the bark of a tree, and putting some of it in his mouth, passed the bark plate to the lady, who took it without hesitation.

She smelled at it as before, and poked it with her finger, which she carried to her mouth. Seeming satisfied with the taste, she poked her finger into it again, and then diligently licked it with much apparent satisfaction. Then, being unable to resist the temptation of its sweetness, she bore the piece of bark on which the sugar was deposited to her mouth, and ate it all up in a moment, cleaning the bark with her tongue of any remaining crumbs as a dog does a plate.

This last mark of attention on the part of her entertainer seemed to reassure her considerably; her trembling ceased; and she sat on her hams more composedly than before. The major now tried by signs to make her understand what he wanted.

He pretended to drink, and looked all about as if he was trying to find water. The native understood him, and pointing in the direction of the path by which she had come, shook her black poll, and made signs of being frightened at something from which she had fled. Then pointing in a direction forwards, she nodded her head, and rising from her sitting position, began to move forward.

Had the major been a younger man, he would not perhaps have minded the total absence of dress on the lady's person, which, as she stood on her hind legs, was more conspicuous and

striking than it had been in her sitting posture ; but, as he was the father of a family, he would have preferred that she should have been clothed with some sort of covering, however trifling.

Desirous of remedying the deficiency in some way, he drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and presented it to the black lady, not being able to express his meaning by words, nor even by signs, but hoping that what is called the natural modesty of her sex would prompt her to make a proper application of the gift. The native girl accepted the handkerchief readily, and turning round on the strange white man, whom she rewarded with a smile which exhibited to view her formidable row of teeth, tied the handkerchief round her head, and continued her way.

"She knows no better," said the major to himself; "and, after all, our civilized habits are only conventional; but certainly if a lady of any color was to appear at court in the old country in that state of primitive simplicity, it would produce no slight sensation."

The farther philosophical reflections which he might have made on this point of etiquette were put a stop to by the native suddenly pointing to a tiny stream of water which trickled from the side of the declivity. The major and his men drank of it eagerly, and the native drank some also, the sugar having made her thirsty; and when the party had satisfied themselves with the pure element, which the men remarked would mix admirably with any sort of spirit, but to which hint the major paid no attention, the question was, what was to be done next!

The young lady showed no disposition to escape, and seemed to wait quietly to know how she was to be disposed of; but as the evening was advancing, and as it was nearly dark, the excellent major was somewhat puzzled to know what to do with his new acquisition during a night bivouac. If it was possible, he thought it would be best to endeavor to reach the cave that night, but as he calculated that he must be at a great distance from it, he despaired of being able to accomplish the journey, fatigued as he was with his day's march.

He essayed, however, to communicate his desire by signs. He pointed to the water of the spring, and endeavored to make her comprehend the idea of a large quantity of water spread over a wide surface. It seemed that the native comprehended him, for she stretched out her arm towards the right and shook her head, exhibiting signs of great fear from that quarter;—what the cause of her fear was it was impossible for them to make out;—but they could make her understand nothing farther.

The major was inclined to regard her as a fugitive from her tribe, or perhaps a prisoner who had escaped, for he could not otherwise account for her being alone, and for the expression of alarm which she had displayed in her demeanor before they had secured her.

His men took the liberty to represent to him, that the natives were a savage and treacherous race, and that it was very likely that this young girl had been sent out as a decoy, in order to brow beat them off their guard; and they related

many instances, which they had heard in camp, of the cunning of the blacks, and of their insuperable animosity to the white people.

This view of the case, however, the major repudiated, for the girl's countenance, black as it was, had something in it of that softness which is never entirely absent from the youthful of her sex; and her manner indicated besides, as it struck him, that she was in want of protection, and was inclined to accept it even from the white people rather than again encounter the dangers from which she had recently escaped.

He pursued his inquiries, therefore, and made another attempt to communicate with the native by the universal language of signs, although the coming darkness scarcely allowed him sufficient light for his operations.

He directed one of the men to scoop out a hollow basin in the course of the rill, which soon filled the excavation with water. He then took a piece of the bark of a tree, and stuck a couple of sticks in it to represent miniature masts, clothing them with pieces of paper to represent sails. He then, by signs and gestures, contrived to make the black girl understand that he wanted to go to a great thing like that.

The girl looked at it attentively for some time, gazing alternately at the mimic ship and at the major, as if striving to comprehend his meaning. Suddenly she broke out into a wild laugh, and clasped her hands, and pointed with her finger in a direction over a high tier of hills.

The major made signs to her to go forward in the direction in which she pointed, but she showed much reluctance to move, for the night was setting in, and the natives have a great dread of traveling in the dark, fearing to fall into the power of an evil spirit. The major was not aware of the cause of her fear, but it was clear that she was afraid of something, and he showed to her the guns of himself and the soldiers to reassure her; but it was evident, from her manner, that she did not comprehend the use of such weapons.

He then directed his men to unsheath their bayonets. She retreated at the sight of these strange instruments, but the major, taking one of them in his hand, offered it to her. She took hold of it, but let it drop immediately, alarmed at its coldness, and at the unusual feel of metal.

But as, in falling on its point, it stuck in the ground, the circumstance seemed to strike her with much admiration; and when the major picked it up and offered it to her again she took it, and continued to hold it in her hand, though a little frightened. As it did not move, however, and as she felt no harm, she touched the point gently with her finger and was surprised at its sharpness.

The major then made signs to her to hold the weapon in her hand and move forward; and the native, after a little hesitation, and seeing that the white stranger showed no signs of fear, in the dark, and supposing, perhaps, that the curious cold spear which they had given to her was a protection against the evil spirit, set out at a tolerably rapid pace in the direction to which she had pointed as the place where the great

moving thing that resembled the little bark ship lay in the wide water.

Her new friends followed, keeping a sharp eye on her to guard against an escape; but of this it afterwards proved the poor girl was not thinking; and after a brisk walk of about three miles, after passing over some high hills, the major suddenly found himself on the margin of the bay; and, as he presently perceived, not far from the cave which he desired to reach.

He now became aware that he had been wandering nearly the whole of the day in a part of the country abounding in high and low hills, and at a comparatively small distance from the place of his destination, confused as he had been by the intricacies of the bush. Determining to profit by this lesson, he led the way at a rapid pace to his old encampment, having previously relieved the girl from her bayonet for fear of accidents, and having invited her by signs to accompany him.

The native now, in her turn, followed her conductor with great willingness; a circumstance which rather surprised the major, as it betokened a confidence which he had been given to understand was altogether contrary to the disposition and the habits of the aborigines; but the reason was afterwards explained when she had been taught sufficient words in the English language to enable her to express her meaning.

The major now thought that he might do an acceptable service to the colony and to the government by taming the wild creature which had thus been placed in his power, and who seemed well contented to abide with him and to receive his commands.

He determined therefore to make the attempt, not a little pleased to have the opportunity of studying closely a specimen of the singular people who inhabited a country unlike any other part of the known world.

With this view, he made up his mind at once to send her on board the brig, and to place her under the care of his daughter Louisa, to whom she might be taught perhaps to perform the part of a female attendant.

He immediately made the signal to the brig which had been agreed on, by lighting three fires on the beach at particular distances; and the distant sound of oars on the water soon proclaimed that his signal had been understood and attended to. The mate was not in the boat, and the major immediately dispatched it back for clothes of some sort for their visitor; not liking, although it was night, that his new acquaintance should make her appearance in her present unsophisticated condition before his daughter.

The boat returned promptly; and the major, with much delicacy, showed the young lady how to put on a pair of sailor's trousers, which he tied on with a bit of rope yarn round her middle. Over this was placed a petticoat to give her a proper feminine appearance; and a faded light blue spencer, which hooked on behind, "put her bows in decent trim," as a sailor expressed it.

Her head was left bare, and shoes and stockings were dispensed with; and thus elegantly dressed, the young lady was politely assisted into the boat by the sailors, where she squat-

ted down on her hams, preserving an extraordinarily grave countenance all the time, the poor creature being in truth utterly lost in astonishment as to what had been done and what was to happen next. Thus freighted, with the addition of the major and the two soldiers, the boat was rapidly rowed to the vessel.

The affectionate Louisa was overjoyed to see her father again; a delight, however, which was presently damped by the thought of his ill success in search after her sister Helen, and by his informing her that it was his intention to recommence his journey at the dawn of day. With respect to the novel sort of lady's maid which her father had brought for her, she felt a little repugnance at first to allow the black girl to remain in close proximity to her person.

But that feeling presently wore off, and she soon ceased to regard the color of her skin; while the gentle aspect of the kind-hearted Louisa and the soft and silvery tones of her voice so won on the simple heart of the native, who was not long in learning that the beautiful creature, who she at first supposed had come from the skies, was of the same sex as herself, that she threw herself on the floor of the cabin, uttering sounds which were unintelligible; and then raising her head, laughed, and addressed to Louisa some words which, although spoken in an unknown and barbarous tongue, were evidently meant for the expression of her gratitude, and obedience, and devotion.

The personal appearance of the native was so grotesque, that Louisa could not forbear some little laughter at the incongruous nature of her habiliments. Her laughter seemed to please the girl. She coiled herself up at Louisa's feet, and although her wild bright eyes glanced rapidly at every motion or sound that occurred, she seemed quite resigned, and pleased with her new position.

Louisa made attempts to talk with her, but that was impossible. She tried to find out the name of her new acquaintance, but it was some time before the native could be brought to comprehend what she wanted. At last, by frequently repeating her own name and pointing to herself, she made the girl understand her meaning. The native repeated the name of "Louisa," with a readiness and correctness which was quite startling; and then pointing to herself, said, "Oionoo."

"Oionoo," repeated Louisa.

The young native girl, at the sound of her own name thus pronounced, showed the most extravagant signs of joy. She again threw herself on the ground before Louisa, and kissed her feet, while great tears ran from her bright fierce eyes down her black face, and she seemed convulsed with the most violent emotion.

The major regarded this scene with extreme surprise, and his daughter was much affected by it. They could not conjecture the reason of the violent emotion of the black girl; and they were not aware that she was in fact the last of her tribe, and had escaped, when she was encountered by the major, from those who were about to put her to a cruel death.

How amply the kindness which was bestowed by the fair and gentle Louisa on the forlorn

native girl was afterwards repaid by services the most important, will be seen in the sequel of this narration.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A FIGHT WITH THE NATIVES.

It is impossible to describe in words the intensity of the terror of Helen, as she sat on the ground a helpless spectator of the deadly preparations made by the bushranger for the destruction of those who she doubted not were her lover and her father!

And if Trevor was foremost in her thoughts in that time of mortal agony, it was from no lack of filial affection towards her parent, but it was in accordance with that powerful principle of our nature which prompts a woman's heart—in its absorbing love for that one being whom it has selected from all other men in whom to confide her virgin trust—to consider him as all in all to her—and of all things on earth the most precious and dearest!

It was in vain that she racked her brain to find some expedient either to divert the bushranger from his object, or to frustrate his design. She thought that she would scream out, in the hope that her voice might be heard in the stillness of the bush, so that Trevor might be warned of his danger. But then she considered, that if she made use of such means of giving him notice prematurely, it would only cause her own instant death without benefiting him.

It occurred to her also that she should have the means of ascertaining her lover's and her father's near approach from the looks and gestures of the bushranger, and that it would be best for her to reserve her caution until they were near enough to profit by it; then—what might be her own fate—he being safe—signified nothing!

Neither was poor Jeremiah Silliman insensible to the peril which hung over the friends advancing to their rescue; but the fatigue of his long march, encumbered as he was by the heavy load, and the frequent rebuffs and threats which he had experienced from Mark Brandon, and the blows which he had suffered from the brutal Grough, without his being able to defend himself or to retaliate, had so broken down his spirit, that he had become almost like an impassive piece of mechanism at the will of his captors.

He could not, however, survey unmoved the cool and impenetrable Mark Brandon with his fowling-piece directed in the line leading from the side of the stream to the thicket; and his good feeling predominating over his fears, he ventured to begin a remonstrance with Brandon on the cruelty of his proceeding:—

"Mr. Mark Brandon," he began, "I have a thousand pounds in dollars....."

But before he could proceed further he felt the butt-end of Grough's musket on his head, which stretched him prostrate on the ground. Grough was about to repeat the hint to be quiet by a second blow, which would have silenced forever poor Jerry's tongue, when he was stopped by a sign from Brandon, who, making a significant gesture, and pointing towards the

line on which their pursuers were expected said in a low firm voice:—

"Be ready."

Grough immediately brought his musket to his shoulder, covering obliquely the point at which Brandon's weapon was directed.

The bushranger cocked his fowling-piece;—Grough did the same.

The sound of those two "clicks," in the awful silence of the bush, rang in Helen's ears like the tolling bell of her lover's doom! She felt that the decisive moment was come!

The bushranger ran his eye down the hollow between the barrels of his piece—for it was his habit to fire with his left barrel first—and edged the sight a little to the right of his victim;—it was a deadly aim.

Helen now tried to scream out;—but excess of terror paralyzed her! She opened her mouth;—but her voice stuck in her throat! She could utter no sound! The moments were fleeting away! In another her lover would be slain!.....

"Fire!" said Brandon.

But at the instant when he pronounced the word, a shower of spears from behind came whistling through the bushes. One of them struck Brandon's right shoulder, and another stuck in Grough's huge back, which caused the discharge of both to be ineffectual.

Helen and Jeremiah being on the ground, the spears passed harmlessly over them; but the report of the guns, and the sudden appearance of the natives' spears acting as a sudden shock on Helen, she gave vent to her pent-up shrieks, which apprised Trevor—who, not heeding the shots that missed him, was advancing with the corporal at the charge—that his mistress was nigh, and in danger!

At the same time a yell arose from the body of natives, who had, as they thought, surprised the white people at a disadvantage, which, responding to Helen's shrieks, made the bushes and woods resound with discordant cries.

Nor did the natives delay in following up their first discharge of spears by a bodily attack on those whom they considered as the spoliators of their country. They knew but little of the nature of fire-arms, but some of them had learned that after the first noise of the thunder, an interval must elapse before it could be made again. The white men, Brandon and Grough, therefore, having done their thunder, the natives in a mob made a rush, with frightful yells, on their enemies, and Helen and Jerry found themselves in the midst of the blacks, who fell on the two bushrangers with inconceivable fury.

Brandon, being unable to resist the impetuosity of this first onset, called out to Grough to come to his side, and retreated on the right hand side of the thicket, while Trevor and the corporal charged to the left, where they were encountered by the natives, who had driven away the other two, and who, flushed with success, immediately attacked the new comers with their waddies.

Trevor fired, and shot one and wounded another of the natives with his double-barrel, but as they did not cease from their attack, the corporal was obliged to fire before Trevor had time to load again. He killed one of the sav-

ages on the spot, but the natives, heated with the combat, and confiding in their numbers, and emboldened besides by the flight of the other two white men, continued to press forward; and Trevor and the corporal were obliged to retreat, in order to get free from the crowd which assailed them, and to load their weapons. When they emerged from the thicket, they beheld on their right the two bushrangers.

The natives, on their retreat, which was almost simultaneous with that of Brandon and Grough, set up a shout of triumph, and pursued them closely. The four white men—two and two, and at the distance of about a hundred yards from each other—retired in the same direction, till they reached the stream which they had previously crossed.

But short as was the time which it took them in this quick flight, the steady and practised corporal was enabled to insert a cartridge into the barrel of his musket, which he instantly rammed down, and then faced about.

"Load, sir," he said to the ensign, "as quick as you can." At the same time he fired at the mob of natives yelling after them, and checked their advance. Before the ensign had loaded the corporal had fired again, and had brought down another native.

There was a short pause; and the cries of the natives for a few moments ceased.

Trevor took advantage of the opportunity, and, raising his voice, called out to the men on his left:

"If you are Mark Brandon, as I suppose you are, I promise you a free pardon if you will join us against the natives. Where is the young lady?"

Brandon, who had retained the most perfect coolness during the sharp and sudden conflict with the savages, who were still in considerable numbers before him, replied immediately, and with a voice seemingly of entire unconcern at the danger of his position:—

"What authority have you for promising a pardon; and what assurance can you give me that I may trust you?"

"My word of honor as a soldier and a gentleman," replied the ensign. "I will promise you good treatment, and I will use my best endeavors with the governor for your pardon."

"Is that all?" returned the bushranger, with a sneering laugh; but at that moment a threatening movement on the part of the natives stopped his reply:

"Don't fire on the natives," he said to his comrade—"let the others do it. See! the soldier has fired."

The fire of the corporal disabled another native and checked the rest, among whom there appeared some hesitation.

"If that is all," resumed the bushranger, calling out to Trevor, "I had rather remain as I am."

"Let us shoot them both," said Grough; "we can deal with the natives afterwards."

"We can do better than that," replied Brandon:—"besides—never commit murder if you can help it. It is our being here, I think, that keeps the natives off from the soldiers. They don't like to make a rush on four white men armed with guns. I can see they are wavering at this moment."

Saying this, he retired with his comrade beyond the stream, and took his station at the foot of the hill.

The natives, seeing this retreat, gathered courage again; and they began to assail their two remaining enemies with spears.

"That rascally bushranger," said the corporal, "has got some devilry in his head; you see he has got behind us, so that we are between two fires, and his going off makes those black villains more confident. We must shoot some more of them before they will leave us alone."

"We must make our way through them," replied the ensign. "I heard the voice of Miss Horton in yonder thicket, and we must rescue her, or die in the attempt."

"Your honor has only to say the word," said the corporal.

"Come on, then," exclaimed Trevor, darting forward.

The corporal fixed his bayonet and advanced side by side with his officer against the natives, who were collected together in a dense body of fifty or sixty, and were jabbering to one another with excessive vehemence.

"Shall I fire?" asked the corporal.

"Reserve your fire," said the ensign; "perhaps they will retire without shedding more blood."

But the natives received the charge firmly, and met their enemies with a shower of spears, which, as the distance was not more than twenty yards, told dangerously on the two soldiers. The ensign received one in his left breast, and the corporal had three for his share. They fired simultaneously.

"I have brought one down," cried the corporal.

"And I another," responded the ensign.

"Stand firm," said the corporal, "they are going to make another rush."

The natives discharged another shower of spears, which hit both the ensign and the corporal.

Trevor fired, and in a second afterwards the corporal banged at them, which checked the savages again.

"Load, sir, quick," said the corporal, "they have not had enough yet. But you are bleeding fast, sir; those two last spears have done mischief."

"And you are bleeding, too, corporal. We must increase our distance, so as to get out of the reach of their spears while we can command them with our long shots; or shall we make another charge at them?"

"They are too many," replied the corporal.

"It is as much as we can do to defend ourselves; and if we get off with our lives we shall do very well. This mob is one of the most determined that I have heard of on the island."

"We must advance and rescue Miss Horton," exclaimed Trevor.

"I am ready, your honor," repeated the corporal, "to try a charge again; but they are too many, sir, to be got over that way; we must ply them with long shots—and, come what may, the young lady must be saved from their clutches. The black wretches shan't eat her if I can help it."

"Fire again," said Trevor, stamping his foot on the turf—"fire."

"There goes down another," said the corporal, as he obeyed his officer with the most cheerful readiness, and promptly recharged his musket; "if we keep up a steady fire, your honor, we must break them up at last. Only don't be without a shot in one of your barrels. It is the rush of the savages that is the danger, and we ought always to have a reserve fire to check it. They don't seem to like it," continued the corporal, as he fired away as fast as possible.

"They are off, sir; our bullets are too hard for them."

"Don't fire if they run," said the ensign, in a faint voice.

"Your honor is bleeding very fast," exclaimed the corporal, grounding his musket, and regarding his officer with much concern.

"Never mind! see, the natives are retreating; now we will follow up and charge—but don't fire unless they attack us—now, charge!"

But as Trevor spoke, his voice grew fainter and fainter; he made a step or two forward—he staggered, and presently fell to the ground. Loss of blood from the wounds of the natives' spears had exhausted him; he made an effort to rise, but he sunk down again on the grass, and fainted.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A BUSH SUPPER.

THE corporal was not a man to lose his presence of mind at a faint. He had seen too much service, and had been in too many fights to be scared at the sight of a dying man. But he could not refrain from giving utterance to his indignation at his officer being wounded—and slain, it might be—by "those black rascals," he muttered, "and with such tools as these," as he contemptuously kicked a spear on one side with his foot.

"Such murdering wretches," said he, as he shook his musket towards the spot where the retreating natives had disappeared among the bushes, "don't deserve quarter. And now I suppose they are going to make a feast of that poor young lady!—a delicate morsel she will be for them—the blackguard cannibals!"

It was well that Trevor's condition did not allow him to hear the last exclamation of the angry corporal, who, promptly fetching some water in his cap from the adjacent stream, threw it over his officer's face. Then observing that the blood flowed most from one particular spot under his right shoulder, he opened Trevor's coat, and applying a suitable bandage, soon had the satisfaction to see that the flowing of the blood ceased. He fetched another capful of water from the stream, and dashed it plentifully over Trevor's face, and wishing mentally that he had ever so little a drop of brandy, he endeavored to pour some water down his throat. Trevor seemed to revive at this, and the corporal continued his attempts, till at last, to his great joy, he saw his officer open his eyes.

He urged him to take a good drink. Trevor

drank some of the water, which refreshed him; for he was faint as well from want of food and drink as from loss of blood. Presently he was able to stand up; and although weak and tottering, he insisted on proceeding into the thicket in search of Helen.

The corporal endeavored to dissuade him from so rash a proceeding, and offered to go alone; but to this the ensign would not consent, urging that he was strong enough to pull a trigger, and as his double barrel had been reloaded by the corporal, they could fire three times without loading, if there should be occasion for more fighting.

Leaning on the corporal's arm, therefore, he made his way into the thicket, behind which Brandon had been hidden, and from which had proceeded the shriek which Trevor did not doubt had been wrung from Helen in her double fear of the bushrangers and the natives.

But when they arrived at the spot they could see nothing of her, for whom alone Trevor was at that moment solicitous. There were several bodies of the natives lying about, and the marks of much trampling on the grass—but no living thing was to be seen.

The corporal having cast his eye about for a convenient object, supported the ensign to the foot of a dense thicket at no great distance, and requesting him to sit up and lean against the matted branches, so that he might be protected from a sudden attack from behind, offered, "with his permission," to make a survey round about to endeavor to discover some trace of the young lady.

To this the ensign assented; and the corporal immediately proceeded to make rapid circles around, keeping a sharp eye on every bush which might conceal an enemy; but without success. He continued his search for some time, and even penetrated for some distance into the wood beyond;—but he could see nothing of Miss Horton nor of the natives; they had disappeared as suddenly as they had come, and he feared that they had taken the young lady away to make a feast of her; a suspicion which he communicated freely to Trevor on his return, with many supplemental embellishments of that horrible surmise.

Trevor could only reply by a faint groan of anguish. He attempted to rise, but was unable, from weakness.

The corporal again made a diligent investigation of every square yard of ground, as well as the dusk which was now coming on would allow him, on the spot where the fight had begun. But he could find no trace of the poor girl, living or dead; nor of the other prisoner—the gentleman—Mr. Silliman—whose body was nowhere to be found.

The corporal, having made his report to the ensign, requested his "further orders;" and receiving his request to do as well as he could under the circumstances—for Trevor was too weak to walk—he immediately set himself about making such preparations for passing the night as the place afforded.

He gathered some of the soft and flowering branches of a mimosa tree which stood close by, and made of them a tolerably soft bed; and by cutting some stout stakes with his clasp knife from a grove of straight-stemmed shrubs

which grew by the margin of the water, he contrived to prop up other boughs which he gathered, so as to make a tolerable bush hut for Trevor, and sufficient at that season of the year to shelter him from the weather.

Having accomplished this to his satisfaction, he began to resolve the serious question of "how the garrison was to be victualled?"

There was drink enough, for the stream of fresh and sparkling water at hand ran close by, and the corporal knew very well that so long as a soldier can get a good drink of clear water, although he might grumble a little for want of spirits, he could not come to any great harm; but food was indispensable. While the old soldier was "rummaging his head," as he expressed it, for remembrances of expedients under a similar difficulty in his various campaigns, and regretting the non-existence of villages and farm-houses in those desolate regions, he beheld, to his infinite delight, an immense kangaroo hopping leisurely towards the water on the other side of the stream.

The animal advanced at a slow pace; sometimes hopping and sometimes moving on all-fours, as he was enticed to stop on his way by some patch of sweet grass which particularly tempted him. Now and then the animal raised himself up to his full height, as he rested on the inferior joints of his hind legs, with his long tail serving as a part of his triangular support behind; and then the corporal guessed that he stood at least six feet high, and his heart leaped within him as he surveyed the magnificent piece of game, for he had made up his mind that "on that kangaroo he and his officer should sup that night."

The kangaroo hopped on straight to the water; and putting down his head, prepared to drink; but suddenly raising it up again, snuffed the air, and looked fearfully about.

So exquisitely delicate are the senses of those timid animals, that the noise made by the corporal in the cocking of his musket, and the separating of the bushes on the other side of the stream, which was not more than a dozen yards across, alarmed the creature, and it was about to take flight; but at that critical moment the report of the corporal's musket rang in the air, and the poor kangaroo, making a mighty spring from the ground, fell dead; for the ball had passed through its small and deer-like head, and life was gone in an instant.

The sound of the corporal's piece put Trevor on the alert, and he looked anxiously about for the new enemy which the alarm betokened. He was not a little relieved when he saw his faithful subaltern staggering under the load of the hind-quarters of a kangaroo on his shoulders, which he held there by the hind legs, and which seemed as much as he could carry, while the ponderous tail of the animal hung down the corporal's back behind, and bumped him as he walked along, keeping time, as it were, with the corporal's movements.

"There," said the corporal, as he cast his burthen heavily on the ground; "there's supper for us, at any rate;—and now, to cook it!"

The old campaigner was not long in lighting a fire with the dead brushwood which lay about; and while the embers were burning clear he

occupied himself in cutting some tender steaks, artistically, from the loins, the most delicate part of the animal, and which he had taken care to include in the portion of the carcass which he had brought with him.

He then looked about for two convenient stakes, two feet and a half long, with a fork at the end of each, which he laid on the ground ready for use. He had taken out the kidneys and liver of the animal; the latter of which he placed to bake in a convenient receptacle of hot ashes; as the liver of the kangaroo, from its extreme dryness, is used by the old traveler in the bush as a substitute for bread, to eat with the other part of the flesh.

From the kidneys, which is the only part of the animal on which, except in very rare cases, any grease is to be found, for the kangaroo is almost all lean and sinew, the corporal carefully separated all the fat he could find. Then taking his iron ramrod,—first carefully ramming down a cartridge, having previously primed, into the barrel of his musket,—he slipped it through the pieces of flesh and fat which he had cut, after the manner of more ancient heroes,—taking a layer of flesh and a layer of fat alternately.

Matters being thus in progress, and the corporal in a state of considerable excitement, he scraped away with a stake as much of the burning wood as he did not want for his cooking, and reserved the clear glowing embers of the hot charcoal for his kitchen fire. Then driving in his short stakes, one on each side of the live coals, with their forked ends uppermost, he laid his ramrod, which performed the part of a spit, on the upright supports, the two ends resting on the two forks, with the fire in the middle. This being arranged, he set himself to turn his ramrod round and round with great assiduity, so that the pieces of flesh might be equally roasted. He kept his eye also on the liver, which was baking, as he declared, "beautifully."

A sudden thought, however, striking him, he took the liberty to ask the ensign if he felt himself strong enough to turn the ramrod while he manufactured some plates, and procured some water, to which Trevor cheerfully assented.

The corporal then cast his eyes about, and spying a tree, which seemed to his mind, about a hundred yards to the left, and not far from the water, he proceeded to the spot, and cut through the bark with his knife, though not without much difficulty, and peeled a long strip, which he broke into two pieces—one for a plate for his officer, and the other for himself.

Thus provided, and with his cap full of water for their drink, he returned to the fire, and finding the meat cooked, he slid off a couple of slices, which he presented to the ensign on his bark-plate, waiting, with much deference, for his officer to finish his meal before he began his own.

"Eat, my good fellow," said Trevor: "this is neither a time nor place for ceremony; we are comrades now."

The corporal swung his open hand up to his forehead, but missing the peak of his military cap, was balked in the military obeisance which he intended; perhaps he would have completed his salute by touching the peak of the cap as it stood on the grass like a jug full of water, for habit is strong—but at this moment a gentle air

from the north-west wafted the fragrance of the crisped venison to the corporal's nose! It was too much! military etiquette is strong, but nature is stronger still! The corporal's bowels yearned for the meat, and, without farther ceremony, he plumped himself down by the fire; and as he stuffed himself with the exquisite morsels, his appetite did really seem to grow on what it fed on, and he declared, with moistened eyes and greasy chops, that never, no—never, had he feasted on such delicious prog before.

The ensign, albeit that his heart was sorely troubled at the uncertain fate of Helen, acquiesced by a nod in the eulogium of the corporal.

"And to think," said the corporal, sympathizingly, as he took in another huge mouthful of the dainty viand—"to think that, at this moment, perhaps, those black savages are doing just the same as we are doing with this kangaroo," he continued, speaking with difficulty through the mass of meat which he was discussing, "just the same with that poor young lady!"

Trevor dropped his meat and his bark-plate at this horrid and most ill-timed suggestion, and made an effort to rise; but he was too weak, and his wounds had begun to stiffen: he sank down again, and putting his hands before his face, he groaned aloud.

The poor corporal, excessively abashed at the effect of his remark, which he had intended as amusing conversation wherewith to enliven the repast, suspended his diligent mastication, and pondered for a few moments within himself. Not knowing what else to do, he proffered his capful of water to his officer, who declined it courteously.

Having refreshed himself, and invigorated his appetite by a copious draught of the pure element, the corporal finished his meal in silence; and having eaten up all the meat from the ramrod, which he carefully wiped and returned to its proper place, he proceeded to attack the liver, which he devoured leisurely, amusing himself with it to pass away the time. But, thinking that the ensign showed signs of drowsiness, he assisted him to his bed of leaves and blossoms, and covered him with boughs, so as to guard him from the night air as well as possible.

Having attended to this duty, and having so arranged the fire that it should communicate its warmth to his sleeping officer without danger of its blaze reaching the temporary habitation, the corporal dissected from the hind quarter of the game one of the legs, which he arranged to cook gradually near the fire on three small stones, which he set under the meat to keep it in a convenient position. This he did in order to provide refreshment ready for the next morning.

The dirty condition of his firelock after the work of the day now grieved him sorely; but he did not think it safe to attempt the cleaning of the inside, as he might want to dispose of its contents on the sudden against an enemy; and he considered also that the discharge of his piece, besides disturbing his officer, involved the waste of another cartridge. He remedied the evil, however, as well as he could, so far as the outside went, and fixed his bayonet as an addi-

tional means of defence against surprise, although he trusted more to the butt-end of it as a cudgel in an affray, than to its point as a scientific weapon.

Thus prepared, he mounted guard over his officer's quarters, pacing up and down regularly, after the manner of sentinels, and resting occasionally in a standing posture, with his hands reposing on the muzzle of his firelock. After an hour or two of this watching, the poor fellow found himself so overpowered by fatigue that he was obliged from mere exhaustion to sit down on the ground; but he kept diligent watch on all sides, nevertheless.

He sat gazing at the fire, and listening to catch the slightest sound; but all was still, and the vast bush seemed buried in universal repose. The stars above his head, and the moon which gradually rose, shed their quiet light over the tranquil scene; but there was no stir of any living thing. The corporal gazed at the sky, and the kangaroo's leg which was roasting, alternately. He looked at the fire, and thought of his night bivouacs in former campaigns, and of his old comrades whom disease or the shot of the enemy had long since sent to their last homes. At last his eyes began to blink—and wink—at the fire;—and the light of the moon—and the twinkling of the stars—faded from his sight;—he thought he was still awake—but even as he determined not.....to give way.....to the drowsy.....oppression.....which.....mastered him.....his eyes closed—and the wearied soldier slept.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONSCIENCE.

THE veteran slept soundly; but there was one who watched; and who on that night first began to feel, in the remorse of conscience, that sharp and corroding pain which "murders sleep." The watcher was Mark Brandon.

Stung to the soul to find himself deprived of the girl—his cherished scheme destroyed—his chance of making Helen his victim or his hostage lost, he ground his teeth, and clenched his hands, furious as a wild beast that has lost its prey, with mortification and rage!

He had been a witness to the fall of Trevor, and to his retirement into the dense mass of thicket at a short distance from the river, after the retreat of the natives; but he was unable to tell what had passed within the scrub afterwards, as the bushes were so thick as to screen from view all within their recesses. But he had observed the corporal in his search, as he passed over a clear space between the scrub and the wood; and he judged from his manner that he was looking for traces of the major's daughter and her companion in misfortune. From this he had drawn the conclusion, that the girl and Mr. Silliman had not been found by the soldiers, amongst the bushes where he had been suddenly parted from them on the first attack of the natives.

Having made this discovery, it struck him that the natives had carried the white man and woman away as prisoners—to feast upon them perhaps at their leisure; for he could not bring himself to believe that they had left the white

people unharmed, after their own losses in dead and wounded.

Prompted by a strong passion for the girl, and urged on besides by the consideration of her importance as a prize, which he might be able to render useful in his dealings with her father for her ransom, he determined to follow on the track of the natives, with the hope that some lucky chance—some panic fear on the part of the natives, perhaps—might again place her in his power. He communicated his intention to his associate.

"Ten thousand devils take the girl!" exclaimed Grough; "if it hadn't been for her, we should not have been in this mess—without prog and without liquor! Wherever there's a woman, there's sure to be mischief!"

"But you would not have the poor girl left to the fury of those savages!" said he; "but it's the gentleman, our pack-horse, our bush-donkey, somewhat offended at his associate's callousness.

"D—— her!" replied that unamiable individual; "let them scarify her, or eat her, or do what they like with her: it's all the same to me!"

Mark felt that he was on a wrong tack; he shifted his helm dexterously: "It's not the girl that I was thinking of," said he; "but it's the gentleman, our pack-horse, our bush-donkey, mate."

"D—— him too. Let the black fellows roast him too—he's fat enough!"

"Why, Grough, how is it you don't understand me; it's neither the one nor the other that I care for; but it's the brandy, man, and the provisions, and the tobacco."

"And d—— him, too, again," exclaimed Grough; "he has got my dollars!"

"To be sure! Not that they would be of much use to us in the bush; but it's the brandy and the prog! A sup of brandy, now, is just what we want to keep up our spirits."

"Come along," said Grough; "let us go after them! That little fat fellow will be pitching into it most gloriously, now that he has got it all to himself—that is, if the natives don't pitch into him first. When you talked of the gal, you see, Mark, why, that wasn't worth while; but the liquor! that's quite another thing! So I'm your man, if there were a thousand natives to fight for it."

Mark took him at his word; and without further delay, they put themselves on the track of the natives, which they easily found, and continued their course until the dark prevented further progress. But after they had remained lying on the grass for a short time, to the great discomfiture of Grough, who, from having nothing to eat and nothing to drink, was in an excessively surly humor, Brandon began to have misgivings as to whether he was on the right scent for the girl.

He considered that it was a most unlikely thing for the natives to leave any one of their white enemies alive during such a skirmish; and it was altogether contrary to their practice, so far as he had heard, to encumber themselves with such prisoners. After all, he thought, either Helen and Silliman had been killed, or if they had been able to avoid that fate, they had escaped in another direction; and in that case, *be calculated*, they would make right for the

cave on the shore of the bay, from which they had been taken.

Impressed with this idea, he determined to retrace his steps, and endeavor to overtake them; for, as he guessed, they would not be able to make rapid progress in the bush, even if they should be able to find their way at all through a strange country, over which they had only once passed. He communicated his suspicion to Grough, who at once acquiesced; and after cursing himself, with sundry energetic oaths, for being such a fool as to suppose that the natives would trouble themselves with white people as prisoners, he uplifted his huge carcass from the ground, and prepared to follow Brandon:—

"To be sure," said he; "more fools we for thinking anything else! The natives would smash in their skulls with their waddies—and that was too good for the like of them! The cave's our mark—and there we shall find the liquor that we buried, if we find nothing else. My mouth just now hankers after a glass of rum, as a black fellow after a roasted piccaninny! Rum for ever!"

As Brandon had been careful, according to the practice of experienced travelers in the bush, to take bearings of the principal objects in his line of march, he had no difficulty, although in the night, in finding his way back to the sugar-loaf hill from the neighborhood of which he had started, and near which the fight with the natives had taken place. In this course it was necessary for him to pass by the place where the ensign and the corporal were reposing for the night; but he had another and a powerful reason for wishing to visit again the spot where he had left Helen.

Brandon's passion for the girl was most powerful and absorbing: she was a girl after his own heart—bold, brave, ready-witted in difficulty and in danger, and resolute in her determination. She was handsome withal—lofty in her bearing, tall and commanding in her figure, and with the air of a heroine of romance. If his lot, he thought, had been cast in happier circumstances, the companionship of such a woman might have spurred him on to noble enterprises, and have saved him from the commission of many a deed of crime! He had even flattered himself with the idea that, even as he was—sunk, degraded, proscribed—a felon and a murderer—the girl had been inclined to regard him favorably; and he had indulged in the hope that, possibly, she might be reconciled to a life in the wilderness with him, by whom she would have been worshiped as the goddess of his idolatry!

When, therefore, he discovered, as he did in their passage from the hill across the river, that she had been deceiving him all the time; and that, in fact, she, a girl, had outwitted him, the wily bushranger; it was with mingled feelings of disappointment, of wounded pride, and of deep mortification and pain, that he became convinced that Helen regarded him with abhorrence, and had found out some secret means of directing the pursuit of her friends to her rescue.

Nor did the sight of one of the two whose death he had resolved on, tend to lessen his resentment; for that one was young, hand-

some, an officer, and doubtless had been actuated by more than ordinary zeal in hazarding himself in the bush with only one companion, in so desperate a service as the capture of the man the most dreaded in Van Diemen's Land. That young man, then, his jealousy whispered to him, was the favorite admirer of the girl; and it was for him, and for his sake, that she had contrived to give a clue to the path of her retreat.

This thought stung him so sharply, that he stopped in his walk; started, and stamped his foot with signs of the most violent emotion! His excitement moved even the insensible Grough to ask him, with as much concern as he could throw into the brutal tones of his coarse thick voice:—

"If a black snake had bit him?"

"Worse than that, man!"

"Crush it, then," said Grough, "under your foot; if a cretur has bit you, and no help for it, have your revenge!"

"I will!" replied Brandon.

They both now moved on more rapidly. As they drew near to the dense scrub, Brandon enjoined strict silence to his companion, and advanced with his usual caution.

It was easy to ascertain, by the light of the fire, which the corporal had kindled close to his officer's sleeping place, the precise spot where the two soldiers had established their bivouac; and the thickness of the bushes served as an effectual screen to prevent either party from seeing the other, until they came almost face to face. Brandon whispered to his fellow not to make the slightest noise, and to follow him.

The bushranger then crept stealthily forward till he reached a thick bush fronting the fire, on the other side of which the corporal was sitting, with his firelock lying by his side. The bushranger regarded him attentively and saw that he slept—or seemed to sleep; for, as Brandon's own habits taught him, it might only be a feint to throw enemies off their guard. Grough had already put his musket to his shoulder with a deliberate aim; but Brandon, by a sign, checked him.

By the light of the moon he saw a rough sort of bush-hut at a little distance from the fire, which fronted its entrance. He guessed that the wounded officer was there—perhaps not alone! The girl might be with him! Brandon was seized with a feeling of condensed hatred and spite, which mastered all other considerations. "The snake," he muttered to himself, "has bitten me with its poison—and I will have my revenge!"

Retreating from his position to some little distance, he made a circuit through the bushes, and got behind the officer's hut. He observed through the partial openings, here and there, as he went, that the sleeping soldier retained the same position.

"If it's a sham," he thought to himself, "it is well done!" Grough made signs to shoot him; but Brandon, by a determined gesture, forbade it.

They arrived close to the bush-hut. The bushranger peered about, and presently found a small opening, through which he could see the occupant's face. It was that of the officer; it was very pale, and had a youthful and deli-

cate appearance. He was sleeping, and he was alone.

By the light of the fire which shone directly upon him, partially obscured only by the body of the corporal, Brandon observed in the young officer's hand, which was placed on his breast, a woman's glove! The truth was revealed at once! Here was the lover of the girl—the favored lover—with the love-token in his grasp!

Again the same sharp pang shot through the bushranger's frame, and he felt stung as if by a corporal and substantive dagger stabbed into his entrails! All the rage of the demon was roused within him! Slowly and silently he raised his fowling-piece to his shoulder, and covered the sleeping man's brain with the murderous barrel! His finger was on the trigger! He was about to give the fatal touch—when the sleeping officer turned, and said something in his sleep.

It seemed that he was suffering under the painful excitement of some feverish dream.

Clasping the glove to his heart, he murmured:—

"Helen!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE.

THE bushranger suspended his touch;—the name of Helen so pronounced, agitated him in an extraordinary manner. His hand trembled; his weapon shook; for once he felt that his aim was uncertain, for his eyes also were blinded with a sort of mist. The sleeping man spoke again. The bushranger listened:—

"Dead!" murmured Trevor; "dead! murdered in cold blood! murdered! murdered!"

Brandon recovered his piece—meditated for a moment. Some thought seemed to convulse him; a deep flush came over his face:—he leveled his piece again:—

Again the sleeping officer murmured:—

"Murdered!"

Brandon drew back his piece with a hasty movement, much to the astonishment of Grough, who was at a loss to understand what these pantomimic actions signified; and without speaking turned away, and retreated to some little distance among the bushes. His companion followed him obediently. When Brandon stopped, Grough took the opportunity to ask him:—"Why he did not shoot the red-coat as he slept?"

Brandon made no reply for some time. At last he said, "It is best as it is:—let him be left alone."

He then remained plunged for some time in gloomy silence, without giving any intimation to stir from the spot.

But his companion, who was entirely ignorant of the motives which led his chief to spare the sleeping man's life, and who was equally unable to penetrate the feelings of Brandon in respect to the relations of the officer with the girl, was by no means inclined to remain inactive, or to delay their journey towards the major's cave, where a store of rum had been deposited, in a secret place denominated in colonial phraseology a "plant." Besides, this was a neglect of business to the matter-of-fact marauder,

altogether incompatible with his habits of dealing.

Here were two of their enemies at their mercy, and Mark was losing the opportunity of taking both their lives at a time when they could make no resistance, for they were both asleep; and what better chance could they have of shooting them comfortably through the head without danger to themselves! To let such a chance slip by was monstrous! He conveyed his opinion, in a gruff whisper, to Brandon:—

"If you don't like to shoot the young 'un," he said, "there can be no harm in my shooting the old fellow! Besides, we want powder and shot, and his musket would be no bad grab!"

To this Brandon made no reply!—he was a prey to the most painful and conflicting sensations. On the one hand, his passion for the girl had so far touched that part of his better nature which was within him, as to cause him to recoil from murdering, in cold blood, even her favored lover! And, on the other hand, he was stimulated by jealousy, by anger, and by the desire of revenge for the injury which the officer had done him in forestalling him in the girl's affections, to take the life of the hated rival who was in his power. Absorbed by these thoughts, he either did not hear, or did not allow himself to be disturbed by his companion's suggestion, but continued plunged in moody contemplation.

Grough, taking his silence for consent, moved quickly off, determined that the night should not pass away, as he mentally affirmed, "without some pleasure;" so he resolved to shoot the corporal.

On such amiable thoughts intent, he edged away a little to the right, in order that he might take the poor soldier sideways, which would obviate the inconvenience of the glare of the fire, and allow him to take a better aim. He stationed himself, accordingly, in a convenient position, and, resting on one knee, was about to have a deliberate shot, when a slight air, which caused the embers of the fire to sparkle more brilliantly, conveyed to his senses the smell of roasted meat!

Now Mr. Grough was, as he expressed it, more than usually "peckish," having not only walked very far, but fasted very long; and the appetizing odor of the kangaroo's leg, which had begun to burn a little, altogether overcame his animal sensibilities! His bowels yearned, and the water rose to his mouth! For a moment he forgot his anticipated gratification of putting a ball through the corporal's head, in the present and more immediate temptation which irresistibly assailed him! He even feared to disturb the sleeper, lest his waking should delay the promised feast.

Taking advantage therefore of his early habits, and his ability in priggling, which even in his youth had conferred on him the title of a most accomplished thief, he bent his whole soul to the getting possession of the savory "grab."

It was astonishing to see with what lightness and softness the legs which supported that huge body could tread! Nothing but long practice in stealing and in housebreaking, could have taught the bulky brute to manage his steps so

mincingly! And the feat, too, was so daring. To subtract the delicious morsel from under the corporal's very nose! There was fun in the exploit! What would be the old soldier's thoughts on waking! How piercing his disappointment! What a glorious "dodge" to put on him! Positively, it was better than putting him to death! The Thief was in the pursuit of his vocation, and he was happy!

He stretched out his hand for the venison, and clutched the protruding bone; but it was almost red-hot, and he let it drop again. The noise, however, seemed to disturb the soldier. Grough was ready to shoot him dead if he awoke; but he only gave a loud snort, and slept on.

On a sudden, a bright idea struck the thief. He spied the corporal's musket lying by his side, with the bayonet fixed—a supplemental weapon with which his own piece was unsupplied. It was also a better one than his own, and in cleaner condition, as he perceived at a glance. Dexterously removing the soldier's musket, he softly placed his own in its place, after removing the flint, which he deposited in his pocket.

The change, however, was not made so silently as to avoid disturbing the sleeping sentinel. The corporal suddenly opened his eyes, looked vacantly at the fire, placed his hand on the substituted musket, nodded his head—and slept again.

Grough waited quietly behind him till his snores announced that the soldier was fast asleep. He then directed the bayoneted weapon to the leg of the kangaroo, and carefully inserting its point into the fleshy part of the thigh, bore it triumphantly aloft, and marched away to rejoin his comrade.

In a few words he communicated to Brandon the exploit which he had achieved, and, as he eagerly devoured the venison, offered him the best portions. But Brandon refused to eat; and after his associate had satisfied his first hunger, he led the way back towards the cave in the hope of finding there, or on the way, some trace of the girl whom he had lost.

In the mean time, the hours of the night wore away; but it was not before the dawn that the corporal awoke from his weary slumbers. Surprised at the appearance of the morning light, the old soldier began to have some vague suspicion, either that the sun had taken it into its head, in that strange country, to rise in the middle of the night, or that he, the corporal, had been asleep!

As the one case was hardly less unintelligible than the other—for to sleep on his post was a breach of a sentinel's duty which it did not enter the worthy corporal's head that it was possible for him to be guilty of—he set himself seriously about resolving the enigma.

He remembered shutting his eyes to avoid the uneasy glare of the fire; but he remembered nothing more. It must be, then, that he had forgotten to open them again! Well, there was not much harm in that! That was not like going to sleep! A man, as the corporal argued, might forget himself occasionally, and be forgiven; but to sleep on his post—that was unpardonable! The corporal was sure that he had not done that.

Having come to this satisfactory conclusion,

and the more so as it happened that there was no one at hand to question its correctness, the corporal opened his eyes wider; and then he remembered the kangaroo's leg, which he had set to roast previous to his oblivion: but no leg was there! The corporal opened his eyes wider than ever at this extraordinary circumstance, and immediately rose to investigate the affair.

In rising, he mechanically lifted up his firelock; for he followed the good old rule in a campaign, that "your arms," as he said, "are always safest in your own hands." "By the powers," he involuntarily exclaimed, "I could have sworn that I fixed my bayonet last night! and by all that's holy, it's not in the sheath! And the firelock, too! what has come to the hussy! And there's no flint in the hammer! There must be Irish fairies here too! This is not my firelock! By the powers, it's like the child that was changed at nurse! And I'm changed, too, perhaps, for anything I know! But I haven't been asleep—that I'll swear to!"

"Corporal," called out the ensign from the bush hut, in a faint tone.

"Here, your honor," said the corporal, promptly, not a little relieved to hear the ensign's voice, for he began to think that he might be changed also. He was about to salute his reclining officer with a "present;" but a look at his musket put him so out of conceit with the tool, that he could not bring himself to perform the evolution with "such a thing." He contented himself, therefore, with the minor military obeisance of bringing his open hand, as he expected, to the peak of his cap. But here again he was balked; for his cap, at that moment, was performing the office of a water-jug on the grass. The ensign did not observe his confusion, but in weak accents expressed his desire to move forward without delay in search of Miss Horton.

"Lend me your hand," he said, "and I will get up from this bed. I am afraid, corporal, you have had a weary night of it, while I have been sleeping."

The corporal said nothing; but handling his officer as tenderly as if he had been a child, he raised him from his mimosa bed; but Trevor could not stand.

The corporal shook his head.

"It will never do, your honor, to be marching if you can't stand. Better be still a bit, and see what the sun will do for you when he comes out warm."

"These spear wounds," said Trevor, "are very stiff and painful. Do you know if the natives poison their spears?"

"I never heard so, your honor; but these are nasty wounds. You see, sir, the spear doesn't go in smooth and clear like the point of a bayonet—though a bayonet wound is ugly enough; but the ends of them being of charred wood, and blunty, they make a greater rend; it's curious, though, that they don't bleed so much as bayonet wounds; but they are apt to fester, I have heard say, and become very unpleasant to a gentleman that isn't used to being wounded. If we could contrive to make some water hot, and bathe them, it would do them good, and take some of the smart off. And now I think of it, I know a way that a Spanish

friar contrived to make water hot without a pot to boil it in: I'll do it for your honor in a minute."

So saying, the corporal helped his officer to lie gently down again on his bush bed; and having recourse to his cap, from which almost all the water had oozed away during the night, he made haste to the neighboring stream to refill it; and when he got there he remembered the remainder of the kangaroo which he had shot the evening before, and which he had left the other side of the stream.

He found it just as he had left it, and with no slight joy did he amputate the other leg; taking care, after the amputation, to throw the remainder, consisting of the fore-quarters of the animal, over the branch of an adjacent tree. Thus laden, he returned to the fire; and first setting some meat to cook on the embers, he busied himself in preparing a warm embrocation for the ensign.

To effect this, he provided himself with his officer's handkerchief, and then taking the hot stones, on which he had set the vanished kangaroo's leg of the night before, he blew the ashes from them, and dropped a couple of them into his capful of water. The stones hissed, and the water simmered, and presently became hot; and the worthy fellow then performed the office of a hospital-nurse, and tenderly fomented his officer's wounds with the warmed water.

The application of this simple remedy afforded Trevor so much relief, that he expressed his satisfaction, and his admiration also of the corporal's ingenuity, in the most glowing terms; and the strength of his officer's grateful expressions gave the corporal courage to relate his misadventure of the night.

"This is very strange!" repeated the ensign.

"Your firelock has actually been changed without your being aware of it!"

"Not exactly so, your honor, for I was aware of the change directly I missed the bayonet, and saw the rusty thing that somebody put in the place of it. But who can it be, your honor?—not the natives! They never would have the gumption to do such a trick as that!"

"It must be the bushranger's work," replied Trevor; "and he has done it, I have no doubt, to show at once his cleverness and his daring. But why he spared our lives when we were sleeping—"

"I wasn't sleeping," interrupted the corporal, deprecatingly; "the fire blinded my eyes so, that I closed them only for a moment; and when I opened them again, the thing was done!"

"Why he spared our lives," repeated the ensign, without taking notice of the corporal's explanation, "is a mystery to me!"

"Why, your honor," replied the corporal, "the devil is never so black as he is painted; and these convicts, bad as they are, are not so bad as some people say. They don't want to kill, your honor, for killing's sake. Let them alone, and they'll leave you alone—except when they want to rob you, or that, and then, in course, they must stand the scrimmage as well as they can."

"There is something about this Mark Brandon," resumed Trevor, meditating, "that is very remarkable."

"He is the most remarkable big rascal," replied the corporal, "in all the colony! That's what he is. But he was a gentleman once, people say, and if any one ever had the gift of the gab, they say it is he; and he is an uncommon favorite, by all accounts, among the women."

"Indeed!" said Trevor; "and he has been a gentleman, has he? Corporal, we must lose no time in looking for that poor girl! There certainly is something extraordinary about that bushranger! I have seen him only once—when we were fighting the natives; but it struck me that I had seen that face before. It was a countenance that seemed to have haunted me in my dreams. We must march, corporal, we must march!"

But poor Trevor was so weak, that when he attempted to rise, he fell down again on his couch. The corporal pitied his young officer most sincerely. He "rummaged his head" every way, to contrive some means of remedying this new difficulty. But as there were neither wild nor tame horses to be had in those desolate regions, the poor fellow was at his wit's end to know what to do. For here was his officer wounded and unable to walk, and there was neither hospital staff nor commissariat to help them! And as to foraging—what was the use of foraging where there was no farm, or house, or cottage to forage on!

At last it occurred to him that, as his officer was weak, the best thing was to nourish him; and as he had often heard the succulent virtues of kangaroo-tail soup extolled as the most nourishing thing in nature, he determined to try the efficacy of it in the present case. Fortunately he had secured the enormous tail of the late kangaroo, and he immediately proceeded to cook it in the best manner that he could; and as he could not make soup of it in his cap, he essayed that which appeared to him the next best way of transferring its virtues to the person of his officer, by broiling it most delicately on the embers.

The result of his experiment in the culinary pharmacopœia, however, was not such as to answer his expectations. Trevor had no appetite, and could not partake of the Australian luxury. He began to be hot and feverish; and the corporal beheld with alarm the beginning of a disorder, which, from his experience in wounds, he was aware was the forerunner of danger.

In spite of all the corporal's assiduities, Trevor's fever increased; and the poor corporal, almost abandoning all hope, in their distress and desolation, would sooner have encountered a whole regiment with bayonets fixed, than such an enemy as fever with no doctor to combat the insidious foe.—In addition to this, they were in hourly apprehension of being attacked by the natives.

In this wretched state, while the corporal almost abandoned himself to despair, the unhappy Trevor, in the intervals of his delirium of fever, was a prey to the far greater torture of the thought of Helen in the power of the bushrangers or the natives, while he was lying helpless on that which it seemed to him was the bed of death!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE PROCLAMATION.

THE bushranger traveled during the whole of the night with almost unabated speed towards the bay, on the margin of which the cave was situate, where he hoped to learn tidings of Helen. Sturdy as his companion was, he more than once hinted to Brandon the expediency of a halt; for notwithstanding the frequent attacks which he made on the leg of the kangaroo, which he had suspended from his neck like a guitar, so as to be handy to his jaws, he began to sink under the fatigue of long-protracted exertion.

As to Brandon, he ate nothing, and spoke little; scarcely replying to the questions and observations of his follower! but drinking copiously at every brook and spring that he passed by; for that fever of the soul had already seized him which consumes its victim like living fire!

Stopping only to allow his companion the rest needful for his further progress, Brandon pursued his way, hoping every moment that he should light on some indication of Helen's track, and earnestly wishing that she might adopt the same expedient in her present flight as she had practised when she had been forced to travel with himself. But he could see no trace of her steps; and although he was sometimes tempted to diverge from the direct course, in the hope that she might have chosen some tempting but delusive opening between the hills in her progress homewards, his researches ended only in disappointment, and uselessly consumed his time and strength.

The delay which these failures caused only added to his gloomy anger, and augmented his eagerness to arrive at the place of his destination. At last he reached the vicinity of the bay; and then some caution became necessary lest he should fall into the hands of the emissaries of the government.

Using great circumspection in his approach to the cave, keeping a good lookout on all sides, and carefully examining the ground for foot-marks, he drew near to the spot. As soon as he had a clear view of the bay, he looked about for the vessel; but the brig was gone.

He then remained for some hours, watching the parts in the vicinity of the cave; but he could see no sign of danger. Accustomed, however, to make use of all sorts of stratagems, in order to delude his enemies, he was distrustful of the quiet and calm which seemed to prevail in a place where recently all was life and commotion.

In this mood he approached the front of the cave; but still he saw no sign of its being occupied. But on one side of the entrance, at its mouth, he saw a piece of paper attached in a recess sheltered from wet. Grough saw it also; and at the sight they stopped and looked at each other.

"Let us go on," at last said Brandon, "death is better than this suspense."

"Come on," responded Grough; "life is not worth having without liquor. Let us try our plant."

They approached the mouth of the cave

where the paper was affixed; and both read at the same time, its significant heading:—

"A PROCLAMATION."

"Let us first search the cave," said Brandon, "we shall have time enough to read that gambling paper afterwards." His eye, however, had rapidly caught part of its contents, and he felt a queer sort of uneasiness about it.

They searched the cave, but they found no sign of inhabitants.

"There is no one here," said Grough, chuckling.

"So it seems," said Brandon, despondingly.

"What does the paper say?" asked Grough.

"Just what they all say—a bribe for treachery."

"A bribe!" exclaimed Grough. "I suppose you mean a reward. Much good may it do them—the tyrants! as if one man in the bush would betray another! But how much is it?"

The qualification which the words "how much is it?" implied of the nature of Mr. Grough's virtuous resolve not to be tempted by the proclamation of the government, grated on Brandon's ears disagreeably.

"You had better read it," he said, "and see."

Grough spelled it out, not without difficulty, commenting on the manifesto as he went on:

"A PROCLAMATION."

"Whereas one Mark Brandon, a prisoner of the Crown, has made his escape from Hobart Town, and has committed a piracy on the high seas, besides being guilty of various other high crimes and misdemeanors

"(I say, Mark, they lay it on thick.)

" 'Crimes and misdemeanors; and is charged also with having forcibly abducted a young lady of the name of Helen Horton, lately arrived in the colony; and is suspected also of the murder of, or of some other foul dealing with, George Trevor, an ensign in his majesty's service. . . .

"(That's the young chap, I suppose, that the natives speared.—Well, they are wrong there, at any rate.—But those beaks and constables will swear through a brick wall to any lie that suits them against a poor prisoner.)

" 'Majesty's service;—This is to give notice that a reward of five hundred dollars. . . .

"(Five hundred dollars! I say, Mark, five hundred dollars!)

" 'Five hundred dollars will be given to any one who shall afford such information as may be the means of apprehending the said Mark Brandon. . . .

"(Mark, you're worth five hundred dollars! That's something!)

" 'The said Mark Brandon; together with a free pardon. . . .

"(A free pardon! I say, Mark, do you see that? A free pardon!—It's a dead set against you, Mark!—But do they think that any one would be such a blackguard as to inform against you? They don't know us, Mark!—Five hundred dollars and a free pardon! As if anybody would trust to their promises! But there is something more!)

" 'A free pardon, and a free passage to England.

"(By—, Mark," exclaimed Grough again,

"the governor lays it on fat! Five hundred dollars—a free pardon—and a free passage to England! That's tempting! Isn't it! But I wouldn't trust the scoundrels! It's only a trap!—Don't you think so, Mark! And as 'say one betraying you!')

"Read on," said Mark.

"And whereas a prisoner of the Crown, named James Swindell, and a prisoner of the Crown, named Roger Grough, are also missing, and are supposed to have joined the said Mark Brandon in the bush;—This is to give notice, that a reward of one hundred dollars will be given for the apprehension of the said James Swindell, and of the said Roger Grough, or for such information as may lead to their conviction. "Signed, &c. &c.

"LIEUT. GOVERNOR."

"One hundred dollars for me!" exclaimed Grough, after a slight pause, as he concluded aloud the perusal of the proclamation. "A hundred dollars for me! Well—that's kind, isn't it! And another hundred for hang-dog Jemmy! Well, Jemmy's done for, so there's a hundred dollars lost for somebody.—But there's no free pardon for taking me;—you're the great man, Mark.—This is what comes of being a nob!—It would be worth somebody's while to take you, Mark, eh!—Wouldn't it?"

"Yours, perhaps," replied Brandon, turning suddenly round, and confronting his associate with an eye and a look which few could stand under without quailing.—"Yours, perhaps," repeated Brandon:—"but no;—you would not betray me;—I have no fear of that. First, because you are not such a rascal as to do it; and secondly, because you would certainly be hanged, my hearty, for the murder of the old woman and the child at Sandy Bay before you started.—No, my boy; you and I must escape or swing together."

"To be sure, Mark; to be sure:—you and I, as you say, must get away or be strung up together. Not that there was any harm in killing the old woman—they would never hang a man for that!—and the child would shriek out! But how shall we get a boat or a vessel! We shan't have such another chance as we had with that brig in a hurry!"

"We must trust to our luck, man. Leave me to find the way to do it. But we must not hang about here; there may be spies where we least think of. We must get away into the interior, where they can't follow us, or can't find us if they do."

"Wherever you go, Mark, I'm the man to stick to you! And now for the stuff! Let us see if the plant is all right."

To his infinite satisfaction, Grough found his beloved rum safe and untouched. He immediately proceeded to disinter it, taking several hearty pulls at the liquor by the way; and so afraid was he of losing sight of it again, that he determined to load himself with as much as he could carry. As most of it was contained in one-gallon stone bottles, which had been done for convenience' sake on board-ship, and to guard against the danger of drawing off spirit from the cask by candle-light in the hold; although the weight was heavy, it was so divided as to enable the freebooter to dispose of much

of it about his person. He did not neglect to carry away also as large a supply as he could bear of ship's biscuit, and of tea and sugar. He took care to provide himself also with a large tin pannikin, and a small tea-kettle, which was among the stores which the marauders had stowed away previous to their first departure from the cave.

He also visited the spot where he had buried his share of the dollars despoiled from the major; and after a little hesitation, caused by his desire to have them on the one hand, and the inconvenience of their weight on the other, he took them out of the hole, and deposited them in a canvass bag, which he suspended from his shoulders. Thus freighted, like a huge Dutch trader, had it not been for his vast bulk and prodigious strength, he would have been unable to stand under the weight of such a cargo; and, as it was, he found his motions seriously impeded by his cumbrous load. But his covetousness was stronger than his laziness.

Mark Brandon, while his companion was thus busily employed, and gloating over his dollars and his rum, removed his own share of the money, and quietly made his way to the hollow tree where he had secretly deposited the gold, which he had previously contrived to abstract from the participation of his comrades. Having made sure that Grough was entirely and intensely occupied with his stone bottle, he threw some handfuls of earth and stones into the hollow trunk, to disperse any opossums which might have made it their abode; then, hiding his fowling-piece under a neighboring rock which shelved outwards, he nimbly climbed the tree, and dropped down within the ample cavity.

As soon as his feet touched the bottom, he became aware, by the jingling of the coin, that his treasure was safe. He found it rather difficult to get out again; but, by applying his two hands to the sides of the opening above, which he could only just reach, by a vigorous effort he raised himself up, and descended the trunk.

Satisfied by this inspection, that it was a safe place for "a plant," he dropped into it the large bag of dollars which he had removed from the hole in the ground. This he did in order to hide the money from his companion, fearing that his avarice might be too powerfully stimulated by a knowledge of such an amount of dollars at his command, and which would form so pleasing an addition to a "free pardon" and "a passage to England."

For he had already begun to be suspicious of the rascal with whom he was temporarily associated; and he bore in mind the accent and the manner of his "friend," as he read and dwelt on the tempting offer of reward promised by the government for Brandon's capture. He immediately rejoined him, however, with a countenance entirely divested of all appearance of distrust; and he took advantage of his comrade's occupation, to revolve in his mind the expediency of shooting him through the head on the spot, and of thereby removing all danger of betrayal from that quarter.

But on further thought, he considered that the brute would be useful to him, as the lost Mr. Silliman had been, in carrying the load of

sprit and other articles of comfort, with which he was doing him—Mark Brandon—the favor to load himself. He resolved, therefore, to abide with him until the fellow had served his purpose; the more particularly as he would be a useful auxiliary in the event of being attacked by the natives. He had no doubt, that, after he had decided upon his place of refuge—and had possession of the girl, perhaps—he should easily be able to dispose of his thick-headed associate when expedient; and in the mean time, that he could make use of him;—reserving to himself the right, however, of instantly dispatching him, should he discover any strong symptoms of treachery, which, he relied, the animal was too stupid entirely to conceal.

Having come to this cool determination, he accepted his friend's offer to partake of about a pint of rum; and grasping his comrade's hand with an expression of most hearty good-will and confidence, they both swore over the liquor an eternal attachment—Brandon having already resolved to slaughter the huge oaf to whom he was vowing friendship, whenever the fit occasion should arrive; and Grough having determined in his own mind to deliver up his chum to the gallows, and claim the reward, on the first convenient opportunity.

These two worthies, having thus transacted the business which they had to do in that part of the country, and Brandon having made a last search for Helen, departed lovingly together, with lies on their lips and treachery in their hearts, in the direction which Brandon had planned, towards the western coast; for although there was very little chance of a vessel or a boat nearing that side of the island, he was not without a hope, which he could not avoid cherishing, of meeting, by some lucky accident, with the beautiful girl whom he had lost, and for whose possession he longed with all the ardor of his sanguine and impassioned nature.

The social community of the outlaws, however, was presently interrupted by other alarms, which, while they stimulated the inclination of Grough to betray his companion, were the means of aggravating the suspicions of Brandon, who redoubled his precautions to guard against surprise and treachery.

CHAPTER XL.

SUSPICION AND DISTRUST BREED FEAR AND TREACHERY.

THEY had not proceeded far before they came to a huge blue gum-tree, on which was fastened, by a wooden pin, another copy of the proclamation which the bushranger and his companion had seen at the entrance of the cave. Grough read it over again, and seemed to dwell meditatively on the reward of "dollars" and "pardon." Brandon marked his fellow's look, but said nothing.

The sight of this second handbill, however, made Brandon for the moment more suspicious of other enemies than of his companion, and he looked about uneasily.

"The enemy seems to be on this track," he said; "we must shift a little more to the coast."

Grough was rather inclined to proceed in a northerly direction towards the town; but this manœuvre was gently opposed by Brandon. They continued their course to the coast, therefore, for about half a mile, when, fastened on a peppermint-tree, they beheld another copy of the governor's proclamation. Grough cast his eyes round on all sides with an odd and doubtful expression; Brandon looked to the primings of his fowling-piece, and kept to the right of Grough, so that his barrel, thrown over his left arm, might naturally point towards his companion.

"Proclamations seem to grow in these parts," remarked Grough.

"I don't think this is the best way for us after all," said Brandon. "They will be looking out for me near the coast."

"And for me, too."

"And for you, too," repeated Brandon, thoughtfully.

Turning sharp round, he retraced his steps, with Grough by his side. He thought that his comrade seemed inclined to stick to him more than ever; but he was determined to follow out his own plan.

He then made a start in the direction of the north-west, keeping clear, however, of his previous route when he was accompanied by Helen, and having it in his mind either to climb the mountainous ridge to the right of the opening which he had passed before, or to try to go round it; but, after about a quarter of a mile's walk, he encountered another ghost of the hateful proclamation!

"Another!" said Grough.

"They seem to be determined to hem us in with their bribes of dollars and pardons," said Brandon, eyeing his companion.

"It's a great temptation to a prisoner," observed Grough, sentimentally; "and they that did it know it. Not that I would be such a rascal as to betray a chum! Sooner than turn nose, I'd rather—I'd—rather—"

"Rather what?" said Brandon, drily.

"Why, you don't suspect me, do you?"

"Not I: you know that your fate is bound up with mine, and that it is to your interest not to betray me."

"I don't know that," replied Grough, a little doggedly. "It would be to my interest, perhaps, to get the dollars and the free pardon; but may I be hanged like a dog, and sink into eternal flames, if I ever betray a friend!"

"Now, then," said Brandon, "you have read the governor's proclamation; will you stay behind and give information of me if you like, or will you go with me and take your chance of our seizing a boat together, and of escaping from the colony?"

"Which will I do! Do you think I would hesitate for a moment?" replied Grough, who was puzzled to determine in his own mind which was the likeliest way of his being able to deliver up his friend to the authorities and of claiming the reward. "What will I do?" he repeated, after having revolved the *pros* and *cons* in his mind as well as the short time afforded to him for his decision would enable him, "why, follow you, Mark, to the world's end, and stick to you, my boy, like a barnacle!"

This friendly resolve he had come to from the calculation that, if he left Brandon, and sought to give information to the authorities of his comrade's whereabouts, he might possibly be tried and hanged before the value of his information could be ascertained; but if, on the contrary, he accompanied his friend, some opportunity would occur, as he flattered himself that Brandon was quite unsuspecting of his intention, to enable him to fall suddenly on him, when he was asleep, perhaps, and bind him, and so deliver him alive to the governor in camp.

Brandon, on the other hand, had made up his mind, before he asked the question, to shoot his comrade on the spot if he refused to accompany him, as he judged it would be dangerous to let him go; but, as he wanted his services to carry various necessities into the bush for his convenience as well as safety, he let the huge oaf hug himself with the idea that he had the cleverness to deceive one who, by his art and daring, had acquired for himself, preëminently, the title of "The Bushranger;" and knowing well that nothing more effectually blinds a treacherous plotter of Grough's description than to suffer him to delude himself with the idea that he is the deceiver, he allowed his companion to enjoy, undisturbed, his secret satisfaction at being able "to put such a dodge on Mark."

With this thought he extended his hand to his comrade, and, wringing it strongly and with much apparent emotion, declared solemnly that "he would rather have such a man as he was to stand by him than a dozen cowardly and treacherous rascals whom an honest man could place no reliance on!"

Grough expressed, in his rough way, his utmost satisfaction at this exhibition of the warmth of his comrade's attachment, and swore a prodigious oath to signify that he would be true to him to the last. He walked on by his side, therefore, full of glee, for he considered the dollars and the free pardon as his own already, while Brandon made up his mind, definitively, to blow his friend's brains out the moment they arrived at their place of destination.

In this amiable disposition of mind towards each other the two proceeded on their way, keeping to the right of their former route, for Brandon still cherished the hope that he might possibly fall in with Helen by the way, for it was clear that she had not reached the cave, and the probability was that she was lost in the bush; or, possibly, she might have been taken away by the natives, though that was not likely. There was reason to conclude, however, that she had not been killed in the fight, for in that case her body would have been found. Perplexed and irritated by these conflicting surmises, he determined to visit the scene of the fight again, and search narrowly for her remains, and, if necessary, communicate with the wounded officer, if he still remained there.

As to the risk of being taken he did not care much for that, as he considered that he was more than a match for the two soldiers in the bush, and that, if it came to the worst, it would only be making a fight of it. To this step,

however, he would not have been inclined, for his maxim was "never to give away a chance," had he not been incited by his burning passion for the girl for whose repossession he would have incurred almost any danger.

With this resolve he proceeded rapidly on; but his companion was so loaded with his various assortment of useful and necessary articles for the bush, that, soon after nightfall, he expressed his utter inability to proceed a single step farther; and, as they found themselves in the vicinity of a little streamlet, they arranged themselves for the night. Grough disencumbered himself of his load, and, with an affectionate earnestness, which manifested itself by many endearing expressions, he embraced a bottle of the rum which formed a considerable part of the bulk of his provisions. Hastening to extract the cork, he applied it to his mouth, and indulged in a prodigious gulp of the liquor.

"You seem to enjoy it," observed Mark.

"If one could only get as much rum every day as a man could drink," replied the other, "I wouldn't mind whether I was prisoner or free! Rum's the stuff for me!"

"And how much have you left for me?"

"How much! why, this bottle holds two quarts. Drink, Mark—drink. There isn't such stuff in the colony! It's downright beautiful! I'll fill my skin with it this blessed night, and then I shall have the less to carry to-morrow! This night I'll be jolly drunk if I never am again! With a pipe of baccy in your mouth, and a bottle of rum by your side, what does a man want more! Eh, Mark? Here, man, take the bottle."

Brandon took the bottle, and then selecting the pannikin, in the dusk, from the heap of articles on the ground, he fetched in it some water from the stream, to which he added a small quantity of the spirit, which he drank leisurely.

Grough observed this moderation with extreme surprise! That any one should refrain from taking his fill of rum when he had the opportunity was a prodigy that surpassed his comprehension! There must be a reason for it, he thought sagely to himself. Why should Mark not drink? Was he afraid of getting drunk? By —, that was it! More fool he! Then he, Grough, could drink Mark's share and his own too! Capital!

With this he was about to put his beloved bottle to his mouth again; when, suddenly, a thought struck him—a most awkward thought! Perhaps Brandon was meditating to do the same thing to him which he was meditating to do to Brandon! To fall upon him, and secure him, and deliver him up to the government for the sake of the reward! That was the reason why Mark would not drink! He, Mark, wanted him, Grough, to drink, and get drunk, so as to be able to master him easily!—What a rascal!—But here was a particularly disagreeable fix!—If he didn't drink, what was the use of the rum which he had carried all that way! And if he did, and got drunk, he should be entirely helpless, and at the mercy of Brandon, to do with him as he pleased!

The shock of this cruel dilemma was most horrid! He held the rum in his hand which he

dared not drink! Life had lost its salt and its savor! Bushranging had lost its relish!—What was to be done!—The only thing was to wait till Mark fell asleep, and then to fall on him. To this end he resolved to keep his eyes open diligently, though fatigue and travel had wearied his faculties sorely.

"You don't drink," said Brandon, as Grough placed the bottle on the ground, with his hand still on it, and with a countenance which, even in the gloom, Mark observed, was ludicrously sorrowful.

"Better not drink it all up at once; you know we shall want it in the bush."

"You have changed your mind rather suddenly," replied Brandon, "I thought you were determined to take your fill this time!"

"Better keep it for times when we shall want it; the best thing we can do is to go to sleep, so as to be fresh for to-morrow. I suppose, Mark, you feel sleepy as I am," said Grough; wishing by this considerate suggestion to put it into his friend's head to lose no time about it.

"I am very tired and very sleepy," replied Mark; "and I feel that I shall be off in a few minutes."

"So shall I," replied Grough, making an effort to keep his eyes open. "We will both of us go to sleep," he continued aloud, and then saying to himself, "If I do, I'm d—."

"You will be a clever fellow!" thought Mark, on his side, "if you catch me asleep! Depend on it, my fine fellow, that Mark is always wide awake!"

"I shall be asleep in a minute, Mark."

"And so shall I."

Presently Mark breathed heavily.

"I wonder if he is shamming!" thought Grough. "But I am up to that dodge, too!" Accordingly he performed a deep and regular snore.

"That rascal is not asleep," said Brandon, to himself; "he is feigning for some purpose! Does he think to come over me that way! the thrice long-eared ass! Does he think that Mark Brandon is to be taken in by his contrivances! Shall I shoot him now? No: I want him to carry his load for me, and to assist in beating off the natives, for it is more than probable that we shall meet with them before long in this direction, and for his own sake he will not fail me then. Besides, it will be better to appear to the young officer as two to two, should it be necessary for me to communicate with him. No, I will not shoot him yet. I will make use of him, and then punish him for his meditated treachery. But, positively, I think the brute sleeps."

Mark spoke to him in a low tone, to which Grough made no answer; he then approached him cautiously, and satisfied himself that it was no sham; for in fact, the first copious draught of rum which the creature had imbibed was sufficient to dispose him, wearied as he was, irresistibly to sleep.

The bushranger, now stepping with the utmost caution, withdrew silently from the spot, and continued his course till he arrived at a thicket about a quarter of a mile distant from the place where he had left his companion, and burying himself among the densest of the

business, he endeavored to compose himself to sleep. But the thought of his precarious position; the ill-concealed design of his companion; and the gnawing fury of his disappointment at the loss of the girl on whom he had set his whole soul, for a long time kept him awake. But at last he was able to procure a few minutes of fitful slumber.

His fears, however, haunted him in his dreams; and he awoke with the sensation of being suddenly grasped by a powerful hand on his collar! It was only his neck-handkerchief, which, in the uneasy position in which he lay, had become tightened round his neck.

He found it impossible, however, to sleep again. He made his way back, therefore, to his companion, whom he found still snoring. He sat by his side for more than two hours, cold and cheerless, for he feared to light a fire lest some enemy on the lookout should discover him by its light. At last the dawn of day came; and then, thinking that his companion had slept long enough, and being anxious to get towards the sugar-loaf hill, he awoke him, by putting his hand to his shoulder.

"Hands off!" cried Grough. "D—— me! you shan't take me alive! What! Mark! is it you? By ——! I thought it was some of the constables that had got hold of me! By ——! and haven't you been asleep!"

"I could not sleep; so I have been watching for both of us."

"You haven't been asleep! and I have!" said Grough, rubbing his eyes, and endeavoring to reconcile the fact of Mark's forbearance with his own previous suspicions; "well, there is something in this I can't make out!"

"What can't you make out?"

"What can't I make out?" replied Grough, a little confused; "why—I can't make out why it is that you don't sleep after you have been awake I don't know how many nights!"

"It is well," replied Mark, quietly, "that one of us can keep awake; for if we were both to fall asleep together, we might be surprised and taken before we knew where we were—as you might have been last night."

Grough was considerably puzzled, and could not make out at all the reason why Mark had not seized on him when he was asleep and defenceless, as he certainly would have done to Mark. "Mark is up to some game," he thought; "but what is it?" The uncertainty of Mark's object troubled the worthy Mr. Grough exceedingly; but disguising his thoughts as well as he could, he proceeded to load himself with his goods and chattels, taking, on this occasion, only a very moderate sip of rum, in which he was joined by Mark; and postponing his breakfast until he should have the opportunity of bringing down a kangaroo, which he did not doubt of being able to effect shortly, as the fresh marks of their passage were visible in the grassy gorge which they were traversing.

Leaving them to pursue their way, and to meditate on their mutually-resolved treachery towards each other, exemplifying the life of fear and distrust which criminals who take to the bush, sooner or later, invariably suffer, the course of this narrative turns to the fate of Helen and her fellow-captive.

CHAPTER XLI.

HELEN A PRISONER WITH THE NATIVES.

At the time when the natives attacked the two bushrangers near the sugar-loaf hill, Helen and the unfortunate Mr. Silliman had been made to lie down on the ground by Brandon while he stood behind the thicket towards which he had enticed his pursuers for the purpose of shooting them securely as they advanced.

It was from the accident of their recumbent position that the spears of the natives passed over their heads; and it was owing to the same circumstance, perhaps, that the savages, seeing them down, forbore to wreak their fury on them.

As the crowd of males pressed forward, driving back the white people, the females followed, not less cruel than the first, perhaps, in their treatment of their enemies, but who, on this occasion, were struck with the appearance of Helen, whom they were not long in discovering to be of the same sex as themselves.

At the same time they beheld the prostrate form of Jeremiah, and were surprised to observe that he had his hands tied behind his back; and they immediately guessed that so palpable an act of coercion had been committed by his enemies. But seeing that he was secured from doing any injury, and that he was entirely at their mercy, with the caprice not inconsistent with their wild natures and with their sex, they postponed putting him to death, with the intention of keeping him for the performance of certain ceremonies which, time out of mind, had been in usage with the original inhabitants of the country.

After poking at him, therefore, with their spears for a little while, to see, perhaps, how he would comfort himself under the infliction of that preliminary trial, they signified their desire that he should stand up, which he did accordingly, endeavoring by all the signs and gestures which he could think of to excite the compassion of these black furies.

At the same time others of the women assisted Helen to rise from the ground, when they proceeded to examine her dress with great curiosity, and showed a strong disposition to possess themselves of it, a preceeding which, if they had persisted in it, would rapidly have reduced the poor girl to the same primitive condition in that respect as themselves; but as the fight raged hotly, and as the guns of the white men continued to send forth their thunder they were too much alarmed and hurried in their movements to carry their design into execution.

Presently, also, the number of killed and wounded of their countrymen became so numerous, some of the balls fired by Trevor and the corporal hitting one or two of the native women, whom they wounded slightly, that the alarm of the females was too great to allow them to remain so close to the scene of action. They retired, therefore, to a little distance in the rear, compelling Helen to accompany them, and driving Jeremiah before them with the points of their spears, one or two of the younger girls not being able to restrain their laughter, notwithstanding the seriousness of the fight which was going on, at the curious grimaces

exhibited by that unfortunate gentleman, as he made little convulsive leaps in accordance with the application of the stimulating spears administered behind. Helen, however, did not lose her presence of mind, even in this urgent time of peril.

At first she succumbed to the natural terror of finding herself in the hands of savages excited to fury by the fierceness of the fight; but when she saw that the native women refrained from putting her to an immediate death, she gathered courage, and was inspired with the hope of being able to save herself, as Trevor and a supporter were at hand, combating for her rescue. No sooner, therefore, had their new captors stopped at the entrance of the forest, than she began to think of escaping. She communicated her intention to her companion:—

"Mr. Silliman, now is the time to make an attempt to join our friends; try to get your hands free; these are only women who are around us. Come towards me, and I will untie your arms."

Jeremiah was still loaded with the variety of articles which the uncommiserating Grough had packed upon him, and which prevented him from exercising much activity in his motions; but he endeavored to comply with Helen's intimation by sidling towards her with a shuffling step which the natives regarded with astonishment, not being able to make out whether it was the performance of a sort of wardance, or a natural mode of progression habitual with the white people. They suffered him, therefore, to place himself before Helen; but they no sooner perceived the object for which the white man's movement had been effected, than they interfered promptly with spears and waddies, and while some thumped Jerry as well as they could get at him through his manifold encumbrances, others threatened Helen with the points of their spears.

"Wait," said Helen, "till I can find an opportunity to release you; then cast aside your load, and snatch some of their own weapons from the women, and let us fight for our lives."

"I will fight for you, miss," replied Jeremiah, "till I die! But what can we do against such a herd of black wretches! Those spears are uncommon sharp, although they are made only of wood; they are indeed! I have felt them!"

"Never fear the wounds that a wooden spear can make," replied Helen; "we must fight for our lives, and try to join those who have come to rescue us."

"You see, miss, I can do nothing with my hands bound behind me this way; and that ugly rascal has tied them so strong and so tight, that it is impossible for me to loose them myself. But never mind me, miss; try to save yourself. They would not hurt you, perhaps. Suppose you ran off and kept round to the left, so as to avoid the natives and join your friends. Anything is better for you than to be killed and eaten by these savages, for they are all cannibals, I can tell by the looks of them! One old woman," pointing with his head to a venerable lady of terrific aspect, who had been eyeing Jerry in a very affectionate manner, "has been looking at me in a very odd

way! We shall both of us be eaten, miss, if the savages get the better, that's certain."

While Jerry was speaking, two or three of the natives with faltering steps were seen coming over the narrow space of plain between the scrub and the wood, and at the sight of their wounded countrymen, the women set up a wail of sorrow, and looked fiercely at their white prisoners, whom they were about to put to death. But the old woman, whom Jerry had already remarked as regarding him with longing eyes, which he construed into an excessive desire to eat him, interposed, as it seemed, with authority, and prevented them. She said something to her companions, and pointed to the spot where the sound of the guns and the shouts of the fighting natives were heard; and the rest of the women submitted with deference to her command.

She had greater difficulty in holding back the bleeding natives from taking their revenge on the white people in their power; and, although they were bleeding and faint from their wounds, they exhibited a ferocious determination, which made Helen turn pale and Jeremiah cry out with fright.

But the old woman stood before the prisoners, and, with arms upraised, vociferated with an energy and a volubility which betokened that she was an adept in the management of that most fearful of all weapons—a woman's tongue! Besides, it appeared that she had some pretensions to be obeyed, for the women listened to her with deference, and made no attempt to support the assault of the wounded males.

Whether their wounds, therefore, by producing faintness and weakness, made the men less firm to their resolves, or that they were fairly mastered and borne back by the eloquence of the old woman, they desisted, for the present, at least, from their determination, and laid themselves down on the ground; while some of the native women, to whom they were attached by particular nearness of kin or other ties, endeavored to stop the bleeding of their wounds by such simple means as their little knowledge suggested.

But now the firing, which had been very sharp, ceased, and the whole body of natives fled through the covert towards the wood, bearing with them some of their wounded companions. It was fortunate for Helen, at this moment of their exasperation after defeat, that she had been taken possession of by the females, at the head of whom was the old woman, who extended her protection also to the white man; but it was not less fortunate for Jeremiah that he had his hands still tied behind him; for, in that condition, he presented no provocation to the men, who, seeing that he was incapable of defending himself, or of acting on the offensive towards themselves, hesitated to use their waddies on his skull—which was, besides, protected by the load of goods which surmounted his head and shoulders. Without delaying to make inquiries, however, as to how the white man and woman got there, or why their lives had been spared by those who had them at their disposal, the black man, who acted as the chief of the party, gave the signal for immediate retreat.

Upon this, without noise, the whole of the

sable troop made their way rapidly through the forest, the men supporting such of the wounded as they could hastily convey with them, and the women leading the van, with Helen and Jerry in the midst, whom they forced forward, notwithstanding their resistance and the urgent appeals which Helen despairingly made to be left behind. Seeing the difficulty with which the white man walked with his hands tied behind him, one of the women released him from his bonds.

Thus was Helen exposed to a new peril, the more to be dreaded as it was uncertain, and that she could expect no mercy from those who had so severely suffered from the thunder of the white people in the disastrous fight. Poor Jerry already considered himself as roasted and eaten; and the wretched Helen doubted whether instant death would not be the mildest fate to which she could be condemned. In this way they traveled without stopping for the remainder of the day.

When the darkness of the night came on, although the moon afforded light enough to travel for those who were acquainted with the country, the natives stopped. This halt Helen thought a fortunate circumstance, and she determined to take advantage of the opportunity, and endeavor to escape.

CHAPTER XLII.

A NATIVE BIVOUAC.

THE natives had divided, before reaching their resting-place for the night, into two bodies; one of them proceeding towards the north, and the other body, by whom Helen and Jeremiah were detained, continuing their course in a westerly direction. The latter party consisted of about twenty males and nearly the same number of females, but there were no children, which made Helen conjecture that they had not yet arrived at their place of ultimate destination.

The spot which they had fixed on for their encampment was a deep dell, shut in by high hills on either side, partially covered with wood. There was a spring of water near the bottom, at which the natives drank copiously, and Helen and her fellow-prisoner, following their example, did the same, their captors not seeming to take much heed how they disposed of themselves. This apparent neglect seemed to favor Helen's project to escape.

The men now busied themselves in erecting their breakwinds from the bark of the trees which were at hand; but they made them, as Helen remarked, of very scanty dimensions, and they were insecurely put together. The women set themselves about collecting dry wood for fires, of which they made eight or nine heaps opposite the breakwinds. Their next labor was to kindle a fire, for the two lighted sticks, always carried cross-ways by one of the party, had been extinguished in the confusion consequent on the fight, and it was necessary to raise a flame in the manner practised by the natives on such occasions.

Two or three of the party searched for a piece of dry wood suited to their purpose, which one of them soon found. This was placed on

the ground and held firmly, while one or two more stood round ready to alight the flame, when kindled, with dry leaves and bark, scraped into very thin shavings.

In the mean time, another native had prepared a pointed piece of wood, about eighteen inches long, and an inch or an inch and a half in diameter. This piece of wood he took care to select from a dead branch, choosing, in preference, a piece of the stringy bark tree.

A hole was now indented in the first piece of wood with a hard stone, and the end of the second piece, previously pointed with a stone axe, inserted in it. One of the natives now took the piece of pointed wood between his hands, and, with a rapid motion, turned the point inserted in the cavity of the other piece of wood backwards and forwards, as if he was trying to bore a hole. This manoeuvre he continued for nearly a minute, and when his hands began to get weary, another native relieved him, and then the second was relieved by a third, and so on, never allowing the friction of the two pieces of wood to cool down, till at last they elicited fire.

As soon as this took place, the dry leaves and bark shavings were pressed around the point of contact, the natives assisting the nascent conflagration with their breath, lying down on their bellies to blow the fire into flame.

By this ingenious process, in the course of about half an hour they procured a light, with which they ignited the dry heaps of wood previously collected, and in a few minutes the dell was illuminated with the light of their numerous fires.

While this was going forward, Helen thought that, the whole of the party being so busily occupied, now was the time to escape. She communicated her intention in a few words to her companion, and directed him to ascend the steep hill on one side, while she did the same on the other, and to join her at the entrance of the glen, about half a mile distant.

Jeremiah readily acquiesced, although he had little hope of escaping from so many enemies; and they immediately began to carry their plan into effect.

Helen sauntered leisurely up the hill on her side, while Jeremiah did the same on his, looking about them in the dusk as if they were examining objects here and there from curiosity. In this way Jerry had nearly reached the appointed opening, when, on turning a bushy mimosa tree, he beheld, to his horror, two great eyes, which, from the contrast with the black face, seemed to him preternaturally white, staring at him from the other side.

He had sufficient presence of mind not to call out, but he endeavored to catch sight of Helen, which he presently did; and he observed, at the same time, that a dark form followed her, which was visible to him as he surveyed her progress sideways, but which to her, doubtless, had been concealed. He guessed at once that he had been dogged by a native, as he saw Helen was followed; but as it was incumbent on him to endeavor to join her at all events, he stepped on boldly, taking no notice of the spy by whom he had himself been watched.

"Courage," said Helen, in a low voice, as soon as she became conscious of his approach, "we may yet be saved!"

"You are followed by one of the natives," replied Jerry, in the same low tone, "and so am I. We are discovered."

"Could you not catch hold of the one behind you and secure him?" said Helen, with desperation.

"It would be folly, miss; the two would only set up a howl which would bring down the whole gang on us. Better go back as we came."

"We cannot help it," said Helen, after a short pause; "but it is hard to surrender ourselves again to the mercy of the savages: but, as it must be so, our best course is to go quietly back again . . ."

"It would be better to go back together," interposed Jerry; "it will seem more natural—as if we had been looking for each other."

"Perhaps so;—and it may remove any suspicion that they may have of our meditating an escape, so that we shall have the better chance another time. Come, we must return."

They returned, therefore, together, the two natives following them closely, but without making any attempt at concealing themselves, as they had done previously. Jeremiah, wishing to take a survey of them, perceived, by the light of the moon, that one of them was a man, and that the other was the same old woman who had interfered in his behalf before. As he had no idea of her having any other design on him than to eat him, the present evidence of her inclination in keeping him so pertinaciously in view, aggravated his painful anticipations.

During their departure, the natives had succeeded in catching some opossums, generally to be found in great abundance scampering about the trees on moonlight nights, and which were now scorching on the various fires. The women also contributed their store of gum, which they had been diligent in collecting during the march, and which they had gathered from the acacia trees as they passed, bit by bit; each woman sticking the whole of her fragments together as she proceeded, so as to make a round mass as big as a cricket-ball, which she placed in a little net about as large as a small landing-net, made from the flexible fibres of the stringy bark tree, and which she carried suspended round her neck.

Of these balls of gum, some big and some little, they produced nearly twenty, most of which they threw on the fires to simmer. The old lady who had taken Jerry under her particular protection, brought part of a singed opossum and a small ball of hot gum to the prisoners, as they sat, side by side, on the grass. Helen received the edibles with signs of thanks; but the opossum had a disagreeable smell, and the gum was boiling hot, so that the delicacies remained untouched.

Jerry now reminded Helen that he had a store of provisions more congenial to their tastes in the knapsack of the bushranger, besides a variety of articles which might be useful in propitiating the natives. They discussed, for some time, the propriety of opening

their wares, not a little surprised that the savages had not already laid violent hands on them; but there was a reason for that, as they discovered afterwards.

It was agreed, however, that they should make use of the biscuit and the tea and sugar, of which Jerry was the bearer; and he began to unfasten the knapsack for that purpose. But he no sooner manifested his intention "to break bulk," as the nautical term is, than the same old woman came briskly up to them, for they were sitting by themselves—in the centre of the black groups, indeed, but unmolested by their masters. The old woman seemed at first inclined to forbid the opening of the knapsack, but curiosity most likely prevailing, she suffered the white man to proceed.

Jerry, therefore, produced from the reservoir some biscuit, and some tea, and white loaf-sugar. The old woman gazed at these articles very earnestly, but did not offer to touch them.

He then unpacked from his stores two pannikins, and a small tin tea-kettle. These articles, also, the old lady regarded with much admiration, and she waited to see their uses.

Jerry made signs to her to signify that he wanted the kettle filled with water. This the woman readily comprehended, and she called out, in a loud voice, to the women who were grouped together at a fire behind those where the men were assembled. At the sound of her voice a tall female native immediately came forth, and stood before her.

The old woman said something to her in a tone of command, which the other promptly obeyed; for, taking up the kettle, she proceeded to the spring and filled it with water, with which she returned, lifting up her legs on high, and with a very grave aspect.

This command, and the ready obedience which followed it, made Helen and Jeremiah surmise that the old lady was some person possessing authority; but what the nature of her rank or power was, they could not understand.

Jerry now poured some of the water from the tea-kettle on the ground, an act which the old woman beheld with much surprise, as she could not comprehend the reason of his wasting water, which had been fetched at the cost of some trouble; and when Jerry put into the remaining water half a handful of tea, and placed the tea-kettle on the fire, the old woman's surprise increased; for she expected, of course, that the strange thing, for of metal she had no idea, would be burnt. But when the kettle boiled, and steam issued from the spout, the native could not restrain her astonishment, and she uttered a sound difficult to express in writing, but nearly resembling the neighing of a horse. This exclamation quickly brought around her the whole body of the natives, both men and women, who gazed at the phenomenon of the boiling water, with the most lively expressions of wonder.

Jerry now offered the canvass-bag containing the white sugar to Helen, together with a pannikin. Helen selected a small lump, which she put in her pannikin, and Jerry poured on it some of the boiling tea from the kettle. As the water was ejected from the spout, the crowd

shouted with admiration, but they did not fail to observe that it was changed in color, a circumstance which seemed to give rise to much comment among them. One of the men, who was standing close to them, seized the bag of sugar, which he was about to dispose of in some way, when the old woman snatched it away from him, giving him at the same time a sound rating, in which she seemed to be a great proficient, for the man hung down his head, and slunk back behind the others. She then restored the bag to Jerry.

Jerry wondered who this important old lady could be, who seemed to exercise so powerful a control over the tribe; and as he judged it was of importance to propitiate so dignified a personage, although she was as little encumbered with robes of royalty or any other robes as the rest of the black community, he took from the bag a tolerably big lump of sugar, and presented it to her with much ceremony.

The old lady hesitated for a moment or two before she took it; but when she had it in her hand she viewed it with much indifference, mistaking it for a piece of chalk, of which there is plenty to be found in some parts of the island. In order to satisfy herself on this point, she called to her one of the men, who stooped down, and on whose back she attempted to make a white mark with the stuff. But as the sugar was hard and serrated, and as the old woman's hand was vigorous, instead of producing the pigmental effect which she expected, it only excoeriated the black man's back, who uttered a loud roar from the smart, which was greeted with the general merriment of his brethren.

The old lady smelled at the white stuff, but that gave her no information. She then handed it to the native who stood near her, and he smelled it, and handed it to the next, who passed it on to the others, and so they all smelled it, but no one of them could make anything of it; and the white stuff was returned to Jerry.

Jerry then took another little bit, which he put into his mouth and ate, making signs to the old woman to do the same, but she shook her head, and declined to make the experiment.

While this examination of the lump of sugar was going on, Helen had been sipping her tea from the pannikin, and soaking her biscuit in the hot liquid, in which refection she was accompanied by Jeremiah. As soon as he had finished his pannikin of drink, Jerry put into it the piece of sugar which had been submitted to the examination of the natives, and poured on it some of the boiling tea from the kettle. He then handed it to the old woman.

The old woman took it; but as she took hold of it by the rim and not by the handle, she burnt her fingers, and let it fall to the ground, the hot liquid scalding the legs of several besides her own, as it was scattered about.

Jerry, however, poured her out another cup; but as she would not take hold of it a second time, he placed it on the ground close by her side. She popped her finger into it, but soon took it out again, uttering a cry of pain!

Then all the natives would put their fingers into it to try the experiment, those who tried it first urging on the others to try it also, and taunting the backward ones, especially the women, for their timidity; much in the same

way as children, who have experienced an electric shock, endeavor to persuade others to feel the same sensation.

When the mirth which the hot tea had given rise to had subsided, the natives turned their attention to the biscuit which the white people were eating; and Jerry offered some of it to the native who was nearest to him.

The native took it, and, as usual, first smelled it, and passed it round to the others, by all of whom it was smelled in turn; but not one of them would taste it. They exhibited a strong desire, however, to examine the contents of Jerry's knapsack; but this was authoritatively refused by the old lady, who rose from her sitting posture, and spoke some words to the assembled crowd, pointing to the west, which had an immediate effect upon them; and they forthwith retired to their separate fires, crouching behind their breakwinds.

Helen and Jerry also, on their parts, seeing that there was no present harm intended to them, and that the fate of themselves and their valuables was postponed, for some reason which they could not divine, were inclined to rest; and Helen endeavored to make the old woman understand that she was desirous of retiring to the sleeping-place of the women, which she observed was arranged by a fire apart, and at some distance from the fires of the men.

The old lady at last understood her signs, and prepared to conduct her to the female department of the encampment; but first, she called out to the men, and one of them having appeared, she said something to him, the meaning of which was evident from his behavior; for the native at once established himself in the immediate vicinity of Jeremiah, and lying down on his belly, watched him as an intelligent dog does an article of property, that he has been set to guard.

The looks of the black fellow were by no means agreeable to Mr. Silliman, but fatigue soon weighed him down so heavily that he forgot natives, and bushrangers, and all, and slept on the bare earth as if on a bed of down. Helen also courted sleep for the sake of the strength which it would restore to her, and in a short time the whole of the party, with the exception of the two who kept watch over the captives, were fast asleep. For many hours the two prisoners slept profoundly, nor thought, nor dreamed of the new adventures which the morrow was to bring forth.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE PASSAGE OF THE RIVER.

At the first dawn of day the natives were on the stir, and as they had no toilet duties to perform, and no portmanteaus or carpet bags to pack, they were ready to start as soon as they had got on their legs; an absence of ceremony which gave them a decided advantage in traveling. Before they set out, however, Helen made another attempt to leave them, and she beckoned to Mr. Silliman to accompany her; but they had no sooner made a few steps towards the entrance of the glen, than they found themselves followed by the same old woman and the same man who had watched them the night before.

Abandoning an attempt, therefore, which it was plainly useless to persevere in, Helen thought that she might be able to purchase their release by voluntarily presenting the natives with the stores and articles carried by her companion; but on their attempting to unpack the goods, they were immediately checked by the old woman, who gave them to understand that the articles were not to be touched at that time; an intimation with which they were obliged to comply.

Sorrowfully, therefore, and, as Jerry complained, without any breakfast but dry biscuit and cold water, they accompanied the natives on their journey, which Helen conjectured was homewards, as the movements of the natives were in one determined direction, and as they seemed to have no other thought than to reach the place of their destination.

In this way, and without stopping, they traveled the whole of the day, in a slow and sauntering manner; the women employed in collecting gum, and the men occasionally ascending a tree to capture an opossum, the presence of which animal, as Helen remarked, they were able to detect by its scent, their organs of smelling being remarkably acute, and, in that respect, bearing a strong resemblance to those of the inferior animal creation.

They saw plenty of kangaroos in their route, but the natives did not exert themselves to chase them; but they caught many kangaroos and bandicoots. The old woman presented one of the latter to Helen, who was surprised to find the furry coat of the creature, which was about as large as a small badger, come off as she handled it, as if there was no power of cohesion between the hair and the skin.

The old woman endeavored to make her understand that it was very good to eat, and Helen expressed her thanks in the best way she could; but she was by no means in the humor to study objects of natural history, and her uneasiness increased at every step which she made further in the interior, as it augmented the difficulties of her escape. She was at a loss also to imagine what it was that the natives intended to do with her. They offered her no violence, and all the restraint that they put on her was to prevent her from quitting them. But whether she was reserved to be put to death in some solemn manner, or in accordance with some religious ceremony, she could only conjecture; and such a conjecture was by no means calculated to enliven the tediousness of the way.

As for poor Jeremiah, he had made up his mind, with a sort of desperate resignation, as to what his fate would be, and he could not refrain from expressing his lamentations in the most disconsolate terms to the more strong-minded Helen. He had read in some book of travels, that it was the practice with all savages, either to eat the enemies whom they had taken in battle on the spot, or to offer them up to their gods as victims of sacrifice; and as he could not possibly conceive what other use they could make of him, he had no doubt that such was the honor reserved for his especial glorification.

Helen endeavored to restore the courage of her fellow-captive, by remarking that there was

no appearance of any religious ceremony being in use among the tribe of natives with whom they were traveling; that they did not pay any sort of worship to any being, visible or invisible; nor did she observe any one of them with any appearance of being a minister of religion.

But her arguments failed to convince Jerry; he was sure, he said, that it was intended that he should be sacrificed; and as to the gum which they were so officious in offering to him, it was only to fatten him up for the grand occasion; and the old woman looked, as he averred, as if she could eat him at any time, without salt or pepper.

"But before they shall do that," added Jerry, valorously, "I will have a fight for it! But my greatest trouble is about you, miss; I don't suppose they will eat you; for they must see that you are not one to fight them—and a woman, they say, is respected even by savages. At any rate I will fight for you, miss, if I only had a weapon—a gun or a pistol—till I died! I would, indeed! and I wouldn't mind death, unpleasant as it is under any circumstances, if I could only save your life!"

Helen thanked the kind-hearted Jeremiah for his generous intentions, and in this interchange of sentiments, which, after all, had a certain charm for Jerry, for he had never been in such close communion with the beautiful Miss Horton before, they beguiled their journey; passing over a variegated country of hill and dale, till they arrived at the bank of a broad and rapid river, a few miles from the dell which they had left, and which was the same which the bushranger had discovered from the top of the sugar-loaf hill.

The natives did not seem at all embarrassed at this obstacle; but an immense deal of jabbering took place in making preparations for passing it. It was about twenty yards broad, flowing in a southerly direction in a plain of luxuriant but coarse grass, bearing the marks of being periodically flooded. The women, on this occasion, sat down on the turf by the margin of the water, taking no part in the work—which was performed exclusively by the men; but they endeavored to forward the undertaking, it seemed, by much gratuitous advice, all talking together with considerable vehemence, and great gesticulation.

The men, meanwhile, set about constructing two bark canoes, but as they had only a stone axe to work with, the incision of the bark, in the first instance, was an operation of much difficulty, as the bark of nearly all the trees in Van Diemen's Land is very thick and tough. Jerry, observing the operose nature of their work, and thinking this was a favorable opportunity for being useful, made his way to them, and requesting them by signs to stand back, drew out an axe, which was one of the articles of which he was the bearer, but which had been concealed under his coat. He soon made manifest the superiority of the white man's tools; but his interference was interrupted by the eternal old woman, who made signs to him to discontinue his assistance, as, for some reason which he could not comprehend, his axe was forbidden to be made use of.

This restriction puzzled Jeremiah exceedingly. But the men were not so submissive to

the mysterious authority of the aged female as before. One of them took the axe from Jerry's hand, very unceremoniously, and examined it attentively, admiring the sharp edge, and wondering at the hardness of the metal. He passed it round to his fellows, who, although they saw plainly enough that it was an instrument made to cut with, could not make out of what stuff it was made, as they were entirely unacquainted with the use of iron.

An immense quantity of talk ensued, and one who seemed to have some previous knowledge of the instrument, harangued the others at great length, as it seemed, in explanation of the white man's axe. The native who had taken it from Jerry, and who seemed to exercise the chief authority over the tribe next to the old woman, then proceeded to use it, which he did with great dexterity; and as the keen edge penetrated into the bark, and effected at one stroke an incision which it took many repeated blows of the rude stone instrument of the natives to perform, the black fellows set up a shout of admiration, and capered round the tree in excessive delight.

The necessary planks of bark, by means of this effective auxiliary, were quickly separated from two trees fit for the purpose, and the two ends of each being tied up so as to fashion the pieces of bark into the shape of two canoes, they were pushed into the water. But a bright thought now seized Jerry, who, seeing the success of his first essay at pleasing the natives, was prompted to a fresh display of his ingenuity.

He was furnished with more than a hundred yards of whale line, which the forethought of the bushranger had provided, and which was now found particularly useful, so that Jerry in his glee remarked to Helen "that the burthen which had so long plagued him would turn out after all the best load he had ever carried; and," as he philosophically observed, "that there was no knowing what was best for us in this world, for that which seemed most burdensome often turned out most useful in the end."

Jeremiah now assumed an air and attitude of authority, in which he was supported by his ally, the old woman, who seemed curious to know what were his intentions. He made signs to the natives to remove to the edge of the river several pieces of dead timber, which he fastened together with a part of his cord so as to form a tolerably large and secure raft, capable of bearing a dozen persons, and which, by the united strength of the whole party, was launched into the water and held fast. He then divided his whale line into two lengths, and tied one of the cords to one end of the raft and one to the other. The natives regarded all these preparations in silence, but with great attention.

He then, by signs, directed a "black fellow" to take hold of the end of one of the lines, and transport himself with it in a bark canoe to the other side of the stream. He had some difficulty in making him understand what he wanted him to do; but at last the native comprehended his meaning, and he and another, having provided themselves with a long pole each, by way of an oar or punt-stick, stepped lightly into the fragile boat, and one sitting at either end of it, they quickly pushed themselves over to the other side.

When both of the men were in the canoe,

Helen observed that it was nearly under water, so that it was impossible for more than two to be conveyed in the same boat at a time, and the slightest motion seemed to endanger its being overturned; but the two natives balanced themselves and managed their extempore craft with wonderful dexterity, and showed no signs of fear at such a ticklish mode of water-carriage.

In the mean time, Jerry intimated, by signs, that two more natives were to cross over, which they did. He then got on the raft with Helen, first putting the end of the other rope into the hand of another native on the bank, in order that the raft might be hauled back for the conveyance of more passengers.

He endeavored to prevail on some of the women to accompany them, but they all hung back and refused to try the experiment;—they could not make out why the cords were tied to the wood on the water.

The men on the other side now readily comprehended that their part was to pull the raft over the stream, which they did easily, the rapidity of the current assisting them; and Jerry and Helen were safely landed on the other side. A wild scream of admiration sprung from the assembled blacks as they beheld the success of this manœuvre; and those on the side which the raft had left, now seeing the reason of the two cords, quickly pulled the raft back, and by this means the whole party passed over quickly, and without accident.

Jeremiah, vastly pleased with his exploit, and trusting that, if the natives found his services useful, they would refrain from devouring him, or, at any rate, that they would postpone that ceremony for some time, which would give him the chance of escaping, now untied the cords from the raft, and as they were wet and uncomfortable for him to carry, he parted them off into coils, which he placed round a young native's neck, who permitted him to do so without resistance, and, on the contrary, seemed rather pleased to be selected for the honorable distinction.

Helen now conceived hopes, from the pacific treatment which they had already received from the natives, and from their present demeanor, that she should be able to induce them to conduct her to some settlement; but she perceived that there was some particular reason for their taking her with them; and she guessed that there was some native of higher authority before whom she was to appear, and on whose decision her fate rested. In the mean time, she resolved to bear her present lot with all the fortitude that she could bring to her aid; and she determined to avail herself of the opportunity to observe the manners and customs of her new associates closely, as well for her general information, as to enable her to take advantage of any good trait in their dispositions, or of their inclination to possess themselves of the mechanical tools of the white people, for the purpose of effecting her release. And she flattered herself, that she should be able to find the means of communicating to them the promise of a great reward of axes, nails, and various useful articles, on the condition of being restored to her friends.

Mr. Silliman being of the same opinion, and being considerably elated at his own readiness of invention, and great cleverness and ingenuity in

respect to the construction of the raft, they became less depressed. They were inclined almost to be cheerful at the prospect of the speedy liberation which they promised themselves, and the remainder of their journey was performed with less anxiety than at first.

They had to cross two more small streams before they stopped; one of them they passed by means of a natural bridge formed of a tree which had fallen conveniently across the water; the other they waded through. Jerry could not avoid remarking on the inconvenience of having clothes on in the latter case; and in this respect, he said, he was bound to concede the superiority to the natives; wondering, at the same time, "if their masters would oblige him and Miss Horton to adopt the national custom in that respect, which," he observed, "would be very obliingly to one not used to it."

Helen had her own misgivings on that point, but she said nothing, as indeed it was an awkward subject to converse on; but it is due to Mr. Silliman to record that he practised the most gentlemanly reserve towards his companion in captivity, being actuated as much by his own kindness of heart, as by habitual respect for Miss Horton; so that the poor girl was saved from much that was disagreeable by the unobtrusive assiduousness of his attentions.

They had now proceeded about twenty miles, and the sun had for more than two hours declined in its course. It was very hot, and Helen was much fatigued; Jerry, too, was tired with his journey. The old woman observed they walked with difficulty, and raising her voice, she caused the whole party to halt, and the natives assembled around her.

She spoke to them a few words, and by her pointing to the north-west, Helen guessed that she was giving some directions in respect to that quarter. And her anticipation was presently confirmed; for after a little consultation among themselves, nearly all the natives continued their march, leaving behind them only the old woman who had taken special charge of the captives, and another young girl, with three of the men, among whom was the one bearing round his neck the coils of whale line placed there by Jeremiah.

This arrangement having been effected, the old lady intimated to her prisoners, that they might rest where they were, which happened to be in a pleasant clump of cedar trees on a platform of sandy land, raised about six or eight feet above a grassy plain, on the edge of which they were reposing. Under their feet, and at the bottom of the bank, which was extended like a wall for some distance right and left, ran a shallow brook of water not more than two or three inches in depth. Towards the west there was a ridge of continuous hills of considerable height, and at a distance on their left were to be seen the craggy summits of lofty mountains.

Helen endeavored to ascertain how much further they had to go; but although it appeared that the old woman understood the meaning of the signs which she made, Helen could not understand what the black lady said in reply, although the native, in order to make herself more intelligible, repeated her words several times, and pronounced with great earnestness the syllables "Walloo-wombec." But what this

"walloo-wombec" was, whether it was the name of a place or of a person, neither Helen nor Jeremiah could make out. It seemed, however, that on this "walloo-wombec" depended in some manner their future destiny.

As they could not help themselves, however, they determined to make the best of circumstances, and Jerry set the natives to cut down boughs and to place them so as to form a tolerable bush hut for Helen, and another for himself at a little distance. His tea-kettle also was again put in requisition, and Helen was able to enjoy that which is considered in the bush as the greatest luxury. One of the native men caught a kangaroo-rat, which he gave to the prisoners, and Jerry, after dissecting it with his knife, roasted it at the fire which had been kindled, and tasted it. Finding it to resemble very much a wild rabbit, though much tougher and more sinewy and fibrous, he encouraged Helen to partake of it, which she did, after a little reluctance, with much satisfaction.

The night was now passed with less of discomfort than Helen had experienced since her life in the bush; and the next morning they were invited, as soon as daylight appeared, to continue their journey. The weather still continued fine and without rain, which was unusual at this season of the year, it being September, and the early part of spring, during which the periodical rains take place. They journeyed on that day about a dozen miles more, most of the country being flat, and only one or two high hills occurring during the whole of this route. In the afternoon, they came to a part of the country abounding in rocks and ravines, wild and barren, and seemingly unfitted for the habitation of anything but wild beasts.

They toiled through half a mile of this rugged district, when, on surmounting a low green hill, they suddenly found themselves within sight of the sea, while to their right stretched a sheltered dell of the most picturesque description, and which they observed was sheltered from the sea, which they judged was not more than a mile distant, by a high ridge forming a natural barrier to the vale within.

Having been allowed to enjoy the pleasure of this view for some minutes, their conductor urged them forward, giving them to understand by signs that they had arrived at the end of their journey. Both Helen and Jeremiah were now seized with much anxiety and fear; for the moment had arrived when their fate—for good or ill—was to be decided.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A NATIVE CHIEF.

DESCENDING a gentle declivity for about two hundred yards, they were led by the old lady, who acted as mistress of the ceremonies, into the bosom of the valley, which was bordered by dense forests of the stringy bark tree, whose tall and leafless-stems had a naked and gloomy appearance. In the centre of the valley ran a small rivulet, on the borders of which, on either side, Helen perceived groups of natives.

As she approached nearer, she observed that one of them was sitting on the log of a tree apart from the others, who were standing or

lying about near the fires, which were burning in all directions. Presently, she was able to distinguish that the native on the log was an old man; apparently very old; and it struck her immediately, although she could not tell why, that the other natives demeaned themselves with a sort of deference to the aged black man; although there was no sign of royalty or chieftainship about him, and the only robe of royalty he wore was, like the other natives, the garb of nature.

Helen remembered to have read something of the "natural dignity of man," and of "beauty when unadorned being adorned the most," &c. She was decidedly of opinion, however, that the natural dignity of man would have been assisted on the present occasion by that article of dress which, among ladies of white complexions, can never be more than distantly alluded to; and the same remark was applicable to the countrymen or subjects of his black majesty. As to the female part of his court, Helen could not but wish that their beauties had been adorned by some sort of covering of ever so little dimensions.

But the old lady, who was conducting her and her companion to the presence of the great man, did not seem to be at all aware that anything was wanting to the impressive nature of the reception. There was the sky and the sun above, and the earth and its waters beneath, and kangaroos, and opossums, and gum for food; and what was there to want more? The old lady, after all, was somewhat of a philosopher; but she carried out her philosophical notions of the fawness of the natural wants rather to the extreme! Poor Helen felt the present practical illustration of it most painfully. But there was no retreat! She was in the power of the natives, and she was constrained to abide by their will.

Mr. Silliman suffered also exceedingly, but it was from a different cause; not that he was unfeeling or indifferent to the extreme awkwardness of Miss Horton and himself being the only persons dressed at this sable party; his thoughts ran on being "dressed" in another way; for he feared this might be the chief or conjuror, for the especial gratification of whose appetite he had been reserved. It was with a shudder, therefore, of natural apprehension that he observed, whatever else of strength or beauty that important personage had lost, that the old gentleman had preserved his grinders, which were decidedly carnivorous! His mouth, also, was of most formidable dimensions.

The great man opened it deliberately, and said something to the old woman.

The old woman replied sententiously; and then, pointing to the old man, she said to his compulsory visitors:—

"Walloo-wombee!"

"What does she mean?" asked Jerry of Helen.

"She means, doubtless, that the name of that old man is the word she has pronounced; and as he seems to be the chief of the tribe, it will be prudent for us to please him."

"He is a most particularly ugly old rascal," replied Jerry. "Did you ever see such grinders?"

"Hush!" said Helen; "he is going to speak again."

The natives—men, women, and children—now gathered round, and looked on in silence.

In reply to some questions put from the log, the old lady, it seemed, explained to the "chief" the difference of the sexes of Helen and Jeremiah, for she pointed to Helen and then to a woman of her own tribe, and then to Jerry and to a male native. The old gentleman expressed a lively curiosity at this, and beckoned to Helen to come near to him. Taking hold of part of her dress with his black paw, he examined it with much wonder: he had never seen anything resembling it before. He directed the white woman, by signs, to take it off. His mistress of the ceremonies was about to render her aid, unasked, in this interesting operation, the issue of which was evidently waited for by the assembled natives with much interest.

Poor Helen was much embarrassed. She had a particular objection to being stripped, especially in the presence of such a numerous assemblage; but she feared also to offend the chief. In this dilemma, gently resisting the old lady's officious readiness to act as lady's maid, she pointed to Jerry, wishing to direct attention to his attire; and hoping that some lucky accident would prevent the necessity of her parting with her own. As soon as her desire was understood, it was at once assented to by the chief, who was wondering what the bundles borne by the white man contained. Jerry, therefore, was invited by very significant gestures to unpack himself. Helen, rejoicing at this diversion, assisted him with alacrity.

The first thing that attracted the chief's attention was the axe, of which he had received information from the natives who had preceded the prisoners, and which he forthwith tried, but with a very feeble hand, on the log which served him for his throne of audience. It might be difficult to say whether he entertained the same opinion of a throne as a great contemporary, who expressed a memorable opinion on that subject, but, at any rate, he treated it with as little ceremony.

Being satisfied with the qualities of the tool, he quietly dropped it on the ground behind him, as a perquisite to be appropriated to himself. He then pointed to the tea-kettle, the shape of which filled him with much curiosity. He turned it over and over, wondering, perhaps, of what sort of bark or wood it was made, and inquired the use of it.

The old lady, who acted as interpreter, immediately entered into an animated description of the boiling of the water; but as he could not comprehend the matter that way, he directed that the white people should proceed to explain its uses by practical illustration.

Jerry made some tea in it accordingly, and sweetened it with the white sugar, a substance which the old gentleman examined with particular curiosity. Observing that the white man put a bit of it into his mouth, the chief did the same, and seemed exceedingly gratified at its sweet taste; which was not altogether new to him, however, as the juice which exudes and crystalizes on a certain tree in Van Diemen's Land, similar to the sweet maple abundant in many parts of the United States of America, has a sweet taste, though sickly to a stranger, of which the natives are very fond.

Approving of the sugar as he had done of the axe, he intimated that the whole of it should be shown to him, which he seized on as a royal prize, and deposited it on the ground behind the throne. The tea-kettle he paid little regard to.

Animated by the discoveries he had already made of the white man's treasures, he expressed his desire, by very intelligible signs, that Jerry should proceed with his revelations.

Accordingly, that obsequious individual produced a stone bottle of rum, which the old gentleman smelt at, and put away with evident dislike.

A tinder-box was then displayed, which puzzled the great man exceedingly; but when Jerry struck sparks with the flint and steel, and ignited the tinder, the admiration of all present was violent in the extreme! It was immediately taken possession of by his majesty for the use of the state. Three pannikins, also, which formed part of Jerry's stores, were placed in the royal treasury.

They now came to Grough's knapsack, which Jerry, hitherto, had not had the opportunity of opening, and which that most unamiable person had added to his prisoner's load, with so little humanity, on the morning of the late Mr. Swindell's sudden decease.

The weightiest part of its contents was a huge bottle of brandy, which the chief rejected with the same antipathy as he had put aside the rum. Jerry next pulled out a handkerchief containing dollars, which the natives did not understand the value of; they were given to the children to play with.

Jerry then fished out of the knapsack a woollen bag secured by a string. He opened it, and, to his extreme delight, found a small pair of pocket pistols, with a flask full of powder, a couple of dozen balls, with spare flints, and apparatus complete. It had formed part of the major's personals, and had been secured by Mr. Grough for himself, at the time of the general plunder.

Helen was so rejoiced at the sight of the familiar weapons, that she could not refrain from a loud exclamation of gladness: for she felt that she now had, at her command, the means of defending herself from outrage, and perhaps of intimidating the savages.

The pistols were of exquisite make; and their quality was proved by their having preserved their primings so long a time, for, to Helen's still greater satisfaction, they were loaded. As a soldier's daughter, and a girl of spirit as she was, she was neither unacquainted with the use of such weapons, nor timid in availing herself of their protection. She took possession of them; therefore, as her legitimate right, and suspended the bag to her girdle, explaining in a few words to Mr. Silliman the part which she intended to act.

The old chief and the other natives observed her proceedings with much interest, and the old woman put out her hand to take the pistols from her, for the purpose of presenting them to the chief. But Helen shook her head, and pointed to the sky.

All the natives looked up at the sky; but as they saw nothing more than they had seen every day, they all looked down again and directed their eyes to the curious things in the

hands of the white woman. The old lady again made an attempt to possess herself of the pistols, but Helen pushed back her hands. The chief, who, it seemed, was not exempt from the general infirmity of royalty, now became impatient, and said some words in an angry tone, which excited his savage subjects, and his female prime minister advanced again.

But Helen, determined not to relinquish her protectors, thought that, by an exhibition of the power of the tiny fire-arms, she might succeed in overawing the natives so as to cause them to desist from their hostile intentions of wresting them from her by force. She again made a sign, therefore, for the natives to look up to the sky, wishing them to understand that the things which she held in her hand had some connection with the mysterious powers of the heavens; and while they were thus earnestly engaged, she discharged one of the pistols in the air, which, from its propinquity to their ears, produced an astounding report!

The effect of this unexpected "thunder" on the old chief was sudden and striking. Most of the other natives had heard the sound of the white man's thunder, and had witnessed its deadly effects; but the chief, from his extraordinary distance from any settlement, and from his great age, which had incapacitated him for some years past from joining his tribe in their customary migrations, never having experienced such a shock on his auditory nerves before, fell back with affright, and tumbled head over heels from his log, to the infinite consternation of the spectators!

Then all rushed towards him, which afforded to Helen the opportunity to recharge her weapons, which was expedited by the attentive Mr. Silliman.

The old man was lifted from the ground, and, happily for the prisoners, it was ascertained that he was more frightened than hurt, or the consequences might have been fatal to the thunder-makers on the spot. As it was, they were taken hold of by some of the natives, who bound Jerry with his own whale line, and placed him on the ground apart near a huge fire, which he had much the same satisfaction in contemplating as it might be supposed a sirloin of beef would have, if endowed with animation, in the same position, waiting to be roasted. Poor Jerry thought, to be sure, that his last hour was come! and whether the whole world was ultimately to be consumed by fire or not, that certainly he, as a fractional portion of living matter, was destined individually to experience that most disagreeable mode of corporeal annihilation!

But the effect on the chief, when he had sufficiently recovered his faculties to comprehend the cause of his sudden summer-set from his log, was most impressive and profound; and he was seized with the idea that the white people had really come from the sky, and that they had the power to wield the thunder and lightning which often visited them from above!

He regarded Helen especially as a superior being, from the wonderful whiteness of her skin, and from the absence of all fear, which he did not fail to remark was one of her characteristic qualities.

As to Jerry, whose dress, the chief remarked

was different from that of Helen, he conjectured that he was some inferior inhabitant of the same sky, fulfilling the office of attendant or slave to her, the superior one; but who, still, was to be regarded with the respect due to a creature attached to the person of one to whom he was inclined to pay superstitious veneration.

It is likely that this fortunate reverence of the old chief saved both their lives. Jerry was ordered to be unbound; while Helen was treated with extraordinary respect, being invited to sit on the log occupied by his majesty, and the whole of her goods borne by her slave were directed to be restored to her. But somehow, as Jerry remarked, they were subjected, with a curious similitude to more civilized courts, to so many deductions in the shape of perquisites by the way, that but little of the restituted property reached its legitimate destination.

Mr. Silliman, however, with much tact, took advantage of these favorable dispositions, and set the natives to work to build for Helen a commodious hut, formed of stakes and the boughs of trees, contenting himself with one of an inferior description at a little distance; a distinction which confirmed the natives in their idea of his subordinate capacity. He observed, however, that he and Helen were closely and constantly watched, so that escape seemed impossible, and to fight their way out from the boundaries of their confinement was an undertaking too rash to be attempted.

But not the slightest violence was offered to either of them; and, excepting that they were not allowed to leave the valley, no restraint was placed on their motions. On the contrary, the old chief was particularly pleased to have the white woman constantly by his side; and as he became familiarized to the presence of "the inhabitant of the sky," important state resolves took the place of his first fears of her preternatural powers.

But it is proper in this place, as the western tribe of natives occupies an important position in this narrative, to describe the person of their chief, not only for the sake of historical accuracy, but for the gratification also of the curious in such matters.

His majesty, "Walloo-wombée," had been originally very tall, and as straight as a stringy bark tree, but now was much bent with the weight of years. What his physiognomy originally had been, it would have been difficult to conjecture; but his visage, at the period to which this narrative refers, resembled that of a very old baboon. His body was thin and bony; his arms long and wiry; his legs like spindles, with long narrow feet, having projecting excrescences like the claws of a Boomah "kangaroo." His head, looking at it in front, seemed small from the lowness and narrowness of his retreating forehead: but seen sideways, it looked large and of an oblong shape from the projecting bump behind. In this characteristic it resembled the skulls of all the natives, which are remarkably thick; a quality which enables them to bear the thumps of their waddies, in their frequent combats, with a disregard to feeling which surprises an European. The whole frame-work of the old man, though now attenuated and feeble, exhibited the remains of extraordinary strength and agility; and it was to those qualities, most

likely, as is usual among savages, that he owed his elevation as chief of the tribe.

It must not be omitted, that on the occasion of the white people's reception, his grisly hair was profusely powdered with the dust of red ochre, and that his body was smeared over, in rough devices, with the same material mixed with resinous gum to help its adhesion.

It would appear from this, that even in the most simple and the rudest state, there is an innate propensity in the animal man to improve his personal appearance by the aid of art; for, doubtless, the care which had obviously been bestowed on the adorning of the chief, was supposed to add a finish to the natural dignity of his person, calculated to strike an awe in the beholder.

Such was the high personage on whose nod—or on whose waddie—the fate of Helen now depended.

The old lady, who was the daughter of this engaging individual, looked almost as aged as her parent, though she was, in truth, twenty years younger; and excepting her sex, and that her ugliness was infinitely more revolting in a woman than in a man, there was little difference between them. But as the hearts of the softer sex are proverbially more susceptible of the tender passion, than those of the male kind, it was she who first felt a flame for one of the prisoners.

The black Gorgon loved him as *Desdemona* loved *Othello*—that is, vice-versarily considered; but it must be confessed, that she had at first in her contemplation a different sort of passion—for she loved him because he was so fat! and as a familiar saying expresses it—although in the present case it had too literal an application—she loved him as if she could eat him!—a mode of exemplifying her partiality, which she had originally cherished with all the ardor of native ingenuousness!

But, as she could eat him—as she considered—at any time, her thoughts were gradually turned in another direction; and such is the force of mighty love! she, the daughter of a chief, resolved to raise him to the rank of her husband!

She had already had three. Two had been killed in battle; the other she had killed herself. She would willingly have tried a fourth; but no one of the tribe could be cajoled into accepting that distinguished but dangerous place; for she was strong and tough exceedingly! and was as expert as any one of the males in throwing the spear and in handling the waddie; a dexterity which she had acquired by much experience, and by the constant exercise of that primitive argument on the skull of her deceased husband. These unattractive traits in her character, added to her indomitable fierceness on all occasions when her will was thwarted, caused her to have more fearers than admirers among the gentlemen of her acquaintance.

The advent of *Jeremiah*, therefore, was really a godsend for the old lady;—it seemed that he had dropped from the sky for her on purpose,—and it was not long before she contrived by various endearing attentions to make the object of her attachment sensible of her preference. But Jerry was as inexorable as a tiger!

Filled with despair, the daughter of the royal

chief communicated her sorrow to her venerable papa, who having, himself, similar designs towards the white woman, was well-disposed to forward her inclinations.

The unhappy Helen, on her side, viewed the increasing partiality of the old savage with unspeakable horror, as it threatened a fate worse than death itself; so fatal, sometimes, to their objects are royal predilections!

CHAPTER XLV.

TREVOR SEEKS HELEN.

IN the mean time Trevor lay ill of the fever, occasioned by the irritation of his wounds. The excellent corporal attended on him with the most zealous assiduity. He fetched him the freshest water from the river, and boiled for him the tenderest morsels of kangaroo flesh. Gladly would he have made for him some of that delicious and nourishing soup, which, of "all the tails on the face of the earth," as he declared, that of the kangaroo alone could furnish with such luxurious relish.

But poor Trevor could eat nothing; and for three days water was his only drink. Nothing but the strength of his constitution, and the extraordinary salubrity of the climate, could have carried him through such an illness. And to this was added the still more depressing influence of his anguish of mind at the contemplation of Helen's fate, whom he sometimes pictured as lost and wandering in the bush, and at others in the power of the savages, of whose relentless cruelty he had heard so many horrible relations.

The corporal sat by his bush hut, employed for the most part in endeavoring to clean the rusty firelock left with him so mysteriously in exchange for his own, and furnishing it up with charcoal ashes, so as to give it a regimental appearance. Nothing, perhaps, but the necessity of being armed in his solitude, could have reconciled him to its use at all; and he lamented occasionally the absence of his own firelock in most dolorous terms, as a lover grieving for his mistress, which, at any other time, would have afforded the ensign considerable amusement.

At the end of three days, however, his officer showed signs of amendment; and Trevor no sooner felt the prostration of the fever abating, than he expressed his desire to proceed in search of Miss Horton. But this the corporal strenuously opposed; and Trevor's weakness was so great that he could not disguise from himself that such a course would be rash and useless. Besides, he considered that, for Helen's sake, it would be more judicious to give information to the major at the cave, or to the people on board the brig, of the fight with the natives, and the probability of her having been carried away with them; as the corporal, after the most diligent daily search, had been unable to discover any trace of her remains, or of those of Mr. Silliman. He flattered himself also with the hope that possibly Helen had escaped, and had found her way back to the bay.

Actuated by these considerations, he became anxious to reach the cave as soon as possible; and, although he could hardly walk, he determined to begin his journey back. In this determination the corporal entirely acquiesced, "for

he could not be worse off," as he remarked, than where he was, and "every step back was a step forwards," bringing them nearer to their friends.

Fortunately, although it was the beginning of the rainy season, the weather held up, and the nights were not cold; and as Trevor was now able to take food, and as there was no lack of kangaroos, he got on better than he expected; but it took him four days to perform the journey in his present state, which he had rapidly traversed in little more than one shortly before. But on reaching the cave, to his excessive mortification, and not less to the disappointment of the corporal, they could not see the brig; and, from the appearance of the cave, it seemed clear that it had been deserted!

The proclamation appended to the rock apprised them, however, that the authorities were active in pursuit of the bushranger, and Trevor could only hope that, by some lucky chance, in pursuing the absconded prisoners, they would meet with Helen; an opinion, however, in which the corporal did not agree, as he said, "that in the bush one man might search for another all his life, and never find him, unless he knew where he was;" an assurance which was by no means calculated to raise Trevor's spirits; but as the corporal was not in love, the dreary prospect of such a failure did not strike him so forcibly as it did his officer.

The question now was, what was to be done? The cave afforded shelter, the forests firewood, and the kangaroos supplied food;—but what was the use of remaining there; that would not help Helen. The corporal counseled their immediate return to camp; and observed that they could not miss the way, as they had only to keep within sight of the river Derwent on their right hand, and they would be sure to reach the town.

The road, however, could not fail to be difficult to a sick man. However, as the corporal professionally remarked, "as there was no help for it, all they had to do was to put their best foot foremost, and lose no time about it."

Trevor was still very weak, but inspired by the ardor of youth, and by his desire to give the earliest possible intelligence of Helen's danger, he at once decided to set out for Hobart Town. The journey was long and difficult; and it took him six days to perform the distance of forty miles, from the southern part of the coast where the bay was situate to the nearest station on his way to the town. He arrived there in a state so exhausted that it was necessary to procure a bullock-cart to convey him to his quarters, where at last he obtained the medical assistance which he so much needed.

The corporal reported himself to the commanding officer, and related succinctly the occurrences which it was expedient to make known, passing lightly over the event of the loss of his firelock, a circumstance on which the worthy corporal did not think it necessary to expatiate. He indulged himself, however, liberally in relating to his comrades that which he called his "scrimmage" with the natives.

Trevor, on his part, lost no time in making inquiries of the brig, and of the major and his daughters. He ascertained that the brig was anchored in the river near the jetty; that Louisa was under the care of a family in the town, at-

tended by a native girl, who had inspired much interest with the inhabitants; and that the major had started with a party in search of Helen, who was supposed to be in the power of the bushranger, and whose fate had excited the most lively commiseration.

His report of the probability of her having been carried away by the natives gave rise to fresh excitement, although it was generally deemed certain—an opinion which was industriously pressed upon Trevor—that she had been put to death by the savages, as they were never known to spare a white man or woman in their power.

Some few, however, had the consideration to say that, as Helen was a woman, the case was different; and that the natives might not think it necessary to take her life, and that perhaps she might be admitted into their tribe, and become the wife of one of the black fellows. This latter suggestion, it may easily be supposed, by no means calmed Trevor's apprehensions.

He asked for leave to go in search of her, a request which was readily granted; but here the medical attendant interposed, and positively forbade any attempt at traveling in his present state; and his commanding officer thought it his duty to exercise his authority to prevent him from exposing himself to the hardships of the bush, under circumstances which could not avail the young lady, and would certainly be fatal to the adventurer. Trevor, therefore, was compelled to bear his disappointment, and to nourish his grief in silence.

In his returning convalescence he was constantly in the society of Louisa, with whom it was a melancholy pleasure for him to converse about her sister; and to whom he could, without reserve, express his bitter wretchedness at her loss, aggravated, as it was, by his own inability to undertake the task of discovering her, if she was still alive.

He related to her over and over again all the circumstances of his fight with the natives, and the scream which he had heard from the thicket, and which he was certain, he said, had proceeded from Helen. And every day he discussed with her the likelihood of her having been carried off as a prisoner by the natives, or the possibility of her being even then a wanderer in the bush! Louisa listened to all these surmises with many tears.

The young female native who had so willingly accompanied her father, as Louisa informed Trevor, was often present at these conversations; and although she could not understand the cause of their trouble, she showed by her manner that she commiserated their distress, much in the same way as an attached dog looks up into the face of its master when he sees him troubled, and wags its tail, and shows an inclination to sympathize with his affliction, if he could only understand what the matter was, and how he could assist him. Such was the affectionate expression visible in the face of Oionoo.

It is to be observed, that Miss Oionoo was now decently clothed, her hair being profusely adorned with red ribbons, a color for which she manifested a particular predilection. It was with great difficulty, however, that she was persuaded to suffer herself to be encumbered with

any description of apparel; and she displayed so decided a partiality for the sailor's blue trousers, as allowing her more freedom of motion than petticoats, that she was permitted to retain them, as well from a desire to indulge her, as from considerations of propriety; as she was fond of tumbling about occasionally after a fashion that rendered nugatory the protection of female attire.

Nothing, however, could prevent her, at times, from throwing off the whole of her clothes, in order to disport herself at liberty in the garden attached to the house; in which she recreated herself in climbing up the fruit-trees, and in various gambols, which, however interesting they might be to a philosophical observer, from their charming aboriginal simplicity, were by no means consistent with civilized notions of female decorum.

By degrees she picked up a few words, and was able to express her wants, though, of course, very imperfectly, in English. She imitated the sounds of what she heard with great facility, but she could not so easily be made to understand their meaning.

Trevor, partly from good feeling, and partly to beguile the time, would often amuse himself with endeavoring to teach the poor creature to talk their language; and he endeavored to learn from her something about her countrymen, for he was exceedingly anxious to know if they would take a white woman to wife.

He observed that the native, in her endeavor to make herself understood, frequently pointed to the west; but it was a long time before he could understand what she meant by that action. The importance of it, however, to him, and to her who was most dear to him, will be seen in the course of this eventful history.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BUSHRANGER SEEKS HELEN.

ANXIOUS as Trevor was to hear tidings of Helen, and pained and mortified as he was to be prevented by illness from joining the expedition for her recovery, Mark Brandon was not less eager to find the girl on whom he had fixed his wild and lawless lust.

Maddened by her loss, he cursed the ill luck which had separated her from him at the moment when he had assured, as he thought, the destruction of her friends, who were advancing to her rescue, and had secured her for himself. He determined to follow her up at all hazards, for his absorbing passion so blinded him to all consequences, that he lost sight of his usual habits of caution, and was ready to risk life and liberty to regain possession of her.

But, if she had been carried off by the natives, as he expected, he should have need, he was aware, of the assistance of his brawny comrade in the enterprise: he was obliged, therefore, to bear the companionship of the treacherous rascal till his object was accomplished. In this mood he journeyed on with him towards the scene of their encounter with the natives.

This time, however, he forebore from going near the spot where Trevor was lying, and where the corporal, whom he and Grough saw at a distance, was watching. He might easily have shot them both; but as that would have

been a murder without an object, which was contrary to his "system," he passed on his way, intending to move round the point, and look for the tracks of the natives in their retreat.

He thought that he observed his companion eye the soldier in a way that indicated a desire to communicate with him; but whether it was that Grough thought the attempt too hazardous, and that he was likely to be shot by the corporal on the one side if he approached him, and by Brandon on the other if he left him, he went on without speaking. Mark, however, guessed his thoughts, and, as he said to himself, "made a note of it."

The tracks which the bushranger searched for were soon found, for the natives had been in too large a body not to leave a trail behind them, easy to be recognized by one so experienced in the bush.

The track led to the north-west, which was precisely the part into which the bushranger desired to penetrate. He looked out for some sign of Helen having been with them, hoping that she would have recourse to the same device to give information of her track as she had done before. In this he was disappointed, but after a few miles traveling he spied the mark of a little shoe. His heart leaped within him. It could be no other than the girl's foot, for the natives never wore shoes. He proceeded on his way with increased energy.

Grough had not observed the circumstance of the little foot, and Brandon did not think it necessary to tell him; besides, the former was too much occupied with his plans for seizing his friend and delivering him up for the reward to do more than mark the route which they were pursuing, in order that he might find his way back. To assure himself of this facility he began to notch a tree as a sign-post; but Brandon checked him.

Grough seemed at first inclined to rebel; but he suddenly assumed a demeanor of entire acquiescence in Brandon's better judgment. The bushranger was not deceived by the transparent duplicity of his fellow; but he made a "notch" in his memory of that circumstance too.

The pair went on side by side in seeming good fellowship; and they kept on the track till they came to the point where the body of natives separated, one tribe with Helen having gone one way, and the auxiliary tribe another. This was embarrassing. The bushranger stopped to deliberate.

Some suspicion seemed now to cross the mind of the obtuse Grough. What was Brandon's object in following the tracks of the natives? Had he become acquainted with any tribe in his former sojourn in the bush? What did he want with them? Grough was puzzled.

Brandon continued his search after some trace of Helen, but he could find none. After some thought, he followed the track to the right, leading to the north. Grough longed to ask the reason of his taking one track in preference to another, or of his following the track of the natives at all; but conscious of his own meditated treachery, he feared to put any question which might lead Brandon to doubt his confidence; Brandon, from the very absence of the question, drew the conclusion that his companion was hatching some trick against him; for if his in-

teations had been good, he would have spoken without hesitation. He congratulated himself that the brute thought he was outwitting him.

They continued their way, each mistrusting the other. By day the one watched the other at night neither would sleep lest the other should surprise him. At last, on reaching the top of a low hill, they suddenly discovered some natives on the plain beneath. At the same time they were themselves discovered, and the natives feeling confidence in the depth of their fastnesses, greeted them with a loud yell of defiance.

Spears were thrown, but Brandon did not heed them; he was intent on discovering some sign of Helen. The plain was open, and if she had been there, he could not have failed to perceive her; but he could see nothing of her. It was clear that he was on the wrong ascent; he stamped his foot with rage.

Grough observed the action with surprise; but he made no remark, for there was a something in Brandon's look that was dangerous; and the spirit of the less intellectual ruffian quailed before the mental ascendancy of his superior. But, as the natives advanced, it was necessary to check them.

Brandon had a double-barrel fowling-piece; Grough a musket.

"Fire!" cried out Brandon.

Grough hesitated; he did not like to leave himself without the protection of a charge; for he feared Brandon as much as he did the natives. But as the savages advanced closer, and their spears came thick, Brandon was obliged to fire in self-defence, and urged by the imminence of the danger, Grough fired also. The natives retreated immediately. Brandon's second barrel was undischarged, and Grough's barrel was empty.

"I'm done!" thought Grough.

But, to his extreme surprise, Brandon desired him to load again immediately.

"He doesn't suspect me, after all," thought Grough.

It was what Brandon intended him to think.

"We must retrace our steps," said Brandon.

Grough joyfully assented.

Brandon seemed irritable and moody, and was lost in thought.

They went on till they returned to the spot where the two tracks separated.

"This is our way," said Brandon, pointing to the track.

Grough demurred—

"What's your game, Mark?" he said; "what's the use of following the natives! We shall only get riddled with their spears some time, or have our skulls smashed in with their waddies! No use in running into danger. The natives won't help us to leave the island. Better go back towards camp and try to seize a boat or something."

"And be seized ourselves," replied Brandon. He reflected for a moment. Suddenly he said to Grough:—

"The natives have got the girl with them."

"The devil they have! How do you know that?"

"I know it; that's enough. We must get her again."

"What's the use of the girl when you have

got her! One girl is as good as another. Let us catch a native."

"You forget," said Brandon; "we want this girl as a hostage."

"As a what?"

"As a hostage—fool! As a pledge—to make terms with her father."

"Oh! that's another thing. But if the natives have got her, perhaps they want her for a pledge—or a hostage, as you call it—too, and they won't give her up."

"We must fight for it. If you don't like to stand by me, say so."

"Oh! I'll stand by you, Mark, my boy; never fear that. But I don't like the job, that's all I can say."

"Say nothing, then; and come on."

This course did not at all accord with Grough's private plans; but being an animal of one idea, he kept his mind steadily fixed on it, and that was to betray Mark, and get the reward. He kept on with him, therefore, trusting that the opportunity of mastering him would come at last.

They continued their way till dark; but as neither dared to sleep, from fear of the other, Brandon thought it would be a waste of time to stop. He had marked the "lie" of the country, and the direction of the track which pointed to an opening between some low hills. He thought he could not miss it, and he determined to travel all night, hoping to come up with the natives. But in this he made a mistake which he would not have committed in a calmer state of mind; for he knew very well that to attempt to track footsteps in the bush at night is always useless labor. But the irritation of his mind urged him on.

When the daylight came, he found that he was wrong. He was not on the track; and he could form no idea whether he had strayed to the right of it or to the left. His judgment, perhaps from want of rest, had become impaired, and his mental faculties enfeebled. He wandered about for many days, scarcely taking food, and with little sleep. He always removed to a distance from Grough and hid himself at night. He had become peevish and irritable; and Grough grumbled openly. Still the two kept together, for Brandon wanted Grough to make use of him, and Grough stuck close to Brandon to betray him. At last, however, they found the track again, and Brandon's spirits revived.

They followed it up until they came to the bank of the river over which Helen and Mr. Siliman had passed in the raft.

But the river, always rapid, was now swollen into a boiling torrent, and it seemed impossible to cross it at that place. The traces, however, of the natives who had been there many days before, were distinctly visible; and the trees at a little distance bore the marks of having been cut by a steel axe. But the river was for the present impassable. Brandon threw himself down on the grass, furious from disappointment.

But Grough was glad at the hindrance; and sat down at a little distance. Both remained in silence; and both were worn out with the fatigue of constant traveling, and from the want of refreshing sleep.

Brandon revolved in his mind all sorts of schemes for passing the river. He would have risked the danger of swimming across; but he could not dare to be without his fowling-piece. He thought of a bark-canoe after the fashion of the natives; but a glance at the roaring torrent convinced him that the attempt that way would be hopeless.

While he was thus engaged in cursing his ill luck, Grough was employed in thinking of his own schemes. He was heartily sick of his present life in the bush; there was no fun in it at all! Rather than keep out any longer in such a miserable way, he would almost prefer, he thought, to deliver himself up and take his chance. But as he thought, fatigue overcame him, and he fell asleep.

Brandon observed that his companion had been unable to keep his eyes open; it seemed that he was fast, and not likely to wake for some time; he was himself weary to exhaustion, and his eyelids were weighed down with an irresistible desire to slumber. He thought there could be no danger in getting a few winks—only for a few minutes. In fact, sleep he must—and he slept.

It was the first time in his life, as he afterwards remarked, that he had "given away a chance;" and dearly did he pay for it. But his thoughts were so intensely fixed on the prize in his thoughts, and on the difficulties in his path, that he forgot the danger that was near him.

The immediate cause, however, of the fate which presently befel the bushranger, was so remarkable, that to some, and not superstitious minds, it might have seemed the result of something more than chance; and that the reptile which appeared to play its part so opportunely was not an accidental agent in the tragedy of that eventful day.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

THE brutal and treacherous comrade of the bushranger slept uneasily, and he was disturbed with fearful dreams.

He dreamed that he was standing on the brink of a terrible precipice; above was a black cloud, thick, dark, and impenetrable; below was a depth, so deep that the eye could not scan the profundity of its abyss! Presently it seemed to him that the black cloud descended, and enveloped him in its shroud; then a mighty wind arose, and whirled him from the precipice, and he fell down—down—down,—while a terrible sensation of suspended breath caused him agony unspeakable! Suddenly he found himself at the bottom of the abyss, and strange creatures, of monstrous shapes, writhed around and over him. He struggled to rise, but his limbs had lost all power of motion, though his senses did not depart from him; and he felt the cold skin of some slimy reptile crawling over his face. So horrid was the sensation, that his mental agony caused him to awake; and then he became aware that part of his dream had been suggested by a reality.

One of the large black snakes common on the island was trailing itself over his face, and he instantly was seized with the fear that the crea-

ture had bitten him, and that he should die one of the most dreaded of all deaths; and at which wayfarers in the bush are most terrified. But the creature pursued its way, dragging along its loathsome body, and was lost in the long tufted grass by the side of the water.

The trembling wretch who had received this visitation, disturbed by his terrible dream, and hardly knowing whether he was alive or dead, sat up, shaking with fear, and bathed in a cold sweat, which chilled and benumbed him. Casting his eyes about, he beheld Brandon, stretched on the grass, and apparently sound asleep. The treacherous object of his subservient attendance now arose to his mind, and the paralyzing effect of the recent incident being shaken off by the sight of Brandon at his mercy, he chuckled at the opportunity, and determined to take advantage of it. But the animal had sense enough to consider that, possibly, this seeming sleep of Mark's might be a stratagem to delude him into a betrayal of his own intentions; and Mark, who was "up to every dodge," was not to be dealt with hastily. He had his fowling-piece embraced with his arm, and that was not to be trifled with. But then, if he was asleep, what was so easy as to shoot him as he slept?

But that did not serve the traitor's purpose; his game was to take him alive. What was he to do with the dead body? Besides, if he did shoot him, would that entitle him to the reward? The proclamation said "deliver up;"—but meant "deliver up alive." And who would believe that he had shot the bushranger? It might be said that somebody else had shot him, and then he—Grough—would get nothing by the job, and would be hanged for his pains! That would be a regular mull! No; he must take him alive.

But could he be sure that he slept? He did not move; but Mark was such a deep dog! Grough got up softly; carefully examined his flint and the priming of his musket; looked at the sleeper; fidgeted; doubted; hesitated; looked round on all sides as if to gather counsel and courage from the distant woods; when, as he cast his eye over the plain, he beheld, at the distance of about a mile, emerging from a thick forest of gum-trees, three figures, who, he presently distinguished, had muskets in their hands.

He concluded at once that they were either constables or soldiers in pursuit of Brandon and himself. The decisive moment was now come; and he determined at once to give himself up; to give information of Brandon; and to claim the reward. Skulking away, therefore, swiftly and solemnly from the bank of the river, he advanced to meet them.

The strangers, on their parts, as soon as Grough arose from the grass, caught sight of him; and not knowing his intentions, immediately retreated back into the forest, trusting that they themselves might not have been seen, and hoping to surprise the man, whoever he was, and who, they conjectured, was most likely to be the bushranger himself, so that they might take him before he had time to make any resistance.

Grough soon cleared the ground between the river and the forest, and when he came to the entrance of it, where the strangers had retired

behind the trunks of the trees, he stopped, and calling out, but not too loudly, said, that if they were a party in pursuit of Mark Brandon, he could lead them to the spot where he might be taken; adding, that he claimed the reward for his apprehension promised by the governor's proclamation.

The soldiers, for such they were, hearing this, immediately came forward, and commanded him to lay down his arms. Grough obeyed, and laid his musket on the grass.

So great, however, was the popular dread of the bushranger, that the soldiers held themselves prepared to resist any aggression, and looked about them cautiously, apprehending some trick. They desired the informer to retire, which he did, repeating that his object was to deliver up Brandon to the authorities—for the reward.

"Where is the bushranger?" demanded the leader of the party, a wary old constable, who had formerly been a convict, and who was, as he expressed it, "up to every move of the coves."

"That's my affair," replied Grough; "mind, I say, I am ready to deliver up Mark Brandon, and I claim the reward—five hundred dollars, a free pardon, and a passage to England."

"And who the devil are you?" asked one of the men.

"Stay," said the constable, "let us look at the description of the bushrangers."

He took a paper from his pocket, and read:—

"James Swindell, an escaped convict, five feet five inches high, red hair, marked with the small pox...you're not him...."

"He's a stiff un," said Grough.

"Who killed him?"

"Mark; he shot him."

"Another chalk against Mark; but he has enough to answer for, let alone that. What's next?"

"Mark Brandon... five feet ten inches in height, slim make, black hair, black eyes, straight nose,.... you're not him. Let us see the next:—"

"Roger Grough... six feet one inch high, light hair, light blue eyes, short nose, very broad across the shoulders, thick in the lips.... That looks like you, my man."

"I am Roger Grough," replied the accused; "and mind, I surrender myself, and claim the reward."

"But you have not earned it yet, my hearty."

"But I'm ready; and mind, I give the information."

"Very good, Mr. Grough. And first we will take the liberty to put these bracelets on your fists—in the governor's name, you know—all regular. And now, where's our man?"

"There," said Grough, pointing with his manacled hands towards the river.

"Where? we don't see him. Better have no nonsense with us."

"The bushranger," repeated Grough, "is there—by the side of the water, asleep on the grass."

"Oh, ho! And so you took the opportunity to put the dodge on him!"

"It's the reward," replied the traitor, a little—but a very little—confused at the scorn visible on the soldiers' countenances at this act of

treachery; but wishing to do something to signalize himself in their eyes, and thinking that it would enhance the value of his services to enable them to take the redoubtable Mark Brandon alive, he added :—

"But I have another dodge besides that; you shall take him if you like without his being able to resist."

"How is that?"

"I will steal his fowling-piece from him while he is asleep, and you may fall on him and bind him; and then you will have him as safe as bricks."

The constable and the soldiers consulted together. It was a particular part of their instructions to take the bushranger alive, if possible, as it was known to the government that it was in his power to make important revelations. They did not like to refuse Grough's offer; but they distrusted the rascal.

"You will betray us," they said, "as you have offered to betray him."

"And lose the reward?" replied Grough; "no, not such a fool as that! Besides, I've had a dream!"

He related it. The constable and the soldiers laughed at it.

As it was clear that it was the rascal's interest to keep faith with them on whose report depended his reward, they agreed to let him try his luck.

"We can but have a slap at him if it comes to the worst," observed the leader of the party.

"You must release my hands, then," said Grough.

The constable demurred at this at first; but after searching him and taking from him everything but the clothes he stood upright in, he unlocked his handcuffs.

"A tidy lot of dollars you have there," observed one of the soldiers.

"These are my savings," replied Grough.

"Your grandmother's, that is;—however, that's the governor's business."

"You will stand by me to back me up," said the traitor: "Mark's a desperate man."

"Ay—ay; we will back you up; and back you down, too, if you flinch. Now, my prince of noses—march—and be alive."

Grough obeyed, the constable and the soldiers following him in a row over the plain. When they drew near the sleeping man they stopped.

"There he is," said Grough, in a whisper.

The soldiers looked forward eagerly, and handled their firelocks.

"I've a dodge in my head," said Grough.

"Be quick then—a man can't sleep forever in broad daylight."

"He has not slept for the last fortnight," said Grough in a low voice; "no wonder he sleeps sound."

"No matter, lad," replied the constable, "he will soon take his last snooze, and then he may sleep till doomsday."

Brandon turned in his sleep; the soldiers presented their muskets at him simultaneously; but it seemed that he still slept.

Grough now made his way noiselessly to the river, and steeped his handkerchief in its waters. He then crept stealthily up to the sleeping man.

He seemed to take a professional pride in what he was about. He had been a dexterous house-breaker at home, and his present deed was a pleasant exercise of his vocation.

He stood over the sleeper for a few moments; the soldiers watched him in breathless silence, covering the two with their firelocks. Brandon slept the sleep of the weary; nature had been exhausted within him, and his senses once overpowered by the resistless influence of sleep were fast locked up in oblivion.

Grough sneaked up to him from behind, like a snake through the grass, and with a delicacy of touch which seemed wonderful in one of his herculean bulk, gently lifted up the steel of one of the locks of his fowling-piece, and squeezed some water on the priming. Brandon stirred slightly, but did not wake. The traitor then performed the same manœuvre with the other; and as Brandon still slept, he saturated the two pans with water. He tried to remove the flints, but they were fixed too firmly.

The soldiers nodded approvingly. Grough felt all the delight of a workman, showing off his superiority in his craft. Mark was now defenceless, and Grough beckoned the soldiers to advance. But as he retired—in the exultation of his success, he neglected to finish it with the same nicety of tact, and, as he withdrew his hand, he let fall the wet handkerchief on Brandon's face.

Awakened by the shock of the cold water, Mark instantly started up, and, seeing the soldiers with their muskets leveled at him, he snapped the triggers of both his barrels at his enemies—but the barrels were dumb! Looking at the locks, and seeing the useless condition of his weapon, he saw, in a moment, that he was betrayed, and he dashed it on the grass with rage. Determined, however, to sell his life dearly, he endeavored to disengage his axe from his side; but Grough threw his powerful body heavily upon him, and, clasping him closely, bore him to the ground; and the soldiers lending their aid, the bushranger was secured without bloodshed, and the traitor triumphed! But his triumph did not last long.

The soldiers instantly placed handcuffs on the bushranger, and then they considered that they had him hard and fast. Mark submitted to this ceremony in silence. He made no reproach to his comrade; dissembling his thoughts, he bent his whole soul to the taking of a sure revenge. There was a general pause for a few moments; after which, the soldiers intimated to Grough that, notwithstanding the service he had performed, he must consider himself their prisoner; and, without further parley, they placed handcuffs on him also.

Brandon looked at the handcuffs on his partner's wrists, and looked at the river, and smiled complacently. He had formed his scheme. Then he spoke :—

"You have betrayed me; but I will not reprove you; the reward was too great a temptation."

"Lord love your heart," said Grough, "its all in the way of business! If I had not done it, Mark, somebody else would; better for a friend to get the reward than a stranger."

"True," said Mark.

The soldiers said nothing: they had their

duty to do, and they would not insult their captive. They rather pitied Mark, and they looked on his comrade with the disgust with which all generous minds regard a traitor.

Brandon and Grough were standing a little apart; the former took the opportunity to wink to the latter.

"What is it?" said Grough, coming nearer, but keeping out of Mark's reach.

"The sovereigns," whispered Brandon.

"What sovereigns?"

"The sovereigns from the brig; a thousand of them; I planted them. You may as well have them too."

"Ha!" whispered Grough, his avarice excited by the gold; "Mark, you're a trump! where are they?"

"Come a little this way," said Mark. He advanced to the edge of the river. The foaming waters hardly allowed Grough to hear what Brandon said; he advanced nearer to him.

"There are a thousand of them," repeated Brandon.

"Where are they?" eagerly asked the greedy Grough, bending his head towards his betrayed comrade.

"Come nearer," said Brandon.

"Where are the yellow boys?"

"In hell!" suddenly exclaimed the bushranger, darting his body against the huge frame of the burly traitor, and precipitating him into the raging tide; "go," he said, raising his voice, "and seek them there!"

"Help!" cried the wretch, struggling with his manacled hands in the furious torrent; "help! my hands are fastened! help!"

The soldiers ran to the water's edge, and, while the constable remained by the side of Mark, they followed down by the bank of the river, with a vague idea of rescuing him. But whether it was that their hearts were not in the work, and that they thought it served the rascal right, or that the furious waters too suddenly overwhelmed their prey, they could do nothing to save him. But the agonized shrieks of the dying wretch broke fearfully the solemn silence of the wilderness; and when his last convulsive cry rose in the air, even the stout hearts of the soldiers shuddered for a moment at the sharp echo of the adjacent woods!

They waited for a short time to see if his body would appear; but as no sign of it was visible, they turned their attention to their chief prisoner, Brandon; and, one marching before, and one behind, with the constable at his side, they took their way back through the bush to Hobart Town.

Thus guarded, and handcuffed besides, it seemed impossible that their prisoner could escape. But, even so secured, the crafty bushranger did not despair.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ANOTHER "DODGE."

THE constable who had charge of Brandon did not think it at all beneath his dignity to talk familiarly with his prisoner as he walked beside him. Indeed, it is questionable if those officers, many of whom had been themselves transported for various crimes, considered it as

a personal degradation for a man to be in ~~the~~ today. It was a "misfortune," he had ~~lost~~ his luck; he had thrown his chance, and ~~lost~~—that was all: and now he was going to be hanged; that was merely consequential; and they were so accustomed to see people hanged that they had ceased to regard it as anything more than a little episode in their career, which did not much matter either way. It was in the natural and regular order of events that the result should be so; and it was as idle for the hanged to complain of it as it was useless for the hangers to pity them.

The functionary, therefore, who, in this instance, happened to be on the right side of the hedge, opened the conversation in a cheerful way, not supposing that his prisoner could harbor any malice against him for conveying him to gaol in order to be executed in the regular way:—

"Clever dodge, that, Mark, wasn't it, of that blackguard!—Glad you pitched him into the water:—too good for him, though:—but he didn't deserve to be hanged in a gentleman's company.—Old chum of yours?"

"I scarcely ever spoke to him," replied Mark, who was aware of the importance of seeming resigned to his fate, and of the expediency of adopting the free and easy style with his new friends; "he was a coarse, rough brute—no particular harm in him; but it would never have done to have let him get off scot-free, after betraying a comrade that way!"

"Certainly not; that is, of course it was wrong to do it; but it served him right—the dirty dog!—only it's murder; but of course you're booked without that, so one more or less is no odds; and there's one less rascal in the world, at any rate—and that's something. Had fine weather since you were out?"

"Remarkably so, lately; but life in the bush is weary work, any way. For my part, I began to be heartily sick of it before you took me."

"I dare say; I never tried it; but it must be a wretched life, to be hunted about like a wild animal, and never to be able to rest night or day!—Met with any natives?"

"Yes; we had a tussle with some of them. I got hit with a spear in this shoulder; but they can do nothing against our fire-arms."

"The governor wants to civilize them, as he says; but, lord! that will never do. Of course they will take all the blankets, and bread, and tea, and sugar that you give them; but what's the use of it? You can never make anything but savages of them; and the end will be that they will all be shot down, one after another, till there are none left. The major that you took the brig from brought one of the native girls into camp the other day; and a fine fuss they are making with her! By-the-by, Mark, what is become of the major's daughter that you marched off with? I say—that was a bold lark! How did the young lady like the bush, eh? Hope you wasn't rough with her?"

"Is the major in camp now?" asked the bushranger, who had a disinclination to talk about the girl, and who wished to parry the question.

"He had left before we came out. He is

seeking for his daughter; but it's not easy to find people in the bush, Mark, as you know; lucky hit we made in lighting on you, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps it was; for the sooner an end comes to this sort of life the better."

"You're right, Mark. I never knew a man that took to the bush that wasn't tired of it at last, and that didn't say that hanging was a relief to him. For you see when a man takes to the bush, what with lying out at nights, and all sorts of hardships—with every man's hand against him—now in fear of the natives, and then in fear of the soldiers; and worst of all with the chance of being betrayed by his comrade, as you have been; why, you see, he is always dying by inches, as one may say. But when his fate is once settled, his mind is easy, and it's only a jump and a kick, and then all's over!—and he gets rest at last. I heard the parson say to the sheriff, just before the last three were turned off, that they all felt very comfortable!"

Mark's ideas did not exactly coincide with those of the constable in respect to the comfort of being hanged, but he did not care to contest the point at that moment; but he thought that he might venture to try how far his custodian was cajolable. Holding up his hands, he said, in a peevish tone:—

"These things fret me a good deal."

"Darbies worry you? Sorry for that; but they are always complained of;—it's unpleasant to have the hands confined, I know."

"What's the use of them?" said Mark, in a careless way. "You are three to one—and I am without arms."

"It saves trouble, Mark; I would oblige you if I could, with all my heart: but, you know, it's regular, and it wouldn't do to take 'em off—especially with you, Mark."

"What! are you afraid of me?" said the bushranger, tauntingly; "three to one, and afraid of an unarmed man!"

"Suppose we are! it's paying you a compliment. It's not every day in the week that we meet with such an out-and-out fife as you! Excuse me, Mark; but duty's duty."

"Surely! but your first duty is to yourself; that's common sense all over the world," said Mark.

"What do you mean by that?"

"A hundred golden sovereigns are not to be earned easily!"

"What is that to me?"

"It may be a hundred pounds to you, if you like?"

"No go, Mark; duty's duty."

"I've got a plant," said Mark; "perhaps two hundred of the yellow boys could be found there at a pinch."

"Where?"

"In a secret place."

"But where is the secret place?" asked the constable. "Excuse me for asking."

"Excuse me," replied Brandon, "but if I was to tell you, don't you see that the place would no longer be secret?"

"It doesn't concern me; duty is duty. Did you say that the two hundred pounds are all in gold?"

"All sovereigns; and they may be yours if you like."

"Can't, Mark—can't, indeed; but if loosening them a little, just to ease you, out of humanity, as the saying is, why, I don't care if I go as far as that. But money first, you know, Mark; business is business, as the saying is; and there's nothing like the ready."

"What sort of fellows are the soldiers who are with you?" asked Brandon.

"Stupid as hounds; no use trying them. It's the major this, and the major that, all the way along; they have no idea but just obeying orders; they would slap at me as soon as you if they thought I was playing them false."

"You agree, then; two hundred and the darbies off?"

"I thought you said three hundred?"

"No: two hundred."

"I couldn't—I couldn't, indeed; I have my duty to do, and if I was to lose my situation—"

"Come," said Brandon, who did not like to lose the opportunity of taking the constable in the mind: "I will deal on the square with you. The truth is, there are three hundred sovereigns, and in one word they shall be yours."

"I mustn't take the darbies off—that would be against duty; but I will loosen them for you, if they are too tight, and hurt you;—I may do that. But it's all very well, Mark, to talk of three hundred sovereigns! Where are they? That's the question."

"Loosen the cuffs, and I promise you to leave them at a certain spot by a certain day, where you can take them."

"Don't doubt your word, Mark; every one says that you are a perfect gentleman, and, except murder, and robbery, and that, which I allow a gentleman is sometimes forced to do, that you never harmed a soul, and always were a man of your word. But duty's duty; and, as you say, Mark, the first duty of a man is to himself; and so the long and the short of it is—no offence to you—but it must be money down."

"Agreed: you have no objection to go round by the bay to the sound?"

"The bay! where the brig was that you got possession of so cleverly!"

"The same."

"What's that for?"

"Because the money lies that way."

The constable objected that it was a long way round, and that such a departure from their direct way to camp would excite suspicion, and the two soldiers, he thought, might turn rusty. But Brandon invented an excuse, which was sufficient to blind them as to the real object. He pretended to give information of the major's daughter, who, he said, had been confined by him in a cave near the southern coast of the island.

As the soldiers had received orders to look out for Miss Horton in their search for the bushranger, they readily assented to the proposal for her release; and the more cheerfully, as they were aware that Mr. Trevor, who was one of their officers, was exceedingly anxious to recover the young lady.

They diverged from the straight course accordingly, keeping to the right, passing round the sugar-loaf hill, and by the gorge, through the tier of hills, till they reached the border of the bay.

The constable was exceedingly assiduous in

endeavoring to worm out from his prisoner where the treasure was "planted;" and it was not difficult for Brandon to penetrate that the official rogue would have no more scruple in betraying him than his late associate. He saw, therefore, that it was necessary for him to contrive some counterplot to out-manceuvre his pretended ally. Manacled, however, as he was, the difficulties against which he would have to contend, he was aware, were almost insurmountable. However, he trusted to the fertility of his invention, and to his power of promptitude, to take advantage of all circumstances in his favor to recover his liberty.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE BUSHRANGER'S TRAP.

THE evening had drawn to a close; darkness was coming on, and they prepared to settle themselves for the night. For this the cave formed a convenient resting-place, and they took possession of it accordingly.

The civil power and the military kept watch by turns; the soldiers took the first two watches, the constable the last. The bushranger lay handcuffed within; the constable reclined at the entrance. The time was now come when, in accordance with their plan, the bushranger was to be allowed to effect his escape, in return for the bribe of three hundred sovereigns.

When the two soldiers were sound asleep, the constable made a sign to the bushranger, who, stepping lightly over the bodies of the sleeping men, came to the outside, and crept softly away, followed closely by the constable with his loaded musket. When they had got to a little distance the bushranger stopped.

"Where is it?" said the constable.

"You must take off my handcuffs before you can get it."

"Let me see the money first."

They had now arrived at the foot of the tree in which Brandon had deposited the major's money. He hesitated for a moment; but he wisely considered that, if he was hanged, the money would be a dead loss; whereas, it would be well bestowed, or that portion of it, at least, which he had bargained to give, in saving his neck from the halter. He made up his mind accordingly; not without weighing beforehand, however, the dilemma in which the constable would be placed when he became informed of the secret.

"The gold," said the bushranger, "is within the hollow trunk of this tree."

"How is it to be got at?"

"Take off my handcuffs, and I will get it."

"It won't do, Mark; I'm too old a hand to be taken in that way."

"Then go down the hollow and get it yourself."

The constable did not like the looks of it. It was night; and if he lost sight of Mark, he might make off and elude all pursuit; on the other hand, if he once took off the handcuffs! Mark was a powerful and a desperate man! That was too great a risk. What was he to do then? There was no time to be lost. An idea

struck him: now that he was possessed of the secret, he might laugh at Mark!

"I will have no more to do with it," he said; "duty is duty, and I've changed my mind."

Mark had already foreseen that he might attempt to back out of the agreement that way, and so keep his prisoner, and secure the money another time. He was prepared, therefore, with an answer, which he made quietly and coolly:—

"If you shirk from our bargain, I will tell the soldiers where the treasure is, and they shall secure it; so that, you will be pleased to observe, you will not touch a single piece of the gold that way; besides, I may think it my duty to mention this little irregularity of yours to those you would not like to be made acquainted with it. Take your choice."

"You shall go down," said the constable, desperately, "and get them. I will help you up the tree, and let you down into the hollow, and, when you are there, I can unlock your cuffs, and you can hand me up the money."

"Do it quickly, then," said Brandon.

The constable helped him up the tree. When he was at the bottom he kicked his foot against the bag of sovereigns; the jingle of the coin excited the constable's cupidity to the highest pitch.

"Hand 'em up, Mark! Look sharp!"

"I can't, with my handcuffs on." He kicked his foot against the gold again; the sovereigns returned a rich mellow sound. The constable considered that he had his prisoner safe within the tree, like a rat in a trap. There could be no danger in loosening the handcuffs. Extending his arms down the hollow, while the bushranger held his wrists up, he unlocked them.

"Now, where's the money?"

"I will give it to you when I am out. The yellow boys are all safe in my pocket, but the weight is no joke. Lend me your hand to raise myself up."

"The money first, Mark; that will lighten you."

"Well, then," said Mark, "take it; put your hands down, and catch hold of the bag."

The constable stretched down his hands; the bushranger seized them with an iron grasp, and, with a sudden wrench, he dragged the constable head-foremost into the hollow; and, before he had time to struggle or cry out, making use of him as a step to raise himself from the bottom, he sprang up to the top, and let himself drop outside. The constable had placed his gun against the tree when he ascended; the bushranger found it under his hand as he reached the ground; he clutched it fiercely, and, without losing a moment, darted off into the recesses of the bush.

The unhappy constable, caught in his own trap, remained with his head downwards in a most unpleasant position within the empty trunk; but leaving him there to get out as he best may, our history follows the adventures of the ingenious bushranger.

Brandon now found himself once more at liberty, and never before did liberty appear to him so sweet! He had escaped an almost certain and ignominious death; he had re-

gained his treasure; and he had arms for his defence. Bounding along through the woods in his joy, full of life and hope, and rejoicing in his strength and cunning, he hastened on his way to place himself beyond discovery, before the daylight came to assist his enemies in their pursuit.

His first thought was to make for the seacoast, as being a part of the country never traversed, and where he might remain undiscovered for a long time, as it abounded in rocks and ravines and defiles, in which a fugitive could easily conceal himself. But he had not advanced many miles before he came on some fires, which he presently perceived were those of natives. On further examination, he ascertained that there were nearly a dozen huts or breakwinds, so disposed as to betoken that one of the native tribes had made it their temporary dwelling-place.

Being well acquainted with the wonderful sagacity of the blacks in tracking the faintest footstep in the bush, and guessing that his enemies would endeavor to avail themselves of such assistance in their pursuit of him, he felt that it was perilous to lurk in the vicinity of such dangerous neighbors; and he determined to stick to his original plan of gaining the remote and unfrequented district of the north-west part of the island, until the hotness of the pursuit should be abated, and himself partially forgotten.

To this course he was in some measure determined by his desire to discover the girl whom he had lost at the fight of the sugar-loaf hill; and as he had learned that she had not reached the town, he had no doubt that the natives had carried her off, and that the footmark which he had observed amidst their tracks was hers. He proceeded, therefore, in that direction, and rapidly traversed the country, with which he was now well acquainted, taking care to keep a good lookout, and to avoid passing over clear ground as much as possible, where his figure might be marked by an observer.

The weight of the gold and the dollars, however, embarrassed him greatly, and he found that it would be impossible for him to keep up his pace with such an inconvenient load. He buried them, therefore, in a secure place, the bearings of which he noted, reserving only fifty of the sovereigns, which he disposed about his person in separate pockets.

He was troubled, however, at one deficiency, which rendered his firearms for the present useless—he had no ammunition. The constable who, according to custom, had searched his pockets for concealed weapons, had taken everything from him, powder and bullets, and even his clasp-knife, which now would have been invaluable to him in the bush. He would willingly have exchanged, at that moment, half his treasure for powder and ball, knife and compass, and such other necessities as are wanted in the wilderness.

But there was no help for it; and cherishing the single charge which he had in his musket, which, fortunately, was loaded, and guarding the priming from all accident, he kept on his way.

He traveled for two days, in constant fear of

the natives by day, and almost afraid to sleep at night from the fear of being surprised. At last he found that his present state of insecurity was too wearing to be endured, and he made up his mind to visit the nearest stock-hut that he could find, and endeavor to obtain a supply of powder and ball. He had plenty of money, and he had no doubt of being able to bribe one of the prisoners of the crown to procure for him what he wanted, as they were always ready to assist one another in that way, and especially when anything was to be got by it.

With this intention he endeavored to guess his route to a certain part of the Big River, where he knew there was a stock-hut, and where it was likely that the stock-keepers would be provided with arms, and, of course, with powder, as they were liable in that outstation to be attacked by the natives. But he had not traveled more than a dozen miles, when, on gaining the summit of a low bare hill, he perceived three men on the plain below, who, he immediately perceived, were soldiers, and who, he had no doubt, were in pursuit of him.

He now felt forcibly the danger to which he was exposed. The government, he had no doubt, had adopted the plan of sending out many small parties of two and three to spread themselves over the country, so as to keep him perpetually harassed, and to wear him out with continual fear and exhaustion. ~~To attempt~~ To approach the settlements, therefore, under such circumstances, was to run into the lion's mouth; but, as ammunition was absolutely indispensable, for without it he was liable at any hour to be massacred by the natives, he conceived a project as novel as it was daring. He resolved to steal one of the soldiers' cartouche-boxes. He manœuvred accordingly.

He saw at once that the top of the hill where he was lying was directly in the soldiers' course; and he felt sure that they would ascend it for the convenience of looking about them. He instantly ran along the side of the rise till he gained a thick covert where it was easy to conceal himself, and which commanded a view of the opposite side of the hill to that on which the soldiers were advancing.

As he calculated, the soldiers ascended the hill and surveyed the country on all sides; their orders were to search in the direction of the west; but in an uninhabited country, where all the country is waste, they had not much hope of falling in with the two bushrangers, who were supposed to be out, according to Trevor's information; and if they had not been stimulated by the reward, they would not have taken any extraordinary trouble in a task which to them seemed almost hopeless.

But, in general, the military liked to be invested with a roving commission in the bush, as it relieved them from the tedium of barrack-drill, and allowed them to be masters, so far, of their own time and motions. Besides, they were always sure to be welcomed cordially by the settlers, and to be regaled with the best that could be set before them. But the duty of penetrating into an unsettled part of the interior was a different affair. There, nothing was to be met with but natives; and there was nothing to cheer or direct them in their wanderings.

In the present case they beheld a wild and

uncultivated country, presenting an appearance of the most romantic beauty. Green hill and green dale, for it was the spring-time of the year, the only season in which the dusky brown aspect of an Australian landscape is divested of its usual autumnal tint, met the eye on every side. Stately trees, mingling their fresh green leaves with their brown and yellow winter foliage interspersed with pink, and but sparingly scattered over a magnificent plain, gave to the scenery a magnificent park-like air, which induced the spectator to expect that there must be some princely mansion near to correspond with the vastness of the uninclosed lands around; while the want of farm-houses or cottages, and the feeling of the absence of any inhabitant of these fertile spots, inspired a sensation of regret that such valuable domains should remain uncultivated and useless, and almost unknown, while there were so many able and willing hands in England, whose labor would soon turn the melancholy waste of the wilderness into smiling cornfields and thriving villages.

The soldiers, however, to whom this scene was presented at that time, had their thoughts otherwise employed. Their only object was to discover the parties of whom they were in search. Seeing that they were in a good position to observe any moving thing for some distance round, they made a halt, and reposed themselves. Their leader looked at the compass which he carried, and consulted with his comrades. After about two hours' rest, they moved on.

The bushranger kept them in sight, and followed them. It was now towards the close of the day, and he guessed that the soldiers would seek for a convenient spot to rest for the night, near some spring or stream of water.

There was a small rivulet at the bottom of a hill about two miles distant, and it was there that they cast off their knapsacks, and set about making themselves comfortable for the night. They lighted a fire, for they had no care for being discovered, or fear of being mastered, and, producing some provisions, began their supper.

The bushranger kept them in view, and observed all their proceedings; but as it was necessary for the dark to set in before he could put his design in execution, he waited patiently for the night.

Had the soldiers been aware of who was watching them so sedulously, they would not, perhaps, have eaten their supper so heartily, nor joked so merrily. But, soldier-like, they cared only for the present, and thought nothing of the morrow.

CHAPTER L.

THE FALSE FIRE.

WHILE his pursuers were enjoying their carouse of cold mutton and damper which they took from their knapsacks, and of fresh water which they drank from the rivulet, the bushranger went on with his subtle stratagem. Knowing well that soon after dark, or, at all events, at some time during the night, the soldiers would look out for the fire of any wan-

derer in the bush, he contrived his plan accordingly.

About half a mile from the spot where the soldiers had established themselves for the night, he prepared some dry brush-wood, on which he heaped one or two large logs of dead timber, so as to furnish the materials for a prompt and considerable fire.

But here a difficulty occurred. He had no means of setting light to it! He had only one charge of powder, and if he burnt his priming for the purpose of igniting any dry materia, it would involve the discharge of his musket; and not only would the report prematurely alarm his enemies, but would leave him without the defence of his shot. But as the case was desperate he was obliged to risk something.

Carefully removing the priming, he screwed it up in a little piece of paper, which he placed in his waistcoat pocket. Then, covering the touch-hole and the pan securely with another piece of paper twice folded, he placed on it a piece of dry punk which he had previously gathered from a tree, and snapped his flint over it.

The sparks falling on the punk instantly ignited it without causing the discharge of his piece; and by this means, by carefully blowing on the tinder, which he surrounded with dead leaves, he quickly raised a flame and set light to his fire. When he saw that it was fairly alight, having returned his priming to its proper place in the pan of the lock, he proceeded as quickly as he could, consistently with preserving silence in his movements, to a point where he could observe the proceedings of the soldiers.

They remained lying on the ground for some time by their fire, but at last what the bushranger foresaw came to pass. One of them got up, and looking to his firelock to see that it was in good order, left the other two, with the intention, as the bushranger did not doubt, and as was the custom in such expeditions, to look out for any fire which the runaway in the bush sometimes incautiously lights. Mark dogged him; and when the escort got to the top of the low hill which was between the two fires, he observed that he stopped, peered about curiously, and advancing slowly with his musket ready, approached nearer to the strange fire to make his observation.

The scout was well on his guard as to what was before him, but he forgot that it was possible there might be danger also behind him. The bushranger followed him closely.

The soldier was a brave fellow and had no fear about him; he was alone; in a strange part of the country; if it were the bushrangers who had lighted the fire it was two to one, and Mark Brandon was well known to be skilful and resolute; but he did not like to return to his comrades with the bare news of a fire; he wanted to know more—whether it was a fire made by the natives or whom? With this view he descended the slope of the hill.

The hill was dotted with stunted trees and brush-wood, and the soldier took care to avail himself of their shelter to cover his advance, which he did most adroitly; the bushranger quite admired his address, at the same time that he took advantage of the same cover to conceal his own motions in the rear. When the soldier got within musket-shot of the strange fire he

halted, and was surprised to see no one near it.

He concluded, at once, that this was the bushrangers' fire; and that they had sighted the fire of his own party, and had decamped without beat of drum.

He applauded his own sagacity in detecting this fact, although he was exceedingly disappointed that no bushranger was near. Unhappily for him, there was one nearer than he supposed; for while he was in the act of turning to acquaint his comrades with the amount of his discovery, he found his firelock suddenly twisted out of his hands, and himself saluted the instant after with a stunning blow on the head, which laid him senseless on the grass.

The bushranger threw himself on the body to stifle any cry of the prostrate man, but it was unnecessary;—the soldier lay without sense or motion; and Mark, without losing a moment's time, transferred the contents of his cartouche-box to his own pockets; caring nothing for the box itself, which he knew was an incumbrance, and securing only the cartridges. But, elated with this exploit, he thought that he might be able to do better still.

He had no doubt that the soldier's comrades, surprised, and perhaps alarmed at their scout's continued absence, would leave their fire to seek him; and he waited for their coming in order to put in execution the next part of his scheme. But after lying in ambush half an hour and seeing no sign of them, he thought he would quicken their motions by another device.

He went back to the top of the hill and discharged his own musket. This, he had no doubt, would soon bring them upon him; and hastening down the slope to where the soldier was lying, he discharged the soldier's firelock a little while after. Then taking a little circuit, he hastened to the spot which the two soldiers had left on hearing, as they supposed, the report of their comrade's musket, who they guessed was engaged with an enemy and wanted their immediate assistance.

In their haste they left their knapsacks behind them as unnecessary incumbrances in a rapid movement, and which the bushranger quickly emptied of their contents, taking with him what he thought worth while to carry away, which he deposited in one of the knapsacks; and so provided, and rejoicing in the success of his plot, he made the best of his way off, directing his course as well as he could judge by night, towards the western coast.

He traveled all night; and it was not until he had placed, as he reckoned, at least twenty miles between him and the soldiers, that he drew up. He feasted well upon the provisions which he had taken from the knapsacks; wrapped his precious cartridges, of which he counted twenty-nine, more carefully in separate parcels so as to preserve them from being chafed, and prepared to pursue his way.

He felt a sense of loneliness, however, greater than he had ever experienced before; and the country seemed more dreary and melancholy than usual. But this he attributed to the great fatigue and mental anxiety to which he had been constantly exposed; but he longed for some companion with whom he might interchange a few words. He dreaded a life of solitariness in the

bush. He began seriously to consider whether he could join the natives and become head of a tribe, so as to have some companions or subjects at least.

But he recoiled from that sort of association; besides, he feared their treachery. One thing, however, he was resolved on; to endeavor to find the girl whom the natives had carried away. And perhaps she might entertain favorable feelings towards the man who should deliver her from their clutches—feelings of gratitude—of something more, perhaps? Women were always grateful to their preservers! at any rate he was resolved to seek for her at any risk, and to attempt her deliverance at all hazards.

This resolution served to reanimate him. There was an object in view; something to hope for; something to live for—even in the bush. He continued his way more cheerfully.

He traveled fast and firmly all that day; but he began to be puzzled as to the right direction. His flight by night had led him astray considerably. He began to doubt if he had actually made any real progress, for the country in the evening seemed to have the same character as it had in the morning. His mind began to be a little confused; besides, he was faint and hungry, for he had eaten very little that day. He thought he might safely kill a kangaroo.

This he had no difficulty in doing, as there were plenty about. He kindled a fire and made a hearty meal. But, thinking that, possibly, some one of the parties in pursuit of him might have observed the smoke, he removed to the distance of about a mile from the spot, and, finding a convenient place for his purpose, he made the best shelter he could of boughs and leaves, and settled himself for the night. He had grave misgivings of having lost the "lie" of the country; but he determined to watch carefully the point at which the sun rose when the day broke, so as to start fair in the morning.

He passed the night very uncomfortably, for rain had come on, and the boughs under which he lay were not close enough to protect him from the wet. However, the lock of his musket had been kept dry, and his cartridges were all right, so he did not much care for the rest. But soon after daylight appeared, as he was standing before the thicket from which he had emerged, he was startled by the apparition of a huge kangaroo bounding past him, closely followed by two dogs!

He had hardly secreted himself behind the bushes, before a horseman galloped past, whom, at a glance, he recognized as Major Horton! The bushranger saw that there was danger abroad, and he began to look about him for the most favorable line of retreat. But before he could make up his mind, for he feared that his pursuers were close and round about him, the dogs killed the game in his sight, not above a hundred yards from the place of his concealment.

The major immediately alighted, and throwing his horse's rein over the branch of a tree close by, advanced towards the dead kangaroo, while the dogs sat up panting by its side, waiting for the share of the game which it is usual for the sportsman to give them for their encouragement.

The bushranger kept close to his covert, hardly venturing to hope that he should be undiscovered, and resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible. In the mean time, the dogs having been regaled with the slight snack, which on such occasions is moderated so as to whet their appetites without incapacitating them by a full meal for further running, began to hunt about again in circles, and one of them smelling at the thicket in which the bushranger was concealed, made a point and set up a peculiar whine indicative of his having made some unusual discovery.

CHAPTER LI.

THE BUSHRANGER "A PENITENT."

THE bushranger cursed the dog in his heart, and would willingly have strangled him if he could have got him within his reach; but the sagacious dog was too wary to be caught, and presently it began to bark. This excited the other, who began to bark also; and the major's attention being attracted to the bush, he took a pair of pistols from the holsters of his saddle and advanced towards it.

It was a dangerous moment for the major, and the bushranger was aware of his advantage; he might have shot him easily. But from some invincible repugnance to shoot the father of the girl whose recovery was the sole object of his thoughts, he could not bring his mind to resolve to pull the trigger. At the same time another means of escape occurred to him, which he forthwith put in practice. He suddenly left his hiding-place, and the major to his extreme astonishment beheld the bushranger standing before him! Before he had time to fire, if he had been so disposed, Mark came forward, and in a firm voice, said:

"Major, I surrender myself your prisoner; you are a gentleman and a man of honor, and will not insult a prostrate enemy!"

The major was a brave man, but he could not help being a little flurried for the moment, at the unexpected appearance of the formidable Mark Brandon, who, instead of resisting, as it seemed he might have done, voluntarily surrendered himself!—But quickly recovering his presence of mind, he commanded him—

"To lay down his arms."

"Major," said Brandon, "you must be aware that it was in my power as you advanced towards this thicket, to shoot you down without danger to myself; but honestly, I will tell you that my hand refused to commit a murder on the father of the girl whom I now bitterly regret having taken from your protection. Sir—you see before you a sorrowful and a repentant man!"

The major was deceived by this address. It certainly had been in the bushranger's power to take his life, and he had not done it. This argued sincerity. Besides, the sight of the bushranger and the thought of his daughter troubled him. Brandon stood before him in an attitude of deep humiliation.

"What has happened to my daughter, and where is she?" asked the major in a voice which betrayed the agitation which such questions excited.

"She is at hand," replied the bushranger meekly, and with his eyes cast on the ground.

"And, villain!" said the major, as he reluctantly asked the fearful question; "have you respected her?"

"As God is my witness, she is as pure as when...."

"Say no more, say no more," said the major; "lead me to her."

"You would wish, doubtless, to see her alone!"

"Certainly, certainly. I have two constables and three soldiers with me; but I have outridden them."

"Are they all on foot?" asked the bushranger, in a humble tone.

"What matters it to you how they are? The constables are mounted as well as myself. But lead me, I say, at once to my daughter. My party will be up presently, and then they can take charge of you."

"As you please, sir; I am weary of this wretched life, and I do not care how soon it is ended!"

"We will talk of that by-and-by. First take me to my daughter; and your present repentance and atonement shall be duly considered in the proper quarter."

"I place myself in your hands, sir; if you will now mount, I will take you to your daughter, who is not more than half a mile from hence. Allow me to place your pistols for you in the holsters."

A shade of suspicion crossed the major's mind for the first time at this excessively polite offer, for the talk about his daughter had thrown him off his guard; but before he could bring his thoughts coolly to bear on the extraordinary conduct of the man, the bushranger had reached his horse, as if with the intention of leading it to the major. The bushranger loosened the horse's bridle from the tree, looked back at the major, and touched his hat respectfully. Then he coolly tightened the horse's girths; and in a moment, gathering up the reins, he sprang into the saddle, and kissing his hand to the major, who was so astonished at the utter audacity of the stratagem, that he had not presence of mind to discharge his pistols at him, was off like the wind!

He was only just in time; for the constables now coming in sight, galloped up, and the major explaining in half-a-dozen words what had taken place, they struck their spurs into their horses' flanks and started in pursuit. The bushranger looking back saw the new and dangerous enemies that were behind him, and he, on his side, put his horse to his speed, and the race became hot and strong between the pursued and his pursuers.

The major's horse was a good one; the bushranger was a capital rider; he had his musket loaded in his hand; plenty of cartridges in his pockets; he knew the trick of bush-riding well, what gullies to shy, what hills to avoid, and how to take advantage of the ground. He pressed on his horse gallantly. He had the start by more than half a mile. The chances were in his favor. He felt confident in his seat; and the excitement of the ride raised his spirits and called up his courage.

The constables, too, were well mounted; the

major had taken care of that before he left camp. Their prize was in view; the reward was almost within their grasp; and their minds being undistracted by the thought of the course they should take, their whole energies were bent to follow on, and they did not lose an inch of ground. They, too, felt the excitement of the chase; they had often hunted wild cattle, but they never had hunted a bushranger before.

On went the bushranger; leaping over dead trees; crashing through bushes; and continually bending his body parallel with his horse's back to avoid the many overhanging branches which interrupted his course; and sometimes, stretching out his right arm, by the strength of his powerful bones and muscles, and aided by the momentum of his speed, wrenching off huge limbs of trees before him. On followed his pursuers, encouraging each other, and trusting that some accident, some trip, some obstacle, would turn the chances in their favor.

But the bushranger bestrode his horse as if the two formed one creature; he cheered him with his voice, held him lightly but firmly in hand, and husbanded his strength by every possible art of horsemanship. The noble animal seemed to be conscious of the task required of him. He gathered up his strength, and with eyes of fire and nostrils dilated, he breasted the way as if rejoicing in his power, carrying his rider over the perilous leaps which the bushranger put him at to abridge the way, without flinching or hesitation.

For twelve miles he went on with unabated speed, till he came to a plain about two miles in breadth. Here his pursuers, having a clear view before them, fired at him with their pistols, but missed him. The bushranger heard the report of their shots behind him; and watching his opportunity, when his pursuers were close together, he turned round in his saddle and fired in his turn. His shot took effect, slightly grazing the left side of one of the constables; but it did not check him; and the noise of the firearms stimulating the horses to renewed speed, they kept on their rapid course with unabated spirit.

Brandon now had to thread a difficult forest of close tracks of trees, often so close together that there was not sufficient room even for a man's body to pass. Here, as he was obliged to seek for openings, his pursuers gained on him a little; but at the end of three miles he again saw the daylight of the open country beyond, and he urged his horse on without relaxation.

His course now lay through a beautiful country of undulating hill and dale, not more thickly interspersed with majestic trees than was consistent with its park-like scenery. As he left this track behind him, after a course of more than five miles, he became aware that the country descended, and he anticipated that he was approaching some low-lying locality where it was likely that he should meet with some lagoon or marshy ground which would be fatal to him. But so long as the ground felt firm under his horse's feet he determined to proceed; and if ill-luck should befall him in the shape of some body of water or boggy soil, at the worst he could take his chance of doubling on his pursuers at the last moment. But his mind misgave him that a difficulty was at hand.

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That which he dreaded appeared shortly to his view. From the fringe of shrubs which crossed the end of the plain over which he was flying, he guessed that some river was in front; but he could not judge of the nature of its banks, or of its breadth or depth. Feeling that he had a good horse under him, he resolved to swim it, hoping that those behind would not like to run the risk of riding through a rapid river, if it should turn out to be so; and as his pursuers' weapons had already been discharged, trusting that he should be able to get across before they had presence of mind and time to load again.

Even while he rapidly revolved these thoughts he came on the object of his apprehension; his pursuers also were aware of it, and they set up a shout of exultation at having brought the bushranger to bay—a shout which served to spur him on to more desperate enterprise.

With one glance he comprehended the extent of the danger which he had to deal with. The river was broad and deep, and having been swollen by recent rains in the mountains, from which it took its course, it foamed and raged tempestuously along, with a fury which was sufficient to appal the stoutest heart, and which scarcely any one but a criminal flying for his life would have dared to encounter.

Again the shouts of his enemies rung in his ear. They struck him like the cries of fiends winging their way to his destruction. Without a moment's hesitation he struck his spurs into his horse, and in another instant the horse and his rider were engulfed and struggling in the boiling stream.

His pursuers now set up another shout, but the bushranger could hear no sound but the water rushing about his ears. The constables dashed on to the brink of the river, but, appalled at the danger of braving such a torrent, they drew up and stood aghast at the terrific scene. The bushranger, meanwhile, was hurried down by the current at a fearful rate, his horse's head only now and then appearing above the water; and it was evident that the poor animal, conscious of its peril, and maddened by the rushing of the waters, was making frantic efforts to disembarass itself of its rider.

But Brandon, firm and cool even in that moment of extreme peril, kept his seat firmly, and endeavored to turn his horse's head towards the opposite bank. In this he succeeded; but as the tide continued to sweep him down, he could find no landing-place, and his horse's strength was fast failing him.

The constables, meanwhile, followed him down the bank, and recharged their pistols. The bushranger caught sight of them ramming down their cartridges, but he did not despair even then, for he knew that a shot fired from horseback, at a moving object, seldom hits the mark. But his horse now began to plunge wildly in the water. He knew that this was the last death-struggle of the gallant animal, but he could at that time think only of himself; and the desire of life increasing with the danger of losing it, he looked out eagerly for some means of extricating himself from the river.

Fortunately, as he thought, just as his horse was sinking under him, he came to a tree with branches overhanging the torrent. He grasped hold of one of them, and disengaged his feet

from the stirrups; but in accomplishing this he was obliged to let go his musket, which sunk to the bottom of the water. It was not without the greatest difficulty, and by an exertion of strength which despair only could have lent to him, that he was able to swing himself up, so as to bestride the branch. The interlaced boughs impeding his efforts to make his way through to the shore, he found it necessary to relinquish his knapsack, which remained suspended on a branch over the water. He then clambered along till he reached the trunk of the tree, and, holding on by a bough, was in the act of letting himself drop on the grass, when, the constables firing together, and the distance being not more than twenty yards across, one of the balls took effect, and the bushranger felt himself struck under the shoulder on his right side.

Not heeding the wound for the moment, he made the best of his way through the scrub which lined that side of the river, and continued his course for several miles over difficult ground till he came to a precipitous and rocky hill. He climbed up it, and finding a recess behind a fragment of rock where he could be hid, he threw himself down exhausted and faint, and endeavored to rally his spirits to decide on the course which he should pursue in his present extremity.

CHAPTER LII.

A NEW "DROP."

THE bushranger had scarcely concealed himself in his retreat before fresh fears assailed him. His wound bled fast, and his pursuers might track him by his own blood!

It was true, that the swollen state of the river would, in all probability, prevent them from crossing at that point. But he calculated that, by ascending the bank of the river towards its source, it was likely that they would find a ford; and then, being mounted, it would not be long before they would be down on him again.

Wounded and faint; without arms, and without the means of procuring food; too weak to travel, and beset by enemies, what was he to do? He was wet through, but under ordinary circumstances he would not have cared for that. The salubrity of the climate was such, that he had been accustomed to wade through water and let his clothes dry on him, without feeling any inconvenience. But now he was troubled by his wound, which pained him when it began to stiffen. The bleeding, however, had stopped, and the ball had not lodged, but had passed through him; that was lucky. He might escape yet.

But as his present place of retreat was unsafe, he determined to penetrate further to the westward. It was not without difficulty that he was able to drag himself along; and after he had proceeded two or three miles he was obliged to stop from exhaustion.

He remained on the ground for many hours; but, although his body was at rest, his mind was at work. He pondered on his position; it was a bad one! Look on which side he would the prospect was most gloomy. He was without arms, and embarrassed by a painful wound;

but the pain was nothing; it was the hindrance to exertion which affected him. And his right arm was useless; his wound had rendered it powerless. He was utterly defenceless.

It then occurred to him, that to persist in his course westward was folly; for weak and wounded as he was, if he fell in with the natives he could make no defence; he could not even wield a club. He had a strange reluctance to abandon that part of the country where, he suspected, the natives detained the girl—the daughter of Major Horton; that is, if they had not killed her!

The idea of that shocking catastrophe which his fancy conjured up, affected him powerfully! He got up from the ground restlessly. The shades of evening were beginning to fall, and it was necessary for him to look out for some place to pass the night in. He walked on, but the idea of the girl—murdered by the natives—did not quit him. On the contrary, it came upon him stronger and stronger.

His heart beat at the contemplation of such a terrible death for the poor girl! To be murdered as the natives would do—have done—perhaps—in their savage way of torment! It was horrible! Who but a savage could be so brutal! In thinking thus, some thoughts on murder in general arose involuntarily.

These thoughts gave him a painful sensation; sudden, sharp, and novel. He tried to check them; but they would not be put aside; it seemed as if some second-self within him reproached him with his own crimes! The image of more than one victim of his violence arose in his memory! He walked on to drive the frightful spectres away; but they pursued him faster and faster! His heart sunk within him. He looked round as if he expected to see some of the victims whom he had destroyed arise in bodily presence to scourge him with their vengeance! A weakness seized him; his head grew giddy; his mind depressed by suffering, and his body faint with fatigue, both failed him; he sunk on the ground, overpowered by his own thoughts, and oppressed with the remorse of his accusing conscience which rose against him.

When he recovered from the profound depression into which the memory of his misdeeds had cast him, he found that it was night. He crept into a convenient bush that was close at hand, and tried to sleep. For a long time that solace was denied him; but at last he closed his eyes.

Fortunately, it rained little that night, so that he was not much disturbed by the wet. When he awoke it was daylight. He felt refreshed, and had strength to look about him. He saw no signs of his enemies, and he began to feel a little more confident. He left his bush-bed and came out into the clear space.

The morning air was fresh and reviving. Restored by his sleep, he began to recover his spirits, which his late mishap and loss of blood had damped; and his strength of mind and coolness of judgment returned. He felt an inclination to look at his case on its best side. There were still some chances in his favor, and he resolved to take advantage of them.

He had fifty sovereigns in his pockets, and he had nine hundred and fifty more "planted" in a safe place, besides the dollars. He was a

rich man ! With money one can do anything ! His best plan, he concluded, was to endeavor to reach some stock-hut, and bribe some stock-keeper to procure for him arms and ammunition. That was the first thing to be provided. Then he might pick up one or two fellows who would be willing to put themselves under his guidance, and with them he might be able to recover the girl ; for Helen was always uppermost in his thoughts. He knew that he should have to run great risks in passing through the bush alone and unarmed ; but he trusted to his own resources. " Never say die," he muttered to himself, " while there's a chance left."

The rising sun served to guide him in the direction which he was to take, and with a stake which he broke under his feet from a branch of a tree which he found on the ground, and which served as a staff, in his left hand, he pushed forward with confidence, keeping a sharp lookout, as well for his pursuers as for natives. Either would be dangerous — most likely fatal. It was not long before he encountered both.

He had not gone more than a mile from his sleeping-place, when, on a sudden, he caught sight of a black figure whisking round a tree ; it was as if one of the black stumps had become animated, and had been seized with a strange desire of locomotion. But the bushranger knew well what the vision of that black shape meant. The natives were near him ! Now was to come the struggle !

Hopeless as it seemed, and with one arm disabled, this extraordinary man did not even then lose courage. He found that he was able to grasp his staff in his right hand ; and he thought that, if driven to despair, the energy of his will might enable him to use it. But the natives, as cunning as he in their way, did not give him the chance.

As soon as they perceived that the white man was alone, they began to throw their spears at him from different points. As long as they continued to cast them from a distance he was able to avoid them, either by stepping nimbly aside, or by warding them off with his staff. But, as the natives drew nearer and nearer, the spears came too fast and too thick to allow him to defend himself, and three of them found their way through his clothes, and stuck in his body ; but he pulled them out again.

The natives now advanced closer, threatening him with their waddies. The bushranger was standing at the foot of a blue gum-tree, with wide spreading branches. Not knowing what else to do at the moment, he made a desperate effort to climb the tree, and succeeded ; and he was presently hidden within the mass of its thick and leafy branches.

But to his extreme surprise, he had no sooner secured himself in his place of refuge, than the natives setting up a loud howl scampered off, leaving him alone in his hiding-place. The meaning of this was presently explained, by the appearance of the two constables, who came up at a hard gallop, and stopped at the foot of the tree in which he was concealed.

The natives, the moment they saw the white men on horses, of which they are very much afraid, believing that the horse bites and fights with his mouth and legs and naturally sup-

posing that the riders had come to the assistance of their countryman, fled into the recesses of the bush. The constables were glad of it, as they did not want to have an affray with them at that time. Their object was Mark Brandon ; and it was in the course of their ride down the back of the river which they had crossed the evening before about twelve miles up, that they thus accidentally delivered the bushranger from the certain death which awaited him from the natives.

But they were by no means aware of the service which they had unwittingly done him. They drew up under the tree, and getting off their horses, held a consultation, which was overheard by the listener above their heads.

The bushranger heard them discuss the probabilities of finding him, and speak of the certainty of his being hanged when taken. This was disagreeable enough ; but after the fortunate manner in which he had escaped from the natives he did not despair. But when he learned that the government, determined to put an end to his career, had sent out more than a dozen parties of three or four men each, he felt that nothing but good luck, of too extraordinary a nature to be hoped for, could enable him to escape such a combination of enemies. It seemed, however, that fortune was again inclined, for a time at least, to grant him her fickle favors.

One of the constables mounted, and left his companion in order to take a survey of the country down the river. The one who stayed behind having fastened his horse's bridle to a shrub opposite to him, sat down under the tree.

He had taken his pistols from the holsters of his saddle in order to examine them. He found that the priming had worked itself out of one of the pans ; he cleared out some dirt from under the steel which had prevented it from shutting close ; reprimed it, and placed it by his side on the grass.

The bushranger watched this operation with much interest. The necessity for the possessing himself with firearms was pressing ; the constable was alone ; the opportunity was inviting. The bushranger conceived a bold stroke ; there was no time to be lost if it was to be done at all ; creeping silently from his retreat, he hung for an instant suspended by the branch over the constable's head, and then dropped on him all at once with his legs over his shoulders.

The constable, not knowing what had fallen down on him, whether a native or some wild animal of the woods, shouted out ten thousand murders. The bushranger gave him no time to recover himself ; seizing the pistol, he ran to the horse, intending to make use of it to escape. But the constable, who was a bold man and knew that his companion could not be far off, continued to shout, running off at the same time and dodging among the trees.

His fellow heard his cries and came galloping back to his assistance. Mark had not time to mount, for the horse was restive, and the weakness of his right arm prevented him from assisting himself effectively. He was obliged to let go the horse, therefore, and as there was some dense scrub at a little distance, he hoped to hide himself in its covert, and make his

way through passes where horsemen could not follow.

But his pursuers were too quick for him ; and before he could cross a narrow open space which lay between him and the scrub beyond, they were upon his heels. The constable who had been so strangely surprised, being the one most exasperated, was the foremost. It was an unlucky post of honor for him ; for the bushranger standing on the verge of the scrub, took deadly aim at him with his left hand as he came up, and discharging the pistol which the constable had so carefully reprimed, shot him dead on the spot. The ball went through his heart ; the horseman fell instantly.

His companion fired at Brandon and missed ; and while he stopped for a few minutes to disentangle his comrade's foot from the stirrup, as he lay on the ground with his horse standing snorting beside him, the bushranger took advantage of the intricate nature of the ground, and diving in and out among the scrub, escaped.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE EAGLE.

THE race of the desperate marauder, however, was now almost run. His late exertions had caused his gunshot wound to bleed afresh ; and the holes which the spears of the natives had made in his flesh were acutely painful. It seemed, however, that destiny had rescued him from the perils which he had escaped, in order to reserve him for a more dreadful and signal doom ; and if the many crimes which he had committed could be atoned for by any earthly torture, that which he suffered in the wilds of the bush might be considered a sufficient punishment.

He dragged his weary limbs onwards towards the north, hoping to reach some part of the river, which he presently came in view of, by some ford, or by means of some natural bridge in some narrow part of its course. He met neither with soldiers nor natives on his way, and wretched and exhausted as he was, he congratulated himself on their avoidance.

He was faint from hunger ; he gathered some native manna from a tree resembling the ash, but larger and higher in its growth, and rougher in its bark than the English ash, which refreshed him a little : but it afforded no nourishment, and he felt the absolute necessity of obtaining some sort of food. He could find no eatable gum in the part where he was, or that would have helped him a little. He was almost tempted to eat some of the large caterpillars or grubs which are abundant on the red gum-tree, but he could not bring himself to put them into his mouth. The gum of the tree being resinous and exceedingly nauseous, none but natives can bear the taste of them.

But while he was looking at the grubs he saw a kangaroo-rat hopping over the grass. He threw a stick at it, and brought it down. He was afraid of making a fire lest the smoke should betray him ; cutting open the creature, therefore, he sucked its blood, and tried to eat some of its raw flesh. But such a meal was unsatisfactory and disgusting.

He examined all his cartridges over again ;

but they had all been spoiled by the wet when he had swum his horse over the river the day before. As they were useless, and their weight encumbered him, he threw them away all but two. He had preserved the pistol with which he had killed the constable, but without powder it was useless. However, the flint and steel would enable him to light a fire if he could dare to do it.

He was surprised not to find himself pursued ; but the rocky and difficult country on the western side of the river, over which he was passing, was almost impracticable for horses. He continued his way, therefore, unmolested ; but full of torture both of body and mind, for with the diminution of his corporeal strength, his mental faculties became enfeebled and clouded.

He traveled in this miserable manner the whole of the day, making but little progress, and hardly able to walk, but still urged onwards by his desire to place the greatest possible distance between himself and those who, he felt sure, were in search of him. In this way he contrived to reach the base of a high and precipitous rock which had been visible for some distance before he arrived at it, and which overhung the river, which at that part was broad and rapid.

He thought if he could ascend the height, he should be able to find some recess wherein he could lie, and find the repose which he so much needed. Some remains of his wonted resolute will came to his aid, and he climbed up the rock ; but he could find no cave or shelter on his way. The top of the rock consisted of a narrow platform, about six feet square. In the middle were the remains of the nest of some large bird, which he guessed to be an eagle. As it was calculated to make a convenient pillow, he pushed it towards one end, and laying his head on it, rested.

The wind was high that night, and it was very cold ; but he remained on his rock. He thought that it was a place of security, and he felt a disinclination to move. He tried to sleep, but could not.

The next morning the sun rose bright, and the sky was clear. He tried to get up. He was able to sit upright, but he found himself so weak that to descend the rock was an impossible task. He had been very cold in the night ; but now he felt parched and fevered. The sun shone hot upon him, but instead of reviving his benumbed limbs by its warming beams, its heat only blistered him. He longed for some shelter, but there was none. The rays of the sun were scorching on the bare rock ; and soon his brain seemed to be on fire. The weary hours seemed as if they would never pass away. The inexorable sun seemed fixed in the heavens. In his delirium, he almost believed that the huge ball of fire stood still to increase his torments. He crawled to the edge of the rock to throw himself down into the cool waters beneath ; for his agony was insupportable.

But first he thought that he would leave a memento of his death to those who might find his body ; and he was penetrated with a strange desire that the money which he had buried in the bush should not be lost. It was a strange fancy ; but arising perhaps from the habits of his mind during a long series of years. He

determined to record the manner of his death, and the spot where the treasure was concealed.

He had the means ready at hand in a large pocket-book, which had formed part of the booty taken from the brig, and of which the constable who had taken him to the cave had not thought it worth while to deprive him, as nothing was written in it. The long pencil which had belonged to it had dropped out. He cast his eyes about for something to make a mark with; and he spied, sticking up by the side of the platform, a feather from an eagle's wing. It seemed not to have been long dropped. He thought this a lucky circumstance.

He fashioned the quill with the clasp-knife which he had taken from the soldier's knapsack into a pen. He was about to make some soldiers' ink out of one of the cartridges which had been wetted by the water, and which he had preserved. But another thought struck him: his principal wound bled at intervals; he moistened his pen from the eagle's wing with his own blood, and wrote.

The occupation distracted him from present pain and anticipations of the evil that was to come. He had a grim pleasure in writing with his own blood. He took it into his head to put down an account of the many murders which he had committed, and his various other crimes. It was a terrible list. He had a sort of satisfaction in showing a preëminence in his line; the world, he was resolved, should have something to remember him for! He continued to write his history; pausing only at intervals when a faintness seized him, till he was interrupted in his occupation by a shadowing of the sun, which he attributed to a passing cloud.

He looked up in thankfulness to bless the friendly shade, when he beheld one of the largest of the great eagles of Australia poisoning on its wings at no great distance above his head, and in the attitude of pouncing upon him. The eagle, as it bent down its head with its hooked beak, shot fire from its eyes on the intruder in its haunt, and its long sharp claws retracted and extended ominously, as if eager to fix themselves on the devoted carcass of their destined prey.

CHAPTER LIV.

TRACKING IN THE BUSH.

VAGUE reports in the mean time reached the town of the capture of Mark Brandon, and of his escape; and all sorts of rumors were in circulation respecting Helen and the natives. How they arose, or whence they came, no one could tell; and the mystery which seemed to hang over Helen's fate and the bushranger's proceedings, only increased the general curiosity and anxiety.

Trevor suffered, day by day, and hour by hour, the tortures of a painful suspense, which at last became intolerable; and, in spite of the remonstrances of his medical attendant, the ensign's representations to his commanding officer were so urgent, and his distress of mind was so severe, that a reluctant consent was given to his departure, and he lost no time in making his preparations.

The same corporal who had been his com-

panion before was allowed to accompany him, with three other soldiers, so that the party was sufficient to defend themselves against all ordinary attacks of the natives, and were more than a match for the two bushrangers, should they fall in with them.

Having completed his equipment, and provided necessaries for a lengthened journey in the bush, which were placed on a led horse, part of whose load consisted of a small bed-tent; and having taken particular care, this time, to be furnished with a couple of axes, and with two pocket compasses to provide against the accident of separation, not forgetting two well-trained kangaroo dogs. Trevor visited Louisa to take leave of her, and to encourage her with hopes of good tidings, not only of her sister but of her father.

The native girl was present at this interview; and as Trevor talked energetically, and frequently pointed to the west as the side of the island towards which he was about to direct his steps, he observed that Oionoo was much excited. Struck with the circumstance, he remembered that, some days before, she had been very earnest in pointing in that direction, and that she had talked very fast, and with much gesticulation, about something which they could not understand, but which, it was evident, she was desirous to tell them.

She had already learned to repeat a few English words, for which all the natives have a remarkable aptitude, being as excellent mimics of sounds as monkeys are of actions, although there have been as few examples of the former attaining much proficiency in the meaning of English as of the latter shavng themselves correctly. Trevor tried to make her understand that he was going into the woods a long way off in search of Louisa's sister.

Louisa said she thought Oionoo understood him.

Trevor was all ready for starting, and his party was at the door; but an idea occurred to him which he thought he might turn to account. He tried the girl again:—

"One," he said, pointing to Louisa; "two!" intending that she should understand there was another Louisa, "two! gone! lost!"

The native knew what "one, two" meant, for being excessively fond of sugar, she had learned to say "two" when she wanted another lump; and they thought she comprehended what he meant by two Louisas; but he could not get on farther.

"Describe to her the fight with the natives," suggested Louisa.

Trevor did so. He acted over again the fight at the sugar-loaf hill, and imitated the throwing of spears; and then, endeavoring to look as savage and as much like a native as possible, which made the girl laugh, he described, in action, the carrying away of Helen, as he supposed had been the case, pretending to perform that operation on Louisa; and he finished his "ballet in action" by going through the mock process of making a fire and eating Louisa, which made the black girl at first laugh louder than ever, and then suddenly look grave.

"Stop a little," said Louisa, "Oionoo is thinking; I am sure she understands us. See, she is going to speak!"

Oionoo said something in a serious tone of voice; but as her auditors could not make out what she meant, they could only shake their heads, and make other signs expressive of their not being able to understand her.

Oionoo immediately led Louisa into the garden, through the window, which was open, and taking off her shoes, ran a little way on the soft walk, leaving the impression of her naked foot on the ground. She then came back, put on her shoes again, and ran on as before, leaving the marks of her shoes near the imprints of her naked feet. Trevor and Louisa watched these proceedings with much interest.

Oionoo now returned and commenced looking about as if to discover the signs of some one who had gone before. She acted her part admirably. Suddenly she pretended to see, for the first time, the mark of a naked foot—and she looked sorry: then she seemed to catch sight of the mark of the shoe and seemed glad. Pointing to herself, and pointing to the marks, she gave Louisa to understand that she—Oionoo—could find the other Louisa in the bush.

"I understand her," said Trevor; "these natives do not seem to be deficient in intelligence, after all. She means, that the mark of a white woman's shoe is easy to be distinguished from the naked foot of the native; and that she could track it."

He pointed to the west, and explained to her, by signs, that she should go with him, and track the footsteps of the other Louisa. Oionoo nodded her head.

"I will take her with me," said Trevor; "I have often heard of the extraordinary sagacity of the natives in tracking through the bush. She understands what we want, and she can serve as our guide. She seems to have no objection to go with me. Come," he said, to the black girl, "come."

Oionoo followed him readily to the door, and stood outside quietly, while Trevor took an affectionate leave of Louisa; but when she found that the party was moving off without her white friend and protectress, she ran back again, and, taking hold of Louisa's dress, squatted down at her foot, and refused to stir.

Louisa made earnest signs to her to accompany Trevor; Oionoo made signs equally earnest that Louisa should come too. The difficulty was embarrassing. No signs of entreaty would make her stir without Louisa. There was a gunny-bag full of brown sugar in an adjoining store-room. Louisa caused it to be brought out, and made her understand that all that quantity of sweet stuff should be hers, if she would serve as Trevor's guide in the bush. But she looked on the reward with indifference, and kept tight hold of Louisa's gown.

"We must have her," said Trevor; "she may be the means of recovering your sister. Try to make her understand that it is your command that she should go."

Louisa now put on an angry countenance; she stamped her foot; looked on the black girl with an air of authority; and, by signs, intimated to her, that it was her order that she should go. But Oionoo, leaving hold of Louisa's gown, crept into a corner of the room,

and, putting her hands over her face, cried lamentably.

"Poor thing," said Louisa, "she will not leave me; but as you think that, by her assistance, you may recover Helen, I will try another way, and, if that fails, why, I will put myself under your care, Mr. Trevor, and, for such a sacred object, I will remember that I am a soldier's daughter, and accompany you myself!"

The emotion which the tender girl felt in speaking this determination brought tears into her eyes. Oionoo regarded her earnestly; she crept from her corner; came near to Louisa; took hold of her dress again, and looked up sorrowfully and wistfully in her face.

Louisa shook her head, and made a motion to push the native girl from her.

The poor black girl fixed her large black eyes on Louisa with the most pitiable expression of countenance; it was the first time that her white friend—her guardian and protectress—had looked down on her with an eye of displeasure! The poor girl felt it bitterly, her tears flowed fast, and she bowed down her head in sorrow.

Louisa was much grieved, but Trevor encouraged her to proceed:—

"Make her understand," he said, "that it grieves you, and makes you cry, because she will not be my guide to find your sister."

As soon as Oionoo comprehended this, her whole manner changed in a moment. She stood erect, and her manner was firm and decided. She was about to leave the room to join the party on the instant; but Louisa detained her for a moment. She pointed to Trevor, and clasped her hands together, to intimate that the girl should not leave him. The girl seemed impatient at this and again turned to go; Louisa kissed and embraced the native affectionately. It was then that the floodgates of the poor black girl's tears were opened afresh, and she wept and talked passionately, embracing and kissing Louisa's feet with the most extravagant expression of attachment and affection. Trevor could not refrain from giving utterance to the thought which the native girl's sensibility excited:—

"Sterne was right," he said; "these black people have souls after all."

At the sound of his voice, Oionoo arose, and, with a calm and resolved expression of countenance, followed Trevor out of the town.

They kept along the high road until they came to New Norfolk, about twenty miles from Hobart Town, where they stopped for the night. The next day they turned off to the westward, Trevor having previously ascertained that his shortest course to the sugar-loaf hill, which was his first point, was by that route.

As soon as the native found herself fairly in the bush, and out of sight of human habitation, she kicked off her shoes, which the corporal considerably placed in one of the packages carried by the sumpter-horse. She would have cast off her sailor's trowsers, and spencer also, in order to be more free and easy in her journey; but to that absence of ceremony the old corporal was the first to object, saying, that, "although she was black, she was a woman, and that it was the duty of a soldier to pay respect to the fair sex, whether black or white,

set alone a poor ignorant native, who had trusted herself to their protection."

In this way, as the party was strong and well provided, and as their hearts were in their work, they soon left hill after hill behind them. They crossed various small streams by wading, and pressed on till they reached the Shannon River, which they were obliged to trace upwards for some distance towards its source at the Great Lake, before they could find a practicable ford. Then, turning to their left, Trevor endeavored to find his way to the sugar-loaf hill; but he had overrated his ability of finding his way in the bush; and, notwithstanding his compass, he found himself lost, in a wild part of the country, where they were encompassed within a mighty cluster of undulating and continuous hills.

In this difficulty he had recourse to the native, who had, hitherto, acted a passive part. He had a strong desire to reach the spot where the fight with the natives took place, for his own satisfaction; and he judged that, if he continued his course, so as to cross that line of route, the native would not fail to distinguish the tracks which had been made in that direction.

He made her understand, therefore, that the time was come when she was wanted to discover the tracks of the little shoe.

Oionoo readily comprehended him; and she began diligently to search with her eyes, right and left, but without stopping. Trevor remarked that she preserved a straight line in the direction which he had pointed out to her, as if prompted by a sort of instinct, and that she passed over all sorts of obstacles without hesitation. In this way they continued their journey for many miles, without any intimation being given by the native of the tracks they were in search of, nor of any other sign of white people or of natives.

This want of success filled Trevor with much uneasiness; he began to suspect that, by some delusion of direction which is so frequent with bush-travelers, they were altogether wrong in the course they were pursuing; or that Oionoo did not possess the talent of tracking which was generally considered as one of the most notable characteristics of the natives. But his doubts were presently put an end to by an exclamation from the black girl.

She stopped, and pointed to some trace on the ground, which she regarded with extreme astonishment.

Trevor looked narrowly at the place, but he could see nothing; the rest of the party also examined the spot, but they could detect no mark or footstep.

Oionoo, however, persisted in pointing at the place. She examined the shoes of all the party, and seemed to compare them with the trace which her eyes detected;—but this, it was evident, was unsatisfactory to her. At last she looked at the horse which carried their provisions, and not without some hesitation and fear, speaking to him in a deprecating tone, she examined his foot, which one of the men held up for her.

Satisfied with this view, she clapped her hands, and pointed to the trace which the white people could not see, and to the horse's foot, to

signify that there was a track of that foot. She then began to survey the ground here and there to discover another mark of the same sort, which she presently did, and soon after another and another, pointing in a direction different from that which Trevor had been pursuing.

As it was known that Major Horton, who had gone into the bush in search of his daughter, was provided with horses, Trevor judged that these were their tracks; and he thought it might be useful to endeavor to overtake the major, and communicate with him respecting their common object. He made signs to Oionoo, therefore, to follow up the track, which she did with great alacrity, seeming much pleased to be employed; and it was not long before she discovered the track of white men's shoes, which she intimated to Trevor by signs which were easy to be understood.

In this way they continued their march for some time, but without coming up with the party which had preceded them; but the marks of the horse's hoofs were so plain on such parts of the ground, now and then, as were clear of grass, and seemed so fresh, that Trevor considered they must have been very recently made, and that, if they pushed on vigorously, they could not fail to overtake the major. Urging his men forward, therefore, and encouraging them with kind words—not unaccompanied with promises of reward for diligence—he followed Oionoo, who strode along at a prodigious rate, and seemed to rejoice like a wild animal in her return to her native wilderness.

CHAPTER LV.

THE NATIVES AT HOME.

WHILE these preparations were being made for the recovery of Helen from the natives, who, it was conjectured, had carried her away with them—although many contended that she had certainly been murdered by the savages long before this time,—the poor girl remained in captivity with the tribe which inhabited the extreme verge of the western coast of the island.

No personal violence had hitherto been offered to her; but the intentions of the black chief were most decidedly expressed with respect to her being included among the number of his wives, while a similar honor, as was most significantly expressed by the old woman, was destined, on her part, for Mr. Silliman. That fascinating person was determined to have another husband, and as she could not get a black one, was content to have a white one.

Being the daughter of the old chief, and exercising, in his name, the patriarchal influence which he enjoyed, and which, from habit, his tribe continued to pay him, although he had lost the physical strength which had raised him to that eminence, she had no difficulty in obtaining the consent of the fraternity to admit the white man into the tribe; and, in accordance with her directions, preparations were made for performing on him the ceremonies customary on such occasions.

These ceremonies were not many, nor very important; but the solemnity with which the priest or conjuror of the tribe entered on the inauguration of the new member, and the mys-

tery in which the preparations were enveloped, were by no means calculated to remove the dread with which the unfortunate Jeremiah was inspired at being made the victim of their barbarous rites.

If it had not been for his reluctance to leave Helen unprotected amongst the savages, he would have endeavored to effect his escape alone into the bush, and encounter all the wild animals, snakes, and bushrangers on the island, rather than face the terrible old woman for whom he was to be duly qualified as a husband. Helen was so absorbed in the contemplation of her own wretched fate, that she could scarcely bestow any commiseration on that of her companion in misfortune. Compared with her threatened union with the old black fellow, Jerry's matrimonial alliance with the lady seemed nothing!

In the mean time, the conjuror painted himself, in a mystic manner, with red ochre and chalk, and summoned Jerry to the ordeal.

It is to be observed that the natives of Van Diemen's Land differ from the natives of the large continental island, forming, preëminently, the Australian portion of the globe, in language, and in some customs.

The continental natives build better huts in the winter season; clothe themselves partially with the skin of the kangaroo; make use of better weapons; and are subjected, wild and savage as they are, to certain forms and religious ceremonies unknown to the aboriginals of Van Diemen's Land. But, in some points, the practices are similar, and it was to these that Mr. Silliman was now summoned to submit himself.

The first of these was more disagreeable than dangerous. As it was impossible for the natives to communicate with their neophyte by speech, they were obliged to leave the discovery of the object of their ceremonies to his unassisted ingenuity. Jerry conjectured rightly when he supposed that the first act of initiation was to prepare his mind, by solitude and reflection, for a due estimation of the importance of the ceremonies which were to come.

But it was his ignorance of what those ceremonies would be, that puzzled and frightened poor Jerry; however, there was no retreat. He had been made to understand that there was no alternative between entire submission, and being roasted alive at an enormous log-fire which had been kindled for the occasion. With a most rueful expression of countenance, therefore, he quitted Helen and the women of the tribe, as it was an essential part of the ceremony that no female eye should witness the mysterious rite of male initiation, and he accompanied the black fellows to a place at a little distance from the encampment.

The priest, if it can be permitted to apply such a name to such a person, and who differed in nothing from his fellows, so far as Jerry could observe, except his being the fattest and the aleekest of the lot, first stripped Jerry with great gravity, and placed his clothes aside; he then proceeded to mark the white man's body with a piece of red ochre, in various curious devices, symbolical, no doubt, of his state of probation.

This being done, and Jerry, in buff, being transformed into a sort of illuminated edition of

a white man, the priest led him into a place in the bush apart, which had been previously consecrated in some way known only to the priest himself, where he was left alone to silence and meditation. Jerry peeped out and saw the black fellows about thirty yards off, in a circle, watching the sacred spot.

In this way they passed the night, no one stirring; and as Jerry was too cold to sleep, he had ample leisure for reflection on the mutability of human affairs in this world, and on the hope of a world to come. He had a strong suspicion of the great wood fire which he had passed on his way to his present resting-place, and he had an indefinable dread that the world to come was to be opened to him that way; a conjecture which increased still more his general disinclination to depart from this; and the ceremony of the next day was by no means calculated to lessen his apprehensions.

Shortly after the dawn, the priest visited him, and examined him attentively. As Jerry did not know what to say, he very wisely held his tongue; and, as it happened, this was the very thing which was expected of him. The priest rewarded his tractability with a grim smile, and hastily leaving him, returned with a piece of roasted kangaroo's flesh, which Jerry devoured with much appetite. This, also, seemed to please the priest, who pinched his loins and shoulders much in the same way as a butcher feels a sheep to see if he is fat enough to be killed; a ceremony which Jerry considered was of a dubious character; especially as the priest grinned with his teeth approvingly, an expression of satisfaction which caused poor Jerry to conceive very disagreeable anticipations of the cannibalistic propensities of the black rascal. The priest then left him.

In about half an hour the priest returned, carrying with him the materials for the new member's next probation.

With a dexterity which surprised Jeremiah, the old gentleman proceeded to dress him up in the guise of a kangaroo. He placed on his head and over his body the skin of that animal, with its fur on as natural as life; he wrapped the skin around him, and secured it with strings made of the strips of the stringy bark tree.

The tail of the animal stuffed with grass projected behind, and the priest was pleased to teach Jerry to wag it with the hand in an easy and graceful manner, intimating to him, at the same time, that he would presently be called on to hop, in imitation of the creature which he represented.

Jerry thought there was no great harm in that, provided they did not carry on the allegory too far, and kill and eat him to make the resemblance more complete. He began hopping, therefore, with much pains, about the small space in which he was inclosed, and his performance seemed to the priest so excellent, and Jeremiah in his new dress was such an admirable likeness of a kangaroo, that the master of the ceremonies hastened to give notice to his companions that the sport was ready to begin.

Jerry sat on his haunches, his ears pricked up, and his kangaroo head erect in anxious expectation. Presently he saw the natives in a body advancing on tiptoe to the place where he was ensconced, and acting the part of looking

about for a kangaroo. They examined the ground, smelled to it, snuffed the air, and tried to penetrate with their eyes into the bushes where Jerry lay, but all in the utmost silence.

Presently one pretended on a sudden to discover the kangaroo; he communicated the information by signs to his fellows, who now advanced with quick steps to the bush, brandishing their spears and waddies in a threatening manner. Jerry did not like the looks of them; he began to doubt whether they were in jest or earnest, they acted their parts so well. While he was deliberating, a spear passed a little way over his head. This was too bad! and Jerry, making a desperate spring, cleared one side of the bush fence, and appeared in the open space beyond.

A loud shout from the natives proclaimed their admiration of the feat; and they followed him with joyful cries, throwing their spears at him occasionally, which hit him with hard bumps, but their ends being blunted, they did him no further injury. The frequency of their occurrence, however, so alarmed Jerry, that without more hesitation, breaking out into a brisk run, he endeavored to avoid the repetition of such native compliments.

And now the chase grew fast and furious; Jerry bounded along, his tail thumping the ground in the most natural manner imaginable, and the natives following after, shouting, screaming, yelling, and performing all sorts of antics, as they pursued him round and round the encampment. Helen's curiosity was roused by the general excitement, and as this was a part of the ceremony which females were allowed to look upon, for the reason, perhaps, that it could not easily be prevented, the whole collection of gins, old and young, assembled to witness the performance, greeting Jerry, as he passed them in his circular career, with vociferous screams of delight and laughter.

Even Helen, as Jerry passed her at full speed, with his enormous tail wagging behind him, in spite of the anxious thoughts which oppressed her with regard to her own fate, could not forbear from smiling at the ludicrous figure which Mr. Silliman cut in his extraordinary costume. He had only time, as he shot by her, to ejaculate, "Oh, miss!" when he was lost among the bushes, and Helen, to avoid the mob of savages who were in pursuit, retired behind the women.

As the natives adroitly hemmed in Jerry during the chase within a certain circle, and as he soon became fatigued with the exertion, he was glad to take refuge again in the retreat from which he had set out, where his tormentors left him unmolested; and, shortly afterwards, the priest visited him, and said something to him with a severe countenance, and in an angry tone, which Jerry could not fail to interpret as a reproof for some breach of etiquette which he had unwittingly committed.

And, in truth, poor Jerry had offended against the practice of that august ceremonial in a way which gave rise to sinister observations among the savages. Instead of hopping like a kangaroo during the last ceremony, he had used his legs like a man, an offence which went far to vitiate the whole proceeding, and which ex-

posed them to the ridicule of the women who had assembled to admire that popular part of the entertainment.

From what followed, however, it would seem that, at the intercession with the priest of the daughter of the chief, Jerry's misbehavior was overlooked, on the condition, that next day he would abide firmly by the further test which he was to be exposed to.

Jerry passed that night as he had done the first, with the exception that the kangaroo-skin served to keep him a little warmer; and as the air was mild and continued remarkably dry for that season of the year, he contrived to get a little sleep. This time the priest brought him a grilled opossum, which, although it stunk abominably of the peppermint-tree, Jerry was compelled to eat to satisfy his hunger.

He judged from this change of food, that he should be obliged to climb trees like an opossum; but he was mistaken. His next ordeal was of a very different nature; it was called in the native language "the trial of spears."

On the morning of this concluding ceremony, the priest stripped the half-adopted brother of his kangaroo appurtenances, and having touched him up under the eyes and on the forehead with some masterly strokes of red ochre, he led him forth into a large clear space, where all the men of the tribe were assembled to take part in the exhibition. The old chief, from his infirmities, was merely a spectator of the trial.

Ten spears were now given to Jeremiah, and he was placed about sixty yards from a particular spot in front of the natives, who all had spears in their hands. Jerry observed that those given to him were sharp, and he concluded that the spears in the hands of the black fellows were sharp also. This circumstance troubled him not a little; and when he found himself standing alone, with all the savages congregated opposite, he began to fear that a principal part of the ceremony was to make a cock-shy of him for the others to cast their spears at! Nor was he far mistaken in that conjecture.

Jerry being thus posted, and the priest in a loud voice having made an exhortation to his flock, which, from the significant gestures used, Jerry conceived was an urgent admonition on his part to the others to take good aim and stick their spears into the mark, the sport began.

First, one native came up to the appointed distance, and threw his spear at Jerry; it went wide of the mark.

Then another came on and tried his skill.

If Jerry had not turned this second spear aside with the bundle of similar weapons which he held in his hand, it would have inflicted an ugly wound. Jerry's dexterity in defence elicited a warm shout of approbation from the savages; but whether the expression of it was in favor of the marksman or of the target, seemed to Jerry, doubtful.

One by one, each of the natives discharged his spear; and it was an evidence of the general harmless nature of the ceremony, though as savage in its practice as the wild people who invented it, that on this occasion the object of their practice escaped unhurt.

It was now Jerry's turn to try his skill; and the priest having harangued him singly in a

strain similar to his first speech to the natives, resumed his place by the side of the chief.

A native now advanced with a spear in his hand, and took his place on the spot from which each had cast a spear.

Jerry considered this as an invitation to have a shot at him, but in his inexperience he threw his spear sideways, and his clumsiness was received with a shout of derisive laughter by the others.

Another native succeeded, and Jerry threw a second spear at him. This was better. He now tried his luck at a third, and this time the spear nearly reached its mark. The fourth, seeing the very narrow escape of the last, held his own spear in an attitude of defence to ward off the coming missile.

But this cast was a decided failure; and it was owing perhaps to the contempt with which the natives regarded their new brother's want of skill, that the tenth man, disdaining to avail himself of his spear of defence, which he threw on the ground, was hit by Jerry's last spear, which entered the native's right arm.

Nothing could have been more fortunate for Jerry than the success of this last exploit, as it established him on the spot in the good opinion of his sable brethren; and far from exhibiting any ill-will at the event, they treated him with extraordinary respect, and escorted him in a body to the daughter of their chief, to whom they presented him as one worthy of her distinguished preference.

Jerry was now in the high road to preferment; but thinking that he might turn the favorable opinion of the natives towards him to good account, and judging that they would now have confidence in him and be less strict in watching his motions, he intimated to them by signs that it was necessary for him and the white woman to perform certain ceremonies of their own in private. He pointed to the sun which was declining, and endeavored to make them understand that the rites which he was about to perform were in deference to that luminary.

The old woman seemed inclined at first to dispense with more formalities, but the priest, who was curious to know what the white man would do, pronounced an authoritative opinion, as Jerry conjectured from his manner, in favor of their new brother's proposal; and Jerry, taking advantage of the opportunity, lost no time in putting the design which he had conceived into execution.

Accordingly he dressed himself again in his clothes, and taking the old black woman by the hand to disarm suspicion, and with the priest on his other side, followed by the chief and the rest of the male tribe, he advanced to the quarter of the women, where Helen was, sitting on the ground.

Taking a hint from the priest's proceedings, he harangued Helen in a loud voice, pointing to the sun, and marching round her in a circle. His speech, which, of course, was not understood by the natives, was to inform her of the plan which he had formed for their escape that night, and to explain to her the part which she was to act. He took care frequently to point to the sun during this manœuvre, the better to

impress on the spectators the reality and sincerity of the white man's ceremony.

Telling Helen to rise, he instructed her to walk before him, and intimating to the men by signs that they were not to follow, he directed her to proceed to a certain spot, in an easterly direction, where a clump of fern-trees would serve effectually to screen her from observation.

Accompanied by the chief and the priest, they marched solemnly to the appointed spot; and, having placed her within the recess, Jerry drew a line around her with a bough of a geranium which he plucked as he proceeded; and then having placed four similar boughs in the ground, at the four corners of her retreat, he retired with the conjuror and the priest in the same solemn manner as before!

The sun now began to sink below the horizon, and Jerry returned to the spot in the bush in which he had been placed by the priest during the ceremony of his own initiation; and making his two companions understand that he desired to be left alone, they retired.

The ingenious Jerry, whose wits were sharpened by danger and necessity, now pretended to busy himself with various mysterious preparations, in order to deceive the conjuror, or any other inquisitive savage, who might be observing him. He then laid himself down on his back as if to watch the stars as, one after another, they rose to view in the heavens, but listening to the slightest noise of what was going on at the native fires.

In this state he waited, in a state of most anxious suspense, until the natives should be buried in sleep, which would afford him the opportunity of carrying his bold resolution of escape into effect.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ESCAPE.

First one, and then another native coiled himself up under his breakwind for the night. Jerry waited till the general silence gave evidence of the whole tribe being fast asleep. The night was cloudy; a favorable accident for his enterprise, as the natives have a superstitious fear of the dark.

Jerry stole noiselessly from his covert, and looked cautiously about; all seemed safe; he could not distinguish any one on the watch. The fires before the natives' low bark-huts were burning brightly at a little distance; the rest of the bush was involved in deep obscurity—rendered more gloomy by the contrast of the light of the burning logs. He knew the ground well; and endeavoring to prevent the slightest rustling of the bushes, or the least sound from the cracking of the dry sticks in his path, he bent his way to the spot where Helen had been placed apart in preparation for her marriage with the black chief.

He threaded his way successfully through the thickets; he heard no one stirring; his plan seemed to prosper; and for once fortune seemed to favor him. He reached Helen's resting-place without hindrance or accident. She was ready at his touch; and without speaking, they set out together.

Helen could not disguise from herself the extreme hazard of the step they were taking, nor the perils to which they would be exposed in the bush; but death in any shape was preferable to a marriage with the old black fellow. She had many times endeavored to communicate to the women, that, if they would take her back to the towns of the white people, a great reward of axes and nails would be given to the tribe; but they either could not or would not understand her. Their present desperate flight, therefore, was her only alternative.

Neither was Mr. Silliman less determined to brave all, rather than encounter the endearments of that hideous old woman; to say nothing of his being dieted, occasionally, on half-broiled opossum, and gum-tree caterpillars! Besides, there was a spice of romance in him, after all; he was good-natured, and did not want courage, although he was without the habit of exercising it in action; and to be knight-errant to "Miss Helen" was a high privilege, and a stimulant to heroic deeds. He felt proud of himself as Helen followed him in silence through the forest.

They were not without some plan, however, in their flight. They had previously agreed that the point to which they should direct their steps, in the event of their being able to elude the vigilance of the savages, should be a high hill, on the top of which a tall and remarkable tree presented the singular appearance of a ship in full sail. Besides, they knew that the breadth of the island was but small, and that by keeping towards the east they must at last come to some district inhabited by settlers. The obscurity was so great, however, that they could hardly make their way through the forest. It was a painful journey, but hope supported them; and the fear of the fate from which they had escaped, was greater than the fear of the dangers which they encountered.

As soon as they had got to such a distance from the natives' fires that they thought they might talk in safety, Mr. Silliman endeavored to support Helen's courage by representing that they could not have more than seventy or eighty miles to travel at the most—for the island was only a hundred and fifty miles wide—before they came either to the high-road leading from Hobart Town to Launceston, or to some settler's farm, or stock-keeper's hut. He assured her, also, that there were no wild beasts on the island, except a sort of hyena, which had never been known to attack a white person.

What Helen most feared was snakes; and she often shuddered as she trod on some soft substance bearing a resemblance to the feeling of their moist, cold skins. Her shoes had been worn out some time since; but she had contrived for herself a pair of moccasins, made of kangaroo-skin, which she found much more easy for bush-traveling than shoes. Jerry had accommodated himself in a similar manner; and a light wind having dispersed the clouds overhead so as to allow the stars to lend their light for their guidance, they were able to proceed at a pretty good pace. As they increased their distance their spirits began to revive.

Helen had retained possession of the small pocket-pistol found in the knapsack, together with the powder-horn, and a little bag, containing about a dozen bullets. She had never al-

lowed them to quit her person, and with these weapons they resolved to defend themselves to the last; but they were too small to be efficient except at close quarters. Besides these means of defence, Jerry had the axe, which on the day of the ceremonial he had been allowed to appropriate to himself. Thus provided, they considered they could make a tolerable resistance,—for a time, at least; and, at all events, they had made up their minds that it was better to die fighting in the bush, or any way, than be at the mercy of the natives.

With this resolve, they continued their way through the wilderness the whole of the night, until they were both compelled to stop from exhaustion. But even as they stopped, the rising sun began to gild the snow-white tops of some high mountains, which they observed behind them to the north-west; and presently the light of day appeared to cheer them. They saw no signs of the natives, and they flattered themselves that they had not been misled. In this hope, however, they were mistaken.

They reckoned that they had traveled at least twenty miles during the night; but it was afterwards known that they had not gone more than ten, so deceptive is traveling in the bush, especially when forests have to be traversed. Trusting to this calculation, Mr. Silliman thought that Helen might safely repose herself for some hours, for her fatigue during the night had been very great. But after resting a short time, she declared her readiness to proceed.

Before they set out, however, they carefully examined their pistols; Helen had one, and Mr. Silliman the other. They would be but a poor defence, he felt, against the natives, if the whole tribe should pursue them with hostile intentions; but for his own part, he resolved to sell his life dearly, and defend Miss Horton with his axe to the last; and it was not long before his courage was put to the test.

They were now traversing wide plains, not inconveniently covered with trees. This sort of country continued for about eight miles in the direction which they were traveling. Thick scrub and an exceedingly dense wood then intervened between that point and nearly the water's edge of a broad and rapid river, which was the same crossed by them on the raft, and the one which the bushranger had swam over when he lost the major's horse, and received his wound.

But of these circumstances they were ignorant; they directed their course by the sun, without knowing anything of the part of the country over which they were passing, and which had never been explored by the colonists. The events of this day, however, were destined to give that district a memorable celebrity.

They had already reached the entrance of the scrub which approached the wood bordering on the river, when Helen, casting her eyes back to take the bearings of some remarkable objects, to assist them in preserving a straight line—a practice abroad, when she was in Germany, which had been taught her by her father—fancied she saw a moving object behind them. As they had seen many kangaroos in their way, she disregarded it at first; but the object continuing to advance, she pointed it out to her companion, and they were not long in perceiv-

ing that it was a native; and in a minute or two more they could distinguish that it was the old woman from whose affectionate home Mr. Silliman had ungallantly eloped the night before.

He was by no means, however, in the humor to comment jocosely on that circumstance, as the matter was too serious, for her appearance betokened the propinquity of others of the tribe. It was evident that she was on their track; to hide themselves, therefore, was hopeless. The best plan was to push forward, and try to discover some cave, the entrance of which they might be able to defend with their tiny fire-arms against the attack of the savages. With this intent, they kept on their course to the thick forest of trees beyond the scrub.

The weather had been remarkably dry for some weeks, and that day was fine, but the sun was very hot. Mr. Silliman had been congratulating Miss Horton on the former circumstance, and had been expressing his regret at the latter; but the sight of the old woman put a sudden stop to all such complimentary expressions. She perceived them, they were sure; for, as they plunged into the thickets, they saw her raise up her arms in a threatening manner, and Helen observed that she held in her hand the fire-sticks, usually carried by the natives in all their excursions.

They saw no one with her, though they could not hope that she was unaccompanied; and they were aware that she walked much faster than they did. But without waiting to discuss the amount of the danger, they pressed forward, and reserved their breath to accelerate their pace; they would willingly have made it a run, but they were too tired for that exertion. In the mean time, the old woman continued to gain on them. As they reached the entrance of the wood she overtook them, and they were obliged to stand at bay.

Planting herself in their path, she stood before them, and commenced a vehement harangue, supported by the most energetic gesticulations! and although they could not understand a word that she said, they guessed that she was exhorting them to return, and was threatening them with the vengeance of herself and of her tribe, if they refused. She frequently pointed to the country behind them, which they construed into the information that all the savages were on their way to overtake their prisoners, and that they would presently be upon them.

Seeing that her intended husband paid no regard to her remonstrances, she was about to return on her steps, to urge her black companions to hasten forward to recapture them; but as this by no means "suited his book," as Jerry said to Miss Horton, he proposed that they should seize the woman, and if necessary, put her to death. Helen hoped that would not be necessary, not only because she had a strong disinclination to take the life of a native, but because the death of the woman would serve still further to exasperate her countrymen. But it was necessary to do something decisive to stop her.

Mr. Silliman beckoned to her to come back to them, as she turned round to threaten them once more. The old woman stopped; but with the instinct of savages, she saw a something in

his eye that was unfavorable to her; and she hesitated. He advanced towards her; she retreated; and was about to run off, when, to alarm her, he fired off his pistol, and she fell immediately to the ground; but it was only from fright.

Without losing a moment he rushed on her, calling out to Miss Horton at the same time to come and assist him; and before the woman could recover herself, he tied her hands tightly together. At this treatment, however, her terrors as to what more was to be done to her becoming excessive, the old woman set up a shriek, so horrid and so shrill, that both Helen and himself feared that it could be heard by the other natives a dozen miles off, and Mr. Silliman was obliged to have recourse to the expedient of stuffing her mouth with some of the long coarse grass, which was abundant under their feet. He considered it prudent, also, to tie her legs together, so as to give them time to get some distance ahead before she could give information of them.

Helen remarked that the fire-sticks which she had let fall had inflamed some dry twigs which stood near at the foot of a decayed tree, whose charred appearance gave evidence of its having already suffered from fire; and she feared that it might serve as a guide to the natives in their pursuit.

But Mr. Silliman observed that it did not matter, as the presence of the old woman proved that the natives would have no difficulty in tracking them. To remove her fears, however, in respect to the fire attracting attention, he attempted to put it out; but the unusual dryness of the season had rendered the materials so inflammable that the fire had begun to burn fiercely, and had already ignited the charred trunk of the tree under which it had been kindled.

Not wishing to lose time, and as the extinguishing of the tree which was on fire was beyond their power, they abandoned the attempt; and leaving the old woman on the ground securely fastened, they hastened on through the wood. But the trees were so close together, and the dead timber which covered the ground was so thickly strewn in their way, that their progress was necessarily slow. However, they toiled diligently through, rejoicing that they had managed so well to escape the danger threatened by the old woman; but a new peril now beset them, from an enemy more savage and devouring than the natives themselves, and one with which mortal strength had little chance in coping.

From the increasing light, and the crackling of the burning timber in their rear, they became sensible that the forest was on fire; and from the strong smell of smoke which now assailed them, they knew that such wind as there was, blew directly from the fire towards themselves.

They had no idea, however, at the moment, that a fire in the woods of Van Diemen's Land was so fierce and so rapid in its progress; but they were soon to learn, by bitter experience, another, and the most dreadful of all the perils of the bush.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE BURNING FOREST.

HELEN's courage, at the appalling sight of the blazing wood, now began to fail her at last. She had escaped from the bushrangers, and from the natives; but from her present peril she saw no escape!

The dead timber, with which the surface of the ground was covered, afforded ready materials for the extension of the fire, which spread rapidly on the right and on the left; while the flames, leaping from bush to bush, and from branch to branch, licking the tall stems with their fiery tongues, threatened to form a blazing canopy of fire over their heads.

She endeavored to console herself and her companion with the consideration that the flames which bore such danger to themselves, would serve as a fiery screen to keep off the natives who they did not doubt were in pursuit of them. But all fear of the natives was presently swallowed up by the urgency of the peril which immediately assailed them; for the fire, they clearly saw, outran their most strenuous efforts to fly from it; and it was so close on them, that it was evident to both, that to attempt to get out of the range of the flames by a side-movement, would be only a waste of time, and a folly to think of; their only chance of escape, if chance there was, was by flying directly before it.

But they soon began to feel the effect of the heat produced by so great a body of fire, giving them a foretaste of one of the most dreadful of deaths; and the smoke began to encircle them within its thick, dark folds, so that sometimes it was only from the sound of the crackling wood behind them, that they were able to keep in the right direction.

To add to their fears, they found themselves beset by numerous black and diamond-spotted snakes, which, driven from their retreats by the advancing fire, wound their way rapidly onwards, but, happily, too intent on saving themselves to molest those who were flying from the same danger. Nor was this the worst; for the flames, suddenly finding materials more inflammable to feed on, spread themselves on both sides of the struggling fugitives with extraordinary rapidity, threatening to inclose them, and thus cut off all possibility of escape.

But still they kept on their course, jumping over logs of dead timber, scrambling through the underwood, and exerting every nerve to hasten their flight from the terrible enemy roaring behind them. The wood was so thick, and the smoke so obscured the atmosphere, that they could see nothing before them but the straight and branchless trunks of the tall stringy bark trees; and when the fire increased in its circular direction around them, they lost their guide and mark by which they had hitherto directed their course.

Blinded by the smoke; their senses scared by the fire; and their judgment lost, from the imminency of the peril which surrounded them, they hesitated in their flight; not knowing which way to direct their steps, and meeting with flames on all sides, they stood still, and awaited their doom in silence.

Helen sunk on her knees, and prayed aloud

and fervently! Her fellow-sufferer stood aghast at the frightful sight of the blazing forest, and gazed at the flames which were coming thick upon them in trembling and speechless helplessness! There was no longer any hope; and both were so exhausted by their previous exertions, that they had not strength to stir.

"This is a dreadful death to die," said Helen to her companion; "but there is no hope! And at least it is better to die thus than by the torments of the savages. The fire blazes fiercer in that direction than ever!"

"It is all over with us, miss!" said poor Jeremiah. "I could not move an inch farther if the fire was burning my legs."

"We must say farewell to each other, my good friend," continued Helen; "but at least I can thank you for having been the means of releasing me from the savages; and if I had lived, depend upon it you should have found me grateful."

"You are very good to say so, miss; and if we had not been burned, as we are to be, if you would have put in a good word for me with your sister, Miss Louisa;—but it is too late now! To be burned to death in this way! It is very dreadful! There's a blaze! miss: we must try to get away a little further from those flames! Your dress will catch fire in a moment!"

"Try and save yourself, my good friend," said Helen. "I cannot move a step further, I am so exhausted. Save yourself, and tell Louisa that my last words were—"

She was interrupted by a blaze of light from the inflammation of some dead bushes, so close that the flames almost scorched her. The effect was so powerful on Jeremiah that he started up, and although, the moment before, it seemed that no peril and no pain could force him to move, he suddenly found himself excited in an extraordinary manner.

"It is too hot to bear," he cried out: "Miss Horton, get up and try to move a little farther off."

"Impossible!" replied Helen; "I am utterly exhausted, and I cannot move. But, save yourself, my good friend, and leave me to die where I am. The smoke will soon stifle me before the fire comes!"

"But the fire is come, miss," replied Jeremiah; "and if your dress catches, how are we to put it out?"

"Save yourself," repeated Helen; "but tell my dear father—and I should like you to say to Mr. Trevor—from me—say that I was encompassed by flames when I sent the message—say—that I was dying—my good friend—you will particularly remember to say that I was dying—"

"I have heard the bushranger say, 'never say die while there's a chance left!' and here is a chance left, Miss Horton: I feel myself strong again. I can carry you a little way; and I will do it. I will never leave you to be burned to death while I save myself! Give me your hand, miss, and get up."

Helen raised herself up; but she would not be carried. Jeremiah had scarcely assisted her a few yards when the wind rose and blew over them a shower of sparks from the burning charcoal, and it seemed, for a few seconds, that they were in the very midst of the fire, and about to be consumed. But the same

wind cleared also the space before them from the thick clouds of smoke which impeded their view. It was only for a moment; but that moment of time served to reveal to them that they were approaching the verge of the forest, for the broad glare of day appeared beyond, forming a contrast by its white light with the red flame of the burning trees.

The hope which had been extinguished in Helen's heart now revived! She felt herself animated with new energy; but it required the utmost stretch of exertion on the part of both to keep ahead of the flames. Every instant of time was precious, for they saw the fire sweeping round with rapid strides to the point whither they were urging themselves forward; and just as they reached the spot they found their passage barred in that direction by a solid wall of fire!

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE MODERN PROMETHEUS.

"We can escape yet," said Helen. "See! the ground is free to the left. There is smoke, but no fire."

They made their way through the smoke, and found themselves treading on loose stones interspersed among the bushes, and presently they came on large masses of rock. The flames were raging to their left, and spreading onwards. They could see nothing before them, the smoke was so thick; but as they continued their course, they found themselves ascending a rocky mound. Judging, that if they could get on the summit of some high rock, they should be secure from the flames at least, although the smoke would embarrass them, they encouraged each other to proceed.

The wind now rose again, and increased till it almost became a hurricane. The two toiled up the mound, which now had assumed the appearance of solid rock, and the wind, which increased the power of the flames, but which dissipated the smoke, enabled them to see their way before them.

They were now within a few feet of the top.

"Courage, miss," said Jerry, as he assisted her up a nearly perpendicular acclivity; "we shall be at the top soon, and then we shall have a flat surface to rest on."

"What is that strange noise?" asked Helen.

They listened, and they heard a noise like the flapping of wings.

"It must be some great bird!" said Jeremiah.

A shrill and discordant shriek now assailed their ears, of a sound so strange and fearful, that, had they not been hanging, as it were, on the verge of a precipice, which made it more dangerous to go back than to move forward, they would have recoiled from a cry of such evil omen. But even as they heard it, they had, by a powerful effort, gained the summit of the rock, and then, to their amazement, and not less to their terror, they beheld a powerful eagle, of the vulture species, with its talons firmly fixed in the body and garments of a man, who was lying prostrate on the rock, and who was writhing under the creature's monstrous beak and claws!

At the sight of the strangers, the gigantic

monarch of the mountains flapped its huge wings, and shrieked with its hoarse throat, as it struggled to disengage its claws, which had become entangled in the clothes of the man, who moaned piteously, but who seemed to be deprived of all power of motion. And still the great eagle screamed and struggled, and Helen and her companion looked on with horror, for, in spite of the change which had taken place in the features of the man, who, even before death, had become the vulture's prey, one eye having been already dug out as a dainty which that voracious bird most delights to revel in, they distinguished the countenance of THE BUSHRANGER!

"It is Mark Brandon!" exclaimed Jeremiah. "This death is more dreadful than to be burnt alive!"

"It is that terrible man," repeated Helen, with her hands clasped in terror at the awful sight. "Such a death as this is horrible indeed!"

The quivering wretch seemed to be still sensible; for, at the sound of Helen's voice, he uttered a painful groan, and his lips moved as if he wished to speak. But the eagle, angry and alarmed at the presence of strangers, who had come, perhaps, to dispute its right to its prey, now redoubled its efforts to release its claws. It beat its wings with convulsive struggles; but the weight of the body was too great for it to lift into the air. Their power, however, was sufficient to enable the creature to drag the body to the edge of the rock on the contrary side to that where Helen and Jeremiah stood, and which rose to a perpendicular height of nearly a hundred feet from its base, at which a mass of decayed wood and dry shrubs was fiercely burning.

The dying wretch now seemed sensible of his coming fate; for with the instinct which prompts all creatures to cling to life, he clutched feebly at the edge of the precipice as he toppled over into the burning abyss below. The eagle, uttering discordant cries at being deprived of its prey, soared aloft towards the clouds; and Helen and her companion, impelled by an irresistible impulse, looking down from the height, beheld a shower of burning sparks uprising from the raging fire, as the still living body of the murderer crashed into the flames below.

They shuddered and drew back. Neither spoke; but they regarded each other in silence, filled with awe and wonder!

After a while, Jerry began to congratulate Helen on their almost miraculous escape, when casting his eyes down he saw a pocket-book, which, after some little hesitation, he picked up, and which Helen immediately recognized as having belonged to her father.

She opened it; and there, written in his blood, she saw short snatches of the bushranger's former life. Curiosity excited her to read one. She read aloud:—

"The eagle is come again. . . ."

"Stop!" interrupted Jeremiah; "what is that on the right hand side, by the side of the water?"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Helen, "it is a native!"

"And there is another," said Jerry; "and another! And, by St. George and the dragon, there is the old woman! I should know her among a thousand! They have tracked us!"

And—look! they see us! It is the whole tribe after us! Oh, miss! miss! here's a job! Was ever there anything like it! Out of one mess into another! What's to be done now?"

Helen looked around her. On each side was a precipice; before them was the river, which flowed bubbling and sparkling in its rapid course; and on the other side were the natives, who, having caught sight of their prisoners on the top of the rock, uttered savage cries of vengeance, and came tumultuously on. Jeremiah now really gave himself up for lost; but Helen did not lose courage.

"We have two pistols," she said; "they are but small, but they will be something; and we have powder and bullets."

"We will fight for it," said Jerry. "I remember the bushranger," and shuddering as he spoke, "used to say, 'never say die while there's a chance.'"

"They cannot attack us from behind," observed Helen, casting her eyes round, and regarding the precipices which surrounded them; "the savages must come on in front."

"That's not much comfort," replied poor Jerry, whom the rapid succession of dangers had rendered frightfully calm; "but as it is all we have got, we must make the most of it. If it comes to the worst I should prefer going down into the water here, in preference to the fire on this side. But it's not much odds, perhaps. Now, miss, do you stand behind me, so that when the natives throw their spears they may hit me first; and, at any rate, we will have a fight for our lives."

But Helen, disdaining to avoid her share of the danger, took her place on the left hand side of her kind-hearted protector, and thus posted, they awaited the onset of the savages, who, with loud screams and yells, were swarming up the rock.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE ROCK OF DESPAIR.

THE natives came on, screeching like devils, and maddened to fury by the sight of their victims standing at bay. They were headed by the old woman and the conjuror, who held waddies in their hands, which they brandished with frightful contortions. The doom of Helen and Jerry now seemed sealed, for they could not hope to resist so many enemies.

"Had we not better try fair means first?" suggested Helen; who, overcome by the weakness natural to her sex at the sight of the approaching conflict, was desirous of avoiding a scene of blood and slaughter.

"It would be of no use," replied Jeremiah; "I see that horrible old woman at the head of the gang, and she looks like a fury from the regions below. If she catches me she will eat me—I feel sure of it."

The savages advanced nearer and nearer. They began to throw their spears.

"Pray, Miss Helen," said Jerry, "do lie down flat on the rock, so that the spears may not hit you. I should fight better if I wasn't afraid of your being hurt; I should indeed. There! that old rascal, the conjuror, is aiming at you with a spear! It's coming! See, it has lodged in

your dress! Pray, miss, keep out of the way and give me the other pistol and let me fight. Or—stay; do you load while I fire; that's the way! Now I'll give them a shot!"

He fired among them, and they were so close that he could not avoid hitting some one. The wounded native screamed out; but the rest, impelled by a thirst of blood and vengeance, disregarding their fellow's hurt, rushed up the rock as rapidly as its steepness would allow, and in a few seconds more they would have gained the top of the platform, where their bodily strength would have overpowered the two occupants in a moment, when Helen called out:—

"There is a loose piece of rock hanging over the edge where we got up. Stamp on it with your foot; perhaps its fall will frighten the savages away."

Jerry never before had reason to be so well satisfied with the fact of his own obesity; albeit that his plumpness had been considerably reduced by his late forced travels. Taking advantage of Helen's suggestion, he immediately began to jump most vigorously on the fragment of rock projecting over the slope on which the savages were clustered.

Thanks to his weight and to the agitation of the mass which his jumps produced, the huge lump became more and more loosened from its bed, and presently it fell among the assailants with a prodigious crash of dust and splinters.

"They have got it now," said Jerry; "the savage wretches! That has tumbled more than one of them over."

"They are going," cried out Helen, advancing to the edge from which the piece of rock had been detached; "they are going," she said, clasping her hands, "and we shall be saved!"

"But they are coming again," said Jerry; "nothing seems to harm that old woman. There she is, brandishing her waddie at us! How she would enjoy smashing in our skulls! They are on us again! we must give them another shot."

Jerry fired again; but whether it was that the report of the little pistol was not loud enough to strike terror into the savages, or that they had begun to disregard the puny-looking weapon, the assailants pressed forward again with loud and furious cries. Jeremiah asked Helen for the other pistol, which he had given to her to load; but on looking for the powder-horn, which she had laid on the rock, it was not to be seen. By some accident, either she or Jerry had kicked it, as they supposed, from the platform, and their only means of defence was gone!

"It's all over now, miss, that's certain!" said Jeremiah; "but I can throw the pistols at their heads as they come up, and have a fight with my fists when it comes to the last. And there's the water below us as a last resource. But what is that? Miss Horton! look down there; there is a man on horseback! and another! and some on foot! See! Scream out! Screech! Scream! If you are a girl, I say scream! Girls can scream loud enough sometimes when they're not wanted. Keep it up. Scream, while I fight the savages with my fists!"

Helen screamed loudly; but her voice at such a height would have been of little avail, had she not waved her handkerchief from the top of the rock. That unusual object in such a place was not long in attracting the notice of those below

on the other side of the river. She saw one horseman immediately dismount. The figure of a man instantly sprang on the horse; even at that distance her heart told her who that figure was!

The horseman, without losing a moment, instantly dashed into the water, and hastily made his way across.

"Are they coming!" said Jerry; "the savages will be at us in another minute. They are jabbering about how they shall do it!"

Helen lost sight of the horseman at the base of the rock, but she saw the other two take their measures more coolly, though without losing a moment of time. Holding hands and forming a line, the persons on foot made their way through the water, which at that point was shallow but exceedingly rapid, preceded by one of the horsemen and followed by the other. They were immediately hidden from her sight.

"They have crossed the river," exclaimed Helen.

"Heaven be thanked!" said Jeremiah; "but I fear they will be too late; the savages are coming up in a body."

Helen turned her head, and beheld some of the savage faces of the natives peering over the ledge of the platform.

"Make haste! make haste!" she screamed out to her advancing friends; but her feeble voice was useless amidst the din of the savages' yells, as they came almost within grasp of their prey!

"Oh!" exclaimed Helen, bursting into tears with the excitement of mingled hope and fear, "they will be too late!"

"There goes one fellow," said Jerry, as, concentrating all his strength in one vigorous blow, he gave an old savage a tremendous punch in the face with his fist.

"I hear a shot fired!" cried out Helen. "It is to tell us that they are at hand!"

There seemed to be some irresolution among the savages at this moment, and they looked behind them.

"There goes another shot; they are coming nearer fast!" said Jerry,—"the savages look puzzled! There go more shots. Stand out of the way, miss, or you may be hit! By George! they are driving the savages upon us!—Fall down, miss,—fall down—flat on the rock, and cling to it with your hands and feet! The savages will be up and on us in another moment!"

Even while he spoke, five of the natives had gained the level space of the platform, which was scarcely large enough to hold them. Jerry seized one of them by the middle, and hurled him down the precipice into the river. But at the same instant another powerful native clasped Helen around the body, and tried to carry her off.

"Hold on, miss!" cried out Jerry; "hold on with your nails! I see our friends coming up! Hold on—a moment longer! For the love of heaven! hold on!"

"Helen!" cried out a voice which the poor girl knew well. "Helen! where are you, Helen?"

"Here!" screamed Jerry, who was struggling with the natives, and fighting with his fists against their waddies, with which they were beating him. "Here she is; a native has got

hold of her, and in another moment they will both be off the rock into the fire!"

Helen held out her hand to Trevor:—the native, with a savage grasp, held her by the other arm. Trevor drew a pistol from his belt, and fired! The ball crashed through his brain, and the savage with a spring fell over the precipice. Jerry, choosing the least of two dangers, rolled himself up into a ball, and let himself tumble down the slope, where he was presently stopped by his friends; while Trevor, at the same moment, pulled Helen from the platform, and fell with her into the supporting hands of his soldiers, who had followed him up quickly, and who were close behind him.

The three natives who were left by themselves on the platform, after hesitating for a few moments, leaped from the rock, and rushing down the slope with the agility of mountain goats, broke their way through the white people, and as Trevor called out loudly to his party not to fire on them, escaped.

He then bore Helen from the rock, and in a few minutes she found herself in the arms of her father.

CHAPTER LX.

CONCLUSION.

MUTUAL explanations followed. Trevor explained that Oionoo had followed the track in the bush until they came up with the party of the major, whom he found in great perplexity, shortly after the bushranger had gone off with his horse; that, impressed with the conviction that Helen was in the vicinity of the spot where Brandon had suddenly appeared, her father had spent some days, with himself, in searching for her in all the places round about; and that, on diverging to a considerable distance on their left, Oionoo had discovered the track of her foot, and had led them to the bank of the river, where it seemed she had crossed some time before, with the natives. This supposition was confirmed by Helen.

Trevor further explained, that, as they found the river too rapid and too deep to be crossed at that point, they had been led by Oionoo up the stream till they came to a fording-place, which Oionoo knew of, and which was nearly opposite to the high rock on which the keen eyes of the native girl first discovered the form of Helen.

Jeremiah, on his part, related the manner of the bushranger's death, making several grave and moral reflections on the awful end of the murderer, and pointing out to the major's attention the sketches of his life, which Brandon had written with his blood.

The constable desired to identify the body, and with that intent made his way over the smouldering embers, to the spot described by Mr. Silliman; but nothing was to be seen but a black mass, scarcely bearing a resemblance to the human form. However, as both Helen and Mr. Silliman were well acquainted with his person, and had witnessed his dreadful death, there was no doubt that the scourge of Van Diemen's Land was no more.

The object of the expedition of the several parties being now fulfilled, they had nothing to

do but to make the best of their way towards the settlements. They recrossed the river, therefore, without delay; and Helen, by the way, gave ample explanations of all that had occurred since the bushranger had taken her away from the cave; and she particularly extolled Mr. Silliman's kindness and bravery to the skies.

Trevor scrutinized the little man with much curiosity as Helen sounded his praises, and she thought that he looked graver than there was any occasion for. Perhaps a feeling of envy, at Mr. Silliman's having had the good fortune to render Helen services so important, might have increased to jealousy at his long freedom of intercourse with Miss Horton, had not Jeremiah, in the excess of his joy, seeing how matters stood between the ensign and Helen, made a confidant of the young soldier; who, soon becoming master of Jerry's character, and being amused at his mixture of simplicity and good feeling, readily promised his good offices in respect to the sister.

He afterwards owned to Helen, that he felt considerable relief at being made acquainted with the little man's love for Louisa; "as there was no knowing," he said, "what impression the genuine kindness of heart and courage of such a good-natured fellow might have had even on such a heroine as Helen."

Helen might have been inclined to resent this insinuation at any other time; but the impression of the recent dangers through which she had passed, was too strong to allow her to take any other notice of the impertinence than by a haughty frown, which was presently succeeded, however, by a gracious smile.

As their party was too strong to have any fears of the natives, they pushed forward cheerily, Helen being accommodated with one of the horses, on which they contrived to make a substitute for a side-saddle by the bell-tent, which formed a retreat for her at night. Everybody was pleased; the constable and the soldiers, to know that the objects of their expedition were accomplished; Trevor, to find Helen; Mr. Silliman, to find himself safe and sound; and the major was rejoiced to recover, not only his daughter, but from the note of the "plant" found in the bushranger's memorandums of his murders, &c., his thousand pounds in gold, and most of his dollars besides; forming altogether a serious sum of money to a new colonist, and which he thought of sufficient importance to induce him to go out of his way to secure it.

As they were well supplied with necessaries, and had with them two kangaroo dogs, which assured to them abundance of game, they made their journey as much of a tour of pleasure as possible; and the provident major took advantage of the opportunity to survey the country, with a view to cattle runs and sheep walks, so important to the owner of flocks and herds.

He found the money in the spot described; and not only that, but the dollars carried away by the bushranger who had been shot by Brandon, to which spot they were led by Oionoo, who discovered the tracks. All this very much added to the good humor of the major and his family, which was increased by a further discovery of various articles of property, and of valuables, which had been "planted" near the cave by the bushrangers.

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They then journeyed on to Hobart Town, passing over the ground previously traveled by the ensign with the corporal, and reached "camp," as the capital was then generally designated, without accident.

There was a grand rejoicing in the town on the arrival of the major with his lost daughter; and Helen became so much an object of attraction, that Trevor, with a view to prevent further accidents, proposed to her father that he should forthwith take her under his own care; an arrangement to which the major assented cordially, but to which Helen demurred, as removing her from her father and her sister.

This difficulty, however, was promptly removed by the ensign, who declared, that his object in entering the army was merely to distract his mind from the memory of Helen, whom he had supposed he had lost, and who announced his determination to resign his commission, and as he had few relations in England to whom he felt attached, to settle in the colony as a landowner and proprietor of sheep and cattle in general, and of Miss Horton in particular.

Helen and Louisa, in a private conversation with their father, earnestly entreated him to quit a colony where such excesses could be committed, and return to England.

But the major represented to them, that the small property which he had left was scarcely sufficient to provide them with the common necessities of life at home, whereas it was enough to establish them in comfort and affluence in the colony: "besides," he said, "according to the doctrine of chances, the extraordinary events which have happened to us once, will not happen again. And, after all, scenes of violence take place at home—in Ireland, for instance—hardly less fearful than those which we have happily escaped from here."

The major was right. They had no reason afterwards to repent the determination, which they unanimously adopted, of persevering in the original intention of the major to become colonists; and they often amused themselves by the fireside in talking over the perils which had beset them on their first arrival; and when the natives, in the course of years, were entirely rooted out from the island, Mr. Silliman at last lost all fear of being revisited by the abominable old woman, whose "ugly mug," as he expressed it, for a long time after, haunted him in his dreams.

The affectionate Oionoo remained with them in the capacity of a domestic, although she could never be thoroughly convinced of the propriety, at all times, of submitting herself to the white woman's custom of stays and petticoats; and would insist, occasionally, on divesting herself of the embarrassment of her apparel in order to climb up some stately gum-tree after an opossum, the presence of which savory animal she was enabled to detect by her sense of smell with marvelous sagacity.

The corporal obtained his discharge from his regiment, and resided with his officer, who offered to settle him on some land; but the veteran said that he was too old to begin life again that way, and he preferred taking a part in the superintendence of his master's flocks.

He had come to a time of life, he said

when the best way to get forward was to stand still.

The mate of the brig, which the major disposed of advantageously, followed his avocations on the sea, notwithstanding the liberal offers of his late employer to assist him in settling on the island.

"It was all very well for the long tails," such was the observation of the worthy sailor, "to dig up the land; but his profession was to plough up the sea; and he never should be able to bring himself to bear such a sawneying life," he said, "as to stand with his hands in his pockets looking at sheep's tails growing behind them. The sea for him! There he was born—that was his home—and there, when it pleased God, he would die."

As Helen never ceased to magnify the importance of her family's obligations to Mr. Silliman, dwelling strongly, not only on his courage, but on the fact of his having offered to the bushrangers the thousand pounds in dollars, which were lodged to his credit in Hobart Town; as well as on his punctilious respect towards herself, under very awkward circumstances, and as on his general goodness of heart and sincerity of affection, which goes so far with the gentle sex, the amiable Louisa was inclined, in process of time, to listen favorably to his suit; and the union being approved of by her father, and most heartily by her brother-in-law and her sister, the marriage took place about two years after her sister's union with Trevor; by which time Jeremiah had not only ample time and opportunity to prove still further the force and constancy of his devotion, but had contrived, with great diligence and industry, to build a good house, and establish a well-stocked farm, about half a mile from the major's mansion.

The alliance between the houses of Horton and Silliman was celebrated with extraordinary pomp, and with festivities of unusual splendor;

not less than twelve bullock-carts, of four bullocks each, arriving nearly all together. The quantity of "geeing," and the cracking of whips, was tremendous! But owing to the excellent regulations adopted by the bridegroom, the drivers being directed by public placard, to set down with their bullocks' heads towards the blue gum-tree, and to take up with their tails towards the stockyard, no accident occurred; although, owing to excessive fatigue, or other causes, it was necessary, on their return to their homes, to assist some of the male portion of the guests into their respective vehicles.

At the termination of an entertainment, which consisted of almost a whole hecatomb of sheep and cattle, and at which port wine and claret was drunk from the cask fresh and fresh, due honors having been paid to Mr. and Mrs. Trevor, and the obligations due to them from the general community, for their presentation of two little colonists to increase the population of the island, having been properly acknowledged, with many hearty encouragements to persevere in those praiseworthy contributions, the major proposed the health of his second son-in-law.

He expatiated much on Mr. Silliman's goodness of heart, and bestowed warm praises on his courage amidst the difficulties and dangers in which he had assisted in the rescue of his eldest daughter!

The great store-room rang with acclamations at this eulogium, and the gentle Louisa's eyes filled with pleasing tears.

Jerry acknowledged the honor in a neat speech, which elicited a prodigious rattling of glasses, and the warmest enthusiasm of the company at every sentence, especially when he announced that another hogshead of claret was then broached, and proposed as a concluding toast:—

"Success to the Colony of Van Diemen's Land!"

THE END