



John Butler Cooper



To Dear Dinnie.

Wishing you
many happy returns
of the day.

With love
from Maggie

Apr. 1918.

COO-OO-EE!

A TALE OF BUSHMEN

COO-OO-EE!

A TALE OF BUSHMEN
FROM AUSTRALIA TO ANZAC

BY
JOHN BUTLER COOPER

“ Who lives if England dies?
Who dies if England lives? ”
KIPLING.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

MCMXVI

PR

10005

C 787c

TO
MY TWO SONS
WHO HAVE "PLAYED THE GAME"
AND
JOINED THE COLOURS

1361418

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PEACE ! LIFE IN IRONBARK	PAGE 1
----------------------------------	-----------

CHAPTER II

WAR ! ECHOES IN THE HILLS	20
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III

THE TWO GERMAN SETTLERS	33
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV

MULLER FOUND DEAD ON THE HILL-TOP. . .	49
--	----

CHAPTER V

THE INQUEST AT IRONBARK	56
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI

SCENE IN JACK DANVERS' HUT	64
------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII

BODER CHARGED WITH MURDER	82
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII

A NOTABLE DINNER AT THE IRONBARK ARMS .	91
---	----

CHAPTER IX

NIPPER TIPPINS AND SANDY PILKINS . . .	106
--	-----

CHAPTER X

TROOPER HAWLEY SEEKS INFORMATION . . .	PAGE 128
--	-------------

CHAPTER XI

THE FIGHT	147
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII

"THE AUSTRALIAN WAY"	161
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII

MARION DEBENHAM'S LOVE TROUBLES . . .	188
---------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV

DANVERS SEES THE MULLERS	198
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XV

MEN OF IRONBARK ENLIST	218
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVI

FAREWELL TO THE TROOPSHIP	234
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII

TROOPS SAIL FOR THE FRONT—GALLIPOLI ! . .	252
---	-----

CHAPTER XVIII

LETTERS TO IRONBARK—THE CASUALTY LIST .	274
---	-----

CHAPTER XIX

"DANVERS WAS AN AUSTRALIAN"—HAPPINESS IN IRONBARK	292
--	-----

CHAPTER I

PEACE! LIFE IN IRONBARK

THE men of Ironbark clutched circumstances by the throat and compelled them to their wills. They were Australian bushmen, typical "cockies," sawmillers, and stockmen in turn as the hour came. In the beginning they went on to the land. They struggled unto the day of sowing. In the end they reaped the harvest of their endurance.

At Ironbark nature's pitiless law of red tooth and claw ran its course. The black wedge-tailed eagle swooped on the settlers' lambs by day: the skulking dingoes ravaged their flocks by night.

Storms blew down gum trees, littering the settlers' paddocks with wood. This debris had to be "picked up and burnt off." Their steers were crushed beneath the falling boughs. Sharp frosts nipped their crops.

Along the tracks heavy timber-jinkers groaned on their way to the Ironbark Sawmill. Often the wheels of the jinkers bogged in a soak on the track. The bullock drivers shouted to coax their teams to pull. The animals' sides heaved and sweated. Their muzzles slavered with froth as they strained before the dead weights of giant trunks on jinkers.

It will be seen that the settlers had their full

share of trials, but they did not lose heart, for the ring of their axes was constantly echoing in the hills.

Along the side of the Ironbark ranges was a bush road, leading to the hamlet that took its name from the ranges. The principal building in the long main street appeared to be the Ironbark Arms. Whether that was really so does not much matter if the Store, the Church and Schoolroom combined, and a few houses are remembered.

The road was a dusty, hard, sunbaked one in summer : a mud-boggled one, furrowed deeply, in winter. Looking from it to the hills, with mists hanging about them like battle smoke, the houses of the settlers peeped out as eyes from the centre of cleared patches, fringed with belts of "rung" timber.

Twice a week a small red coach went to the township. Sometimes in the rumbling, creaking, rattling vehicle was an odd passenger whose bones had been well shaken. The coach wheels splashed through mud, bumped on gum logs, clattered over corduroy roadways, till it seemed as if the coach's axles must break, or the pole, swingle-bars, or traces give way under the strain of the coach horses' pull.

More often than not the coach carried only a few parcels, but in the boot, let it not be forgotten, or there would be a growl from the countryside, His Majesty's Mail. Indeed it was His Majesty's Mail that dignified the dirt-encrusted ramshackle with an official importance beyond any

claims that might have been put forth on its own behalf. Were not the mystic letters "R.M." on its side panels for the world to see? The "R.M." that carried the right of highway where-soever bullock teams or timber-jinkers might bar the track?

The coach was of no slight importance to Ironbark. Sam, its driver, was to the settlers even more than the coach. For twenty-eight years Sam Harebrown had been looking on a world of sunshine, of blue skies, and of gum trees. For eight years he had observed the passing show from the box-seat, and somehow things appear different to a man on a coach to a swaggie padding the hoof along the same road with "Matilda" slung from his shoulders.

Sam's hair was a distinct note in his personal appearance. The red paint on the coach was a dull colour alongside it. "Ginger Sam," boy and man, in those parts he was since his head had first come into view. "Ginger for pluck," his schoolmates had cried. His manhood stood to the assertion. Sun, storm, wind, dust made his clothes shabby. They had left his freckled face weather-beaten, his hands tanned.

It was usually a lean leather bag that held the letters that Sam first handed to Mrs. Debenham, the pale-faced widow who was the postmistress of Ironbark. The newspaper bag was a weighty sack. Sam himself had to lift that from the coach, and to carry it into the office.

In addition to holding the office of postmistress Mrs. Debenham was the District Registrar for the trinity of life's epochs—births, marriages and deaths. She was a short rotund lady with eyes that pleaded for protection. Her habitual expression was one of friendliness, supported by a smile that seemed to have its birth in tears. At odd times her cheeks flushed hectic through a bluish tinge. The little woman's feelings lay close to the surface. It was transparent how easily her heart was moved to pity : how quickly her being was agitated by trouble. She devoutly prayed, each morning when she rose, for her daily bread, then she set about resolutely to earn it. Her thoughts were serious ones. She made herself, at times, miserable in trying to please everybody.

Life in Ironbark was not quite so placid as it appeared on the surface. Snakes were still in the bush. Envy, malice, and uncharitableness were to be found amongst the settlers in the road to the hills. Mrs. Debenham tried to remain deaf to the scandals whispered about the church door. Of course she was out of hearing of the talk in the back parlour of the Ironbark Arms, and she was blissfully ignorant of slanders that went into the letters sent through the Post Office.

Mrs. Debenham managed fairly well, since she never willingly gave offence. Some of the settlers' wives did not like her. They asserted that she put on "airs" : that she had brought

up her daughter, Marion, with thoughts above her station.

As for her son Ted ! He had an evil eye ! He was past his mother's prayers. Whatever the girls saw in him was beyond the ken of the settlers' wives. Ted's position as manager of the Ironbark Sawmill had, the women said, something to do with the way the girls ran after him. Certainly it was not his looks that magnetised the maids !

According to the gossips, Ted took after his father, a sea captain of many ports and easy sweethearts, who had led such a damnable life with his jealous wife that he sailed away one fine day and forgot to return.

There was a grain of truth to a bushel of scandal in the talk of the settlers' wives. Captain Debenham had disappeared over the ocean's rim. He had sailed—no man knew whither, nor are we likely to know until the sea gives up its dead.

What the gossips did not trouble to ascertain was that the captain's ship *The Flying Gull* had been posted as "lost."

As Mrs. Debenham's husband had fought the billows that finally engulfed him, so too she took up arms against her sea of troubles.

With the aid of her brother-in-law's political influence she was appointed postmistress at Ironbark, passing rich on £55 a year. Such, if any, was the head and front of her offending.

But what of her daughter, Marion, who had "eyes above her station" ? She was one with

hundreds of young women of Australia with individualities of their own. As a child, she had cried for the moon. As a young woman of twenty-two years of age in a dull country post office, she yearned for better things. What form she desired that they should take she had no idea. She was sick of seeing the same people whose temperaments she knew off by heart ; their tricks of speech, even what some of them would talk about in a given time.

There was Sandy Pilkins, the pig-farmer, who never failed to speak of the wonderful effects of some pig medicine he used, and how, when he felt unwell, he took the stuff himself. He always clinched his assertions with the statement, " What I say, Miss Debenham, is this : ' What's good for pigs is good for humans.' "

Marion stamped the letters with a vicious jab as a relief to her feelings. When she had finished the letters she sealed them up in a mail-bag. Then she would sit down, and have what she called " a good think," that usually ended with a big sigh. What, she thought, was the use of her bewailing her fate ? Were there not lovely flowers amongst some thorns ? Besides, what did her life matter ? What did anything matter ?

In less philosophic moods, Marion worried her mother with such expressions as, " Life is rotten. How I hate doing things that don't count. Why there is scarcely a man in the place to talk to who is not a ' blob.' "

So she would growl on. Her mother tried to think it was Marion's father's restless spirit, restless as the sea, that made her so unsettled, so changeable, placid, and stormy in turns. Where would the end be found ? Would Marion wreck her career in the mad attempt to satisfy the uncontrolled emotions that surged in her bosom ? If she would only exercise patience ! If she only knew her own mind ! Her daughter's mad impulses, her mother was afraid, would be her undoing.

Marion was filled with the "long, long thoughts of youth," but her will was not that of "a boy's will which is the wind's will." Those who did not admire Marion ("the cats of Ironbark") said "she thought she was Christmas."

But Marion did not care what the "cats" thought or said. She stamped her way through life in the same way as she stamped the letters that came to Ironbark. She had no time for the settlers when they complained about mails' delays. She closed such discussions with the peremptory remark, "You have your remedy—write to the Postmaster-General or put up with it—we've nothing to do with the delays."

Mrs. Debenham, on the other hand, always tried, in an almost pathetic manner, to silence complaints. She felt that as the post mistress she was personally answerable for the delays. So because, unlike her daughter, she did not refuse the burden, the burden of blame was

thrust upon her, and her brow was often in consequence puckered in wrinkles of worry.

When Sam Harebrown did arrive at Ironbark, rattling in with the easy indifference of the Australian, who does not care a cuss for those who wait for His Majesty's Mail, or for the time they have lost in so waiting, he would be greeted with "barrack." But he gave the little group of "barrackers" as good as they sent.

Did they want to pinch his job? If so they were welcome to the profit they'd make out of the Postal Department.

"G'wan 'Ginger,' wot'er ye givin' us?"

"Look," Sam would reply, "at the price of horsefced? Do you want a bloke to put blood-stock in this bally coach so that yer can get yer mails in time, for yer teas? Why it wouldn't matter much if half the letters that are written weren't written at all."

"Did ye bring that swine tonic with ye?" asks Sandy Pilkins.

"I did," Sam would say, and then add, "what's good for beasts is good for humans!"

Faint chuckles would come from the settlers grouped about the coach at Sam's joke, just as the kookaburra starts in a low key with his "kakoo," till the settlers' chuckles progressed into hearty laughter, in the same way as the "kakoo-koo-koo-koo!" swells into a peal of bush melody.

The settlers knew the joke as well as they knew Sandy's small eyes and his heavy jowls. Sandy's

fat body was a great contrast to Sam's figure, lean and hungry like that of a bush Cassius who thought overmuch at night. Not that Sam, after he had groomed his horses, thought of much else than that it was time to go to bed. Yet in him was a strain of philosophy, content in what was past, present, or in the future. Maybe it was because he was "Ginger." Fate had willed it so. Why have it otherwise, even if "grouching" would change the colour of his hair? Not Sam! He was proud of his thick crop of hair; of the two bow locks he plastered down on his forehead. The "smudge of a smile" that he had so often on his face told of his good humour.

Mrs. Debenham would have been a happier woman had the good fairy at her birth bestowed Sam's spirit of contentment on her. Throughout her life friends had told her "not to worry," as if that prescription ever did much good. Worry has sent more women to their graves than women have been given happiness by kisses. And it was just the kisses that Sam stopped to give a woman along the track that was the cause of Mrs. Debenham's worry about the delayed mail-bags.

"The horses don't delay you, Sam, and you know it," said Mrs. Debenham.

"Well!" replied Sam, "wot of it? I suppose a bloke can speak to his comin' missus if he feels that way. Where's the postal regulation agin that? Show it ter me, do if yer can."

"The postal authorities take no count of the mail-man keeping company along the road."

"Then that just shows what a deuce of a lot they know about mail-men."

"Under the contract you have to deliver the mails here not later than six o'clock."

"We are supposed to do a heap of things we don't always do. Anyway the mail's here; not that there is much of it. Faney havin' to run a coach and two horses for that!"

Sam held up the letter-bag that probably did not contain a dozen letters.

"They might be important letters, Sam. You can't say what they may mean to those who get them."

"No, I can't! No more'n can you. I ain't going to try. The might-be's mostly ain't; worse luck! I thought that the trace might have lasted till I got here, but it didn't. I had to call in at Nelly's to get some hay-band."

"We know all about that, Sam."

"Then I needn't tell yer. What a woman don't know ain't much. She's taught man a thing or two since she blew into the world."

"I don't think you have such a poor opinion of women as you make out."

"Oh, haven't I, though!" said Sam in his quiet humorous way. "If my mother hadn't been a woman I'd think less on 'em than I do. Nelly softens me a bit, but still females are all alike when you bunch 'em."

“What do you mean?” asked Mrs. Debenham, somewhat shocked.

“Why,” continued Sam, “I’ve see’d that flea-bitten mare of mine in the coach nigh send the roan horse mad with her tantrums along the road. She’ll stop going till I think the coach’ll be on top of her. When the horse, toff like, tries to go his paces to hers, she’ll suddenly hang back. Then without a ‘beg pardon,’ off she goes agin, as if the devil was twisting her tail. She makes his shoulders real sore before he’s gone half the journey—ain’t that like a woman with a man? My oath it is! I know ’em.”

“Why don’t you give her the whip, Sam?”

“Give the mare the whip! Why because I knows what she’d do. The dash-board wouldn’t be there after she done herself in—ain’t that like a woman, flinging about and breaking things?”

Mrs. Debenham laughed, and showed her white teeth.

“Give her the whip!” Sam cried. “By gum I like that. As if you could give women anything as would make ’em reasonable. It hasn’t been done yet, because it ain’t to be done, Mrs. Debenham.”

“Perhaps your tea will make you more reasonable, Sam?”

“Thanks, missus,” replied Sam. “Tea and reason are good mates.”

Over the kitchen fire a fountain kettle hung with boiling water, ready always to make a cup of tea for the mail-man when he arrived.

In the past it was Marion who gave Sam his cup of tea, but she had gone to Melbourne, and was now a nurse in one of the hospitals. She had found an opening, and to her the world seemed wide. Her daily work brought her in touch with suffering. That sobered her outlook on life. She felt the realities of things far more acutely than ever she could have done in the circumscribed circle of a country post office. Her womanhood had a chance to expand. Sympathy was called forth by the suffering she saw, borne so bravely by some patients, that they won her silent admiration.

How impatient she had been with her imaginary ills! How trivial the worries of life appeared alongside the last and dominant note of life—death. In her innocence she had asked herself in the post office, “What does anything matter?” But she did so in a spirit of defiance, her blood pulsing with life, her spirit as that of an imprisoned bird, but now—? She was chastened. She set death as the ultimatum against misfortune! The bow of defiance was bent at misfortune as powerless to crush since death itself swallowed up everything.

At infrequent intervals, Marion went on a visit home to Ironbark. Sam was a bit shy of Marion in her nurse’s costume, and though, as he admitted to Nelly, “she puts on no blasted side, yet yer know she ain’t just the same. Them nurses, it ain’t Marion’s fault, they know too much for

country blokes. She'll soon find out Jack Danvers ain't good enough for her. I don't say it agin Marion, mind ye. Marion and me's good pals, only just it's woman's way ; when they get the Melbourne habit they wants the earth, and Jack Danvers ain't the earth."

"Well, people as live in Melbourne ain't the earth either," replied Nelly with a jerk of her head. "Jack Danvers'll suit Marion. She'll be a lucky girl if she gets him. He's as fine a looking man as hereabouts. You don't find him 'boozing' about the hotel. He wouldn't be as straight as a hazel sapling if he did, nor have those fine eyes of his as clear as the water at Mooroona spring."

"I know," said Sam, with the air of hearing an oft-told tale, "what a good sort Jack is, but it ain't the good sorts as always get the best treatment. I know that myself."

"You get your whaek of good things, my boy," Nelly replied, "and it's not up to you to say anything against Marion."

"That's a woman all over. A man says what is and if the woman don't like it then the man's sat upon. I say that Marion's got Melbourne on the brain, and when a woman gets a thing on the brain it's as hard to get rid of as bracken in a big paddock."

"Nonsense," said Nelly, with a contemptuous gesture. "Do you think bush girls are like that ?"

And then after a contemplative pause—

“Melbourne’s all right for a spell, but give me our hills ! I can breathe here. When I go to town I’m crowded on the Block, I can’t breathe. There’s plenty to see, of course—women, but they’re not like us. Collins Street hasn’t got a bush smell. At the same time, Melbourne has its points a bit ahead of Ironbark.”

Nelly said this with some native condescension. She could not help her bias in favour of Ironbark ; but she wanted to be fair to Melbourne, and to uphold Marion.

“Melbourne has its points.”

“Oh, I suppose so,” admitted Sam. “But don’t you, Nelly, for Gawd’s sake get the Melbourne habit. Not as I think ye’ll have much chance to do so. But we could have said that of Marion two years ago.”

“Marion’s all right,” said Nelly.

“I tell you, Nelly, she’s a woman as will blaze a track right enough, no kid. Jack will be left on the rails if I know wot’s wot.”

“You think,” replied Nelly, “you understand women ; that you know Marion, ha ! You don’t know a woman’s heart, nor what she’ll do. I haven’t met the man yet as does. Anyhow, how do you know what Marion is doing in Melbourne ? I’ll bet she does nothing that Ironbark might not know, and Ironbark, specially at the head of the valley, is pretty quizzzy in things that don’t concern it. You men always think a woman is not to be trusted out of sight !”

“No more’n they are,” said Sam, “if there’s any cove round as will admire them. They mightn’t want the man but they want the admiration.”

“Yer right, Sam, for once. Why at the hop the other night Philip Woods admired my hair, and told me I was ‘right-o,’ and you, what did you say but ‘what did you put on that clobber for? Didn’t I tell you yer don’t look well in that pink dress?’ That’s not the way to please a woman, Sam.”

“Well now, Nelly,” said Sam in a persuasive tone. “Yer weren’t a dressmaker’s dream in that pink dress, now fair dinkums, were you?”

“That’s not the point, Sam. You’ve got to tell me I’m ‘right-o’ even if the lie sticks in your throat so badly that you have to go outside and cough it up.”

“I’ll make Woods cough something up when I get him,” was Sam’s grim comment, his “smudge of a smile” disappearing much as a revolving light disappears to reappear later on.

Nell was the sister-in-law of Mrs. Tippins. She lived with the Tippinses. Their house was a quarter of a mile past the big black butt that was struck by lightning.

Five miles down the track from the Tippinses was the block that Franz Muller, the German settler, had taken up about the same time as Jim Tippins had selected his 320 acres holding. Mrs. Muller, before she married the German, was Kate Hardley,

the daughter of a boss cockie farmer fifty miles away. As a middle-aged woman, she earned a few pounds by attending to the wives of the settlers when births took place. She also laid out the settlers' dead.

According to Mrs. Debenham, the birth rate of Ironbark was higher than any other country district for miles around. Mrs. Debenham was glad of this since births not only increased her fees, but they showed that homes were happy as they should be, with the good people.

Sam was proud of his footing with the Tippinses, and he looked forward to his relationship with them. If a stranger on the box-seat of the mail coach took an interest in the passing show, it was of the Tippins' family that he would grow most eloquent.

"Going by" Sam, Tippins and his wife had been on their selections for nine or ten years. Tippins at first grafted every day. Even through many a moonlight night the noise of his axe was heard.

"My oath he did work ! Now look at his place ! In that paddock up there last year Tippins had the finest crop in the district. Yet when the Tippinses started they had nothing ! Just came here with two youngsters and a bit of pluck. Tippins pitched his tent on the land. The two of 'em started. He has done well. So has Mrs. Tippins. They've got nine kids.

"That's Nipper Tippins, the eldest one, over there, rounding up that cow. He's a big fellow

for his age, sixteen, ain't he ? Ride ? I should just cry. He'll sit a bucker with the best.

“ Mrs. Tippins says ‘ children is stock.’ If they are made of the right stuff, she's not far wrong ! When she took bad, suddenlike, three years ago, Tippins was in the ranges carting for the splitters. It was at night when she took bad. Mrs. Muller, who lives in the house we passed on the right of the track away back, was the nearest woman who took on such jobs. What did Nipper do ? He flies round, him only thirteen then, like a terror, and catches his father's favourite mare, harnesses her to their spring cart, and drives like mad over the five miles of rough bush track—it were a bad road then—to Mrs. Muller.

“ Nipper almost frightens the life out of Mrs. Muller hammering at her door, as Muller and his son, Gustave, were away on a contract job. Mrs. Muller wasn't for opening the door at first. Not much. She had herself and her daughter Gretchen to think on. She weren't keen, anyhow, about getting out of bed. Soon she knew it was Nipper's voice singing out ‘ Mother's taken bad !’

“ ‘ What's come over your mother ?’ said Mrs. Muller.

“ ‘ I dunno nothing about it,’ replied Nipper, ‘ yer's got to come to her as fast as the mare'll take yer.’

“ ‘ I never knew your mother to be in such a hurry afore,’ said Mrs. Muller, hurrying to the cart.

“ ‘I dunno nothing about it,’ said Nipper doggedly. ‘Up yer get. Can’t yer spring a bit? Gosh, you’re heavy all right, Mrs. Muller.’

“ ‘Don’t you be so saucy, Nipper, and just be a bit perticular how you’re shoving me up.’

“After a struggle Nipper got Mrs. Muller into the cart and set going for home. About a mile back the cart struck a stump—Mrs. Muller and Nipper were thrown out, just where you cross the creek. ‘Course Nipper couldn’t pick his way in the dark at the pace he was going, and he wouldn’t go slower, though Mrs. Muller cried out that he would have her thrown out. She was holding on to the cart rail. Nipper replied, ‘The springs may go, Mrs. Muller, but you won’t!’ It was just about there that they both went into the bed of the creek.

“Nipper was up in a flash. He collared the mare. He then tells Mrs. Muller she ain’t dead, and she needn’t think she was for she had mostly fallen on him. Though Mrs. Muller swore she’d not trust Nipper again, and that she would walk the rest of the bally way, she didn’t. Nipper pushed her into the cart and soon afterwards he lobbed her into his mother’s house all right.

“That’s what I means when I agrees with Mrs. Tippins. ‘Children is stock,’ if they are of the right stuff.

“What? How did Mrs. Tippins get on? Oh! She was all right when Mrs. Muller got there. The baby wasn’t born till two days afterwards,

Mrs. Muller went on no end! Did in her block, thinking of the night's ride Nipper had given her. She declared as how Mrs. Tippins ought to be ashamed of herself for not knowing better than to drag folk out of their beds for nothing. 'The more children,' says Mrs. Muller, 'Mrs. Tippins had, the more casual-like she seemed to get.'

"What did Nipper say? Not much! Just 'I dunno—I don't understand these ere woman's games.'

"The first thing Nipper's father asked about when he heard of the affair was, 'Is the mare all right?' Which Mrs. Muller said was 'just like a man. His wife might have died; I might have been killed; it might have been twins; but no matter what, Jim Tippins could only ask, "Is the mare all right?"'

"Funny," mused Sam, as he flicked a fly off the near side one, "funny how men and women look at the same thing cross-eyed. My oath it is! Jim bred that mare of his. He thinks no end on her, but the women don't argufy that way. They only think of the kids, and what might have happened but didn't. Gosh, they're the limit!"

CHAPTER II

WAR ! ECHOES IN THE HILLS

A DEEP rest brooded in the hills of Ironbark. The settlers, under its drowsy influence, passed their days in the bovine-like contentment of bush life. They scarcely felt the stir of the Great Babel that vibrated beyond the hills. At one time it almost seemed as if the world might be in arms, yet the din of battlefields could scarcely disturb them. Certainly they would have been astonished if they had realised that the even course of their lives could be changed to the extent that they would be called upon to leave their ploughs to grip their swords.

Which devil was it, Beelzebub, Belial, or Mammon, that juggled to disturb the peace of the world, and thereby to destroy the peace that dwelt in Ironbark ? Why should the settlers by the devilish jugglings of men, possessed by fiends, seventy-sevenfold, be made pawns in the world's war game to satisfy the merciless maw of the God of War ? The

“ . . . horrid king besmeared with blood
Of human sacrifice and parents' tears ” ?

When the news came to Ironbark that Britain had declared war against Germany, it soon travelled to the hills. What the war meant, the settlers

scarcely knew. The nation was called to arms, and that cry of the Motherland, "To arms!" was heard.

"Your country needs you!"

Even as Cineinnatus left his plough to deliver his country from the hordes of Volsci, so the virile men of Ironbark determined to leave their homes to fight the good fight. What man, worth his breeding, could stand aloof at such a time? Had they not the mettle of their hills? Could a man die better than

". . . facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his gods?"

Such were the feelings, though unexpressed, in the breast of Jack Danvers, an old public school boy, who had taken up an allotment about three miles out from Ironbark. Following the winding track up the valley, through occasional breaks in the timber, glimpses of his cleared paddocks were to be seen.

Jack, now in his twenty-fourth year, had in him the best traditions of public school life. In the old schoolroom, behind the grey-blue stones of his Alma Mater, he had, as a boy, been taught his duty to God and to man. In his school's ample grounds he had learnt to "play the game." The blue-mitred flag, he knew so well, floating from the square tower peak, and the school's motto on the flag, "Ora et Labora," were to him a part of his youth; a remembrance of sunny

hours when the world, he being young, appeared to be also young. How large, in those delightful days of irresponsibility, "big school" was to his boyish eyes ! How sweet the chime of the tower clock, striking four as each stroke echoed in the quadrangle ! Those days were past, but the lessons learnt at the old school could not, by such a man as Jack Danvers, be forgotten. It was not so much for the learning that he had attained in his forms, as the spirit of public school life which he had assimilated, within the span of his school days, that was responsible for his mental outlook, making him the man he was.

As a boy he had left a good tally on the honour boards that, empanelled on the walls of "big school," recorded the "giants" of his day. He was in the Eleven, that famous Eleven which made the record score up to his time. And one of those paper and pen darts sticking in a rafter of the gabled roof of "big school" was thrown by Jack, for he had a straight aim, in the days when he was puzzling over the tenses of "Amo." But the difficulties he found, whilst at school, in the verb "Amo," were but the thistledown worries of a boy, when Jack compared them with the realisation of the extraordinary passive and active forms he discovered as a man, the verb "I love" could undergo with a bright smiling face, and a pair of laughing eyes, set in a head that seemed to Jack to have the poise of one who was a queen amongst women.

Yes, Jack loved Marion in the best of fashions ; a fashion that is perhaps a little out of date since our grandmothers were wooed and won. Jack knew that "woman is woman the wide world through," but then there is one woman who is not just quite the same as her sisters ! What is it that makes "the one" so alluring ? Is it a flash from the eyes, the tilt of a bewitching chin, a shapely ear, or what feminine charm ? Can a lover say ?

In Marion, Jack saw the one woman of his heart. He felt more of a man for loving her. Thoughts of her sweetened his labours. He whistled, with a light heart, as he farmed his land. He found pleasure in the chase, since Marion was coy, and made her winning worth the while.

At the coming of Jack into her life, Marion's troubles became less imaginary than they were when she was fighting the phantoms of discontent with her life. The world is full of the self-afflicting sort, who find a morbid satisfaction in destroying hope and replacing it by fear. If they have no real troubles and sorrows, they set about to see if they cannot create imaginary ones. Such are the perverse cravings of their natures ! They are to be pitied, of course, since it is their temperament. Marion herself was not quite free from the "temperament" that looks for imaginary troubles.

Hitherto she had liked men as one does a play, for the amusement of the moment. She knew enough of human nature to give her male friend

a little subtle flattery when she was in an agreeable mood. More than one self-deluding male had thought himself "first, the rest nowhere," yet when he looked at the foundations of his belief, he could not find anything beyond "trifles light as air" on which to accuse Marion of coquetting with him. Rather did the men fool themselves, for the sons of Adam have an "extra special" opinion of themselves that is marked "strictly private."

An otherwise sensible man can, in an astonishingly short time, talking to an attractive woman, make what Marion called "an awful ass of himself." She spoke with full knowledge. They had done so in her presence. Why could not the men be "just sensible" and leave love alone? Men were not long "nice" before they became troublesome! They were too fond of wanting climaxes, so they became dangerous, unreasonable, and even impossible.

While Marion's heart was "fancy free," she affirmed these things with the usual cocksureness of those who jest at a wound who have never felt a scar. The marked attention that Jack showed Marion undermined her confidence in her belief that her affections were hers to control, or that her heart, as well as her head, had not something to say about love, and something too her pretty ears were not slow to hear.

Almost without her knowledge, her heart capitulated to Jack's wooing, though, with the

perverseness of the sex, she dissembled her love the better to parley with Jack about her possession.

She found that love is a bitter sweet when it enters the bosom of a maid. She poured out her feelings to her mother like one groping in a new world, the labyrinths of which she fancied her mother had chartered. Love was such an old story. Surely someone could tell a maid how the story ran ?

On one occasion, before Marion went to Melbourne to learn to be a nurse, she told her mother that she was "going to give up Jack."

The two women were "washing up" the tea-things. The clatter of dishes, at such times, sets women's tongues going as no other domestic duty does.

Marion declared that "Jack did not understand her a little bit."

"Worse," she cried, "he does not take the trouble to understand me. He has not come near me for two days."

In moments of excitement Marion's spirit flashed through her eyes as lightning breaks from a cloud.

"But he's burning off," said Mrs. Debenham.

The valley was full of the smoke from bush fires. The air was charged with the smell of burning. A hundred fires glowed at night, red on the hills.

"Burning off !" her daughter replied with scorn, "cooling off, you mean ! Does he expect me to

excuse him ? You may excuse him if you like, mother, I won't. I know it is the nature of the beast, I don't love him a bit the less for it, but the game he's playing is like winking at a girl in the dark. How do I know he loves me if he does not tell me so at least twenty times a week ? There's half a dozen 'blobs' here who would do so if I gave them the chance."

"Are you not a bit unreasonable ?"

"I don't think so. If a man wants a woman he goes after her. There's no shilly-shallying in love when you've got it bad."

"Do you think you deserve a good fellow like Jack ? It's a real shame the way you try to bind him down."

"That's the trouble ! I can't bind him down. He's too strong, or too stupid, I don't know which ! I make up my mind sometimes to have it out with him, but when he comes down he explains so innocently how it came about that he did not come the day before, that I just have to hold my tongue. That is always, for me, a difficult thing to do."

"It's a real shame the way you worry him. Take care that he does not, instead of riding up and hanging his horse to our post, go further and have a talk to Gretchen Muller."

"Ha ! Gretchen Muller ! He's welcome to her if he wants her."

"I am almost resolved," said Mrs. Debenham, "not to give you advice. I know how tiresome

it grows. Still I am your mother. Believe me, good husbands are not common. Girls in my day caught young men with honey."

"Oh, I know I am, at times, horrid to Jack. It's sheer cussedness, I suppose. If Jack would only swear at me when I'm like that I think he'd be just lovely. He makes me, at times, real mad."

"I don't understand you girls of to-day," said Mrs. Debenham. "You read the 'fast' novels, and what do you get out of them for good? On the other hand, how much there is in them that stains the purity of women's thoughts. While the novels affect to portray a phase of womanhood, they really tend to create the womanhood they hold up to you as the modern type, a type, if it exists, I should be sorry to think my daughter had any likeness to."

"But you're old-fashioned, mother, in your ideas. This is the day of split skirts, and V-blouses, and a host of other snares to catch the male flies practised by butterflies."

She was not really serious, but she enjoyed shocking her mother. She did not wear split skirts, nor would she tolerate V-blouses, which she declared were "much too red-throaty for her taste."

"When we loved," continued Mrs. Debenham, "we didn't analyse."

"Quite so," replied Marion, and then with a wicked twinkle in her eyes, she said in that slang

she knew her mother detested, "It was a case of 'neck or nothing,' as it is to-day with the V-blouses."

"I suppose you'll never improve. For a girl who has scarcely gone a hen's race from her own door, you certainly surprise me. You girls always want to see whether your princes have clay feet even while they are courting you. What do you give in return?"

"Everything!" said Marion. "Our liberty! Everything! The prehistoric woman did not do more when her shaggy lord clubbed her into submission. Women have always had to go to the wall, and to sacrifice their liberty when yoked to men."

Mrs. Debenham paused for breath.

"'Pon my word, the world does not improve," she exclaimed with some show of impatience.

"In your day, mother, girls were soft. They took a man at the value he set upon himself. We know every mother's son of them."

"Perhaps so! Girls to-day think they know more than their mothers did at their age. Perhaps they do in one way, and that's not a nice way. May I ask, Marion, are you any the happier for your greater knowledge? Do the girls make any happier marriages than the little sentimental fools they think their mothers were?"

Mrs. Debenham had a suspicious break in her voice. She was a brave woman, but this constant nerve-wrecking talk got her down at times. "What-

ever," she thought, "would become of such a wayward, dissatisfied girl?"

"Oh, mother," cried Marion, full of love and sympathy, "I didn't mean to vex you."

In an instant one arm was round her mother's neck. With the hand that was free she was wiping away the tears that came from her mother in a sudden gush of emotion.

Marion was quite mindless that she was drying her mother's cheeks with the tea-cloth she had been using to dry the tea-things. As soon as the women realised the tea-cloth, they had to laugh.

When the time came for her daughter to go to Melbourne, though nothing was settled, Mrs. Debenham felt the young folks could manage their love affairs without her playing the part of a bell-wether.

Mrs. Debenham had a strain of superstition in her nature—what woman has not?—which she inherited from her Irish ancestry. Marion, though a healthy-minded Australian girl, did not escape from the bondage. Strive as we may, we are chained to our ancestors. If our grandmothers have heard the banshee wailing for the repose of lonely spirits, new to the nether world, who give utterance to the moansome cry "I only died last night," it is as likely as not that on some occasions, rare though they may be, we too may feel the awe that the sense of superstitious dread imposes, and under that dread cower in fear of—we know not what.

The night before Marion went to Melbourne, Jack and she stood in the shadow of a large lilac tree growing in her mother's garden. It was a clear night with the Southern Cross shining brilliantly, fringed by a thousand stars.

To Jack's pleasurable surprise, Marion had a token to give to him, in the shape of a scarab her father in his voyaging to and from the Orient had bought as a curio from an Arab at Cairo, who declared before Allah that it was a genuine Egyptian scarab, and not "a fake" of Arab manufacture. The scarab was a fine one, perfect in preservation, carved in carnelian, of the time of Cleopatra, with the symbol of immortality engraved on the body of the beetle, in addition to which upon the wings were Egyptian signs, that meant "where you find my fellow, you shall find death." This sentence was supposed to convey to the owner that the scarab, so exquisite in workmanship, had no fellow. Therefore the owner of the scarab might seek in vain for death.

"Do you believe in charms?" asked Marion.

"Well, I don't know," answered Jack, with an incredulous smile, and then he added quickly, with an admiring glance at Marion, "perhaps I do, in living charms."

"Oh, I'm serious," said Marion. "Scarabs are the most powerful of charms. Just think that that scarab now in your hands was the seal of some Egyptian 'Knut' at the time of Cleopatra and Antony. There is some legend on the

scarab, father knew it, but mother has forgotten what it is."

"Well, the legend is quite old enough, somewhere B.C., to be forgotten," said Jack good-humouredly. "I do not suppose the first owner of the scarab will be too hard on me, or that the 'Serpent of the Nile' will rise from her imperial mummydom to capture a cockie farmer. Did you say it was a love token?"

"I think I said a luck token," Marion replied with an arch smile, "but either one or the other. You can choose. It will serve for both."

Their faces were very close together, but the shadow cast by the lilac tree did not betray them.

A boo-book owl calling "Mopoke! Mopoke! Mopoke!" from the bush lands caused Marion to shudder a little and say:

"I never hear that cry but I think of a soul in distress. Is the cry uncanny to you?"

"No! A pair of the brown owls nest in the gum trees by my hut. I don't see them often in the daytime, but if any locusts come about they're soon after them. Their 'more-pork' doesn't trouble me. Why should it worry you?"

"I don't know, I just feel so. I have heard it as a little girl when I have been in bed. I've pulled the clothes over my head to shut out the dreary sound."

"You are a bit depressed, Marion. Why, the bird called last night as he is calling to-night; the cattle bells tinkled as they are tinkling to-

night ; the night wind sighed in the trees, and the frogs croaked as they do now. What are they but the sounds of the bush we hear every night ? They certainly do not portend anything except maybe that the voices of the bush are satisfied with things in Ironbark."

" You are not a bit superstitious," Marion said in a tone of half-reproach.

" Well, hardly, Marion, but I don't laugh at people who are, because I cannot understand their feelings. I wish I could."

Then they went inside to Mrs. Debenham, who was still busy and fussy, finding things to pack in Marion's portmanteau.

Beneath the light of the kerosene lamp that hung beneath the varnished boards of matchwood that formed the ceiling of the widow's parlour, Jack saw that Marion's eyes were suffused with tears. They made him happy since Marion could weep at their parting.

* * * * *

So the two roads that the maid and the man were destined to travel opened before them, and the boo-book owls called in the valleys, and the cattle bells tinkled in the hills, deep in the shadows of night.

CHAPTER III

THE TWO GERMAN SETTLERS

FRANZ MULLER and Heindrick Boder were two German settlers who had taken up land at Ironbark. Franz was a man with fair complexion, large blue eyes, and blond hair turning grey. His loose lips, those of a beer drinker, were partially concealed by a heavy moustache.

If a soul looked out of Muller's eyes it was not one to win a smile of welcome. Behind his mottled face there was the consciousness of a tragedy. Muller's voice was shrill, unpleasant. He did not laugh: a great misfortune, since the humanising sound of honest laughter is a lovable one. When Muller was amused he sniggered. Heaven defend us from the man, or woman, who sniggers! They have small and mean outlooks.

Boder was a thin, dark man, full of nervous energy. His sullen eyes peered from under black, shaggy eyebrows, his cheek bones were prominent, his cheeks scarcely knew a flush, his lips were as hard set as a piece of nether millstone. His face was covered with strong black bristles, which he cut with a scissors, so that he never looked clean about the chaps. He spoke quickly, in jerks, as a dog snaps. His smile, thin as whip-cord, suggested the wiles of a serpent. Instinctively men

felt that Boder was not to be trusted, possibly less as a friend than as an enemy.

At first the two Germans were close pals, but it came to pass that they fell out over a deal in calves. For some weeks they looked daggers at each other. As time sped they partly patched up their differences, but it was well known in Ironbark that Boder nursed anger against Franz, though his words to him for a while were smoother than butter.

Once Heindrick hoped that he would make Franz's daughter, Gretchen, his wife, though he was a man of fifty years of age, while she was a winsome girl of twenty. Franz himself in his dull, boorish mind did not see anything impossible in Heindrick's desires. But his wife, when the proposed marriage was mentioned to her, turned on Franz with such fury that he, a coward at heart, cringed under her onslaught. He never suspected that there were such fires smouldering in his wife, so hot was her withering scorn. As a rule he had found her a silent woman, who seldom questioned his "yea" or "nay."

Mrs. Muller left the impression on those who knew what a hard life she led, that she had yoked herself in bondage which she was minded to endure to the end. She was too proud to admit to her relations that she had made a fatal mistake in marrying Muller. On the contrary, she was ready to defend acts of his that she knew in her heart did not admit of defence. But this scheme of

Boder's, this sacrifice that her husband parleyed with, set her whole frame tingling with indignation. It was unclean, unholy, outrageous. Had Germans any sense of decency at all?

"Never! Never shall Gretchen marry a German!" exclaimed Mrs. Muller; "I'd sooner see her carried out in her coffin to her grave. You have 'fed me up' on Germans! If I was a fool when I married you, I've long since outlived my folly."

Muller was dumbfounded. He felt that even his cunning was scarcely sufficient to appease his wife's wrath that flowed out in every direction. It was easy to beat a nest of bull-ants so as to cause them to rush angrily from their holes. A child could do that; but who could drive them back?

"All right," said Muller, "have it your own way, but I thought Boder would to Gretchen make a good husband. He's getting on. His farm's a nice one. He makes as much out of his pigs as Sandy Pilkins does. He's got the best Berkshire boar in the district."

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Mrs. Muller. "Would you swop Gretchen for pigs? What sort of a thing are you? You can tell your scrubby-faced countryman that if he shows his black German mug at our door, I'll mark him."

Seized with the madness of anger Mrs. Muller continued, the impersonation of a fury, "And what are you—you—you—but like him, a German!

You've worked me like a slave, but you'll not have the chance to make Gretchen the slave of that beast!"

Their son Gustave, who was outside the house, and who had heard his mother storming at the top of her voice, came in to the room where he saw his mother confronting his father in a threatening attitude.

As Gustave did so, his father made an attempt to strike Mrs. Muller, but Gustave, short and sturdy, gave his father a heavy push, causing his clenched fist to miss its mark.

"You leave mother alone," said Gustave. "She's not a German, and you'll treat her properly. You can't do as you like in Australia. Gretchen will not marry Boder."

Franz, who was thoroughly cowed in the presence of his son, stalked out of the house cursing the obstinate fools that formed his family whom he could not rule.

When he told Heindrick of the family row, and of the family decision, Heindrick spat on the ground, saying, "These Australian pigs, what can you do with them?"

The two Germans went to the Ironbark Arms. There they drank themselves into a maudlin state of affection for each other. Passing that stage of drunkenness, they started to quarrel over the question as to whose turn it was "to shout." They were hustled out of the hotel. Franz, after staggering home, spent a cold night in his cowshed. He was too frightened to again awaken his wife's

wrath by going to his home. The doors would not have been opened to him. Gretchen herself had barred them.

When Heindrick thought over what had occurred, when he realised that Gretchen's kisses would never be his, a heavy hate loaded his heart like lead. War against the Mullers became his love. He hated Franz as he hated hell pains. It was, he thought, because Franz was a spineless weakling in his own house that he had lost Gretchen. In Germany she would have to do her father's bidding; in Australia girls married as they choose!

The turbulent passions that surged in Heindrick's breast did not have any other effect than to cause him to burn with unsatisfied fires. He tortured himself by his own vehemence until he was in danger of becoming obsessed with the red lust of murder. He felt at times that he must "kill! kill! kill!"

The post office was the distributing centre of the news from the war that reached Ironbark. The news was thereafter each night discussed in the bar of the Ironbark Arms. A notable bar it was. At one end was an open fireplace, large enough to burn thick gum-tree logs. When the valley was filled in winter with an "eager and nipping air," straight off the snow-covered hills, the bar, warmed by the great fire, was as pleasant a resting-place wherein to take your ease as there was to be found thereabouts.

Above the fireplace, hanging in a frame, was a lyre-bird's tail. The settlers sometimes found the birds' dome-shaped nests in the heads of fern trees, or maybe at the base of a tree stump, or on a ledge of rock, so long as the trees, or rocks, were in the furthest recesses of the fern and sassafras gullies. In the morning, or evening, the birds could be heard by the teamsters whistling their liquid and melodious notes in the valleys below the winding tracks. They were bush humorists in the marvellous way they imitated the laugh of the kookaburra, the screams of the parrots, or any other sounds that attracted their attention. It was a standing joke—as a joke a little bit groggy on its legs perhaps—to tell a man who “talked tall” to take the tail home with him.

At the other end of the bar was a notice-board on which was pinned particulars of any local event. It served the purpose of a primitive local newspaper. The records of the Ironbark Rifle Club and their week-end matches were posted each month. Jack Danvers' name usually headed the list as the best rifle-shot in the district.

The licensee of the Ironbark Arms was Martin Hickford, who was more popular with the settlers than the parson who seldom visited them. Martin was a generous-hearted soul who could always find a billy of flour for a swagman at odds with his luck.

In his day Martin had “humped his bluey.” He had not forgotten the palship that is often made between men tramping along the bush

distances that cover the sunburnt tracks to the Never-Never.

Martin sat on a high office stool behind the beer pumps. From his seat, he looked on those in the bar, and between the pulling of the pumps, and "laying down the law" to his customers, he did not live in vain. He was the local court of appeal. Whether it was a question of the pedigree of a horse or a paddock's yield of oats, when Martin delivered his ultimatum it was accepted with a beer-breathed chorus of "Martin knows," and Martin would blink his eyes and look almost as wise as the old cockatoo "Polly" that had the run of the bar, when the bird cried, as he often did, "Martin knows!"

Like many of these out-of-the-way bush publicans, Martin combined a little farming with his business of hotel-keeping. In the days before the war he had employed Franz Muller in fencing some of his paddocks. In that way the two men became friendly. Muller often spoke to Martin about his family affairs, and frequently sought his advice in the cases of difficulty that bristled along his tracks.

Martin did not doubt Muller's love for his family as it was given to Muller to understand love. Unfortunately Muller and his family did not "hit it." Whether the animosity wife and children displayed towards Muller was racial, or arose from other causes, Martin could never fathom.

In an undefined way Martin had a mild feeling

of pity for Muller, whom he regarded at one time as too beer-sodden and too crazy to do harm to anyone outside his family who did not, in Martin's opinion, treat him quite fairly. Yet on the other hand, had Mrs. Muller received a square deal from Muller ? Martin was well aware that Muller, after the German fashion, had made his wife a beast of burden. As an Australian Martin had no time for German brutality—but it was the German way, and that explained everything.

The mistake Kate Hardley, being an Australian girl, had made was in marrying a German. Anyway, there they were, and that being so, Martin liked to feel that he did his "little bit" to make things run with less friction in the Muller family.

A bond of sympathy between Martin and Muller was Martin's intense dislike to Heindriek, whom he termed a "bally German crawler who would skin a flea for its hide if he could market it."

A disputed beer score of Boder's did not raise him in Martin's favour, who had no objection to "stand a drink" if a man wanted it, but who had, on the other hand, a strong objection to be "got at" by "such a swine as Boder."

When the tide of public opinion in the hills set against the two Germans, Boder and Muller still went to the Ironbark Arms as if they had no interest in the ultimate triumph of Germany over the Allies.

Boder, in Martin's words, "gave him the pip." Boder, in his opinion, was bad enough to commit

murder if he thought the crime would not "out." Martin had told his wife, in confidence, that he would not be surprised if Boder attempted, when a safe opportunity presented itself, to do bodily harm to Muller.

"I hate," said Martin, "to have the two men together in the bar. They glare at each other in such a way that it's only the whisk of a cow's tail between their flying at each other's throats."

"Do you think," asked Mrs. Hickford, "that Boder is a spy?"

"I don't know what he could spy on here. If I thought so I'd get a move on and have him interned. He has not taken out naturalisation papers."

"Muller has done so, years ago," said Mrs. Hickford.

"Yes, I know. But I've no stomach for 'naturalised Germans.' A scrap of paper can't make a German other than he is. A naturalised German is neither flesh, fish, fowl, nor good red herring. What can you think of a man who spews up his nationhood? Is he worth a tinker's curse to anybody?"

A few nights after that conversation had taken place between Martin and his wife the bar was filled with men who had just come from the post office. Amongst them were the two Germans.

Franz was in a talkative mood. He was speaking loudly of the way he approved of Great Britain fighting in support of the neutrality of Belgium.

Heindriek looked at him with malignant hate. It seemed to Boder that Franz was throwing out a challenge to him. He went up to Franz and said something to him in German.

Franz at once shouted, "Boder says I ought to be shot. Mein Gott, I guess if it's shooting I think his luck right out ! Ya !"

The bar was in an uproar in a moment.

"Put Boder out," cried Martin authoritatively.

"Martin's right," the crowd rejoined ; "chuck Boder out."

"Martin's right !" shrieked the cockatoo.

Boder did not wait to be "chucked out." He went through the hotel door before a hand could be laid on him.

Outside, in the road, he paused for a moment to hurl back the threat, "I'll be even with you, Muller, you . . . cow !"

"Oh, the dirty dog !" said Martin.

"Martin's right," the cockatoo chuckled. "Martin's right."

The honours were with Franz. The men felt that Muller did not make himself offensive like Heindriek, and they were content, drinking long beers, to listen to him telling how his son, Gustave, was going to enlist.

"What will your wife do without Gustave ?" asked Mrs. Hickford, who had come from the hotel kitchen to see what the uproar was about.

"What does any woman do whose son goes to the war but wait and hope ?" said Martin.

"Of course Mrs. Muller has Gretchen. I have not seen her for some time, Mr. Muller. I did hear from Mrs. Tippins that Gretchen had gone away for a change."

It was quite true that Gretchen had left Ironbark, but not for the reason that Mrs. Hickford's remark implied. The cause of Gretchen's going was a very bitter and a sad one to the Mullers. She was one of those unfortunate and ever-to-be-pitied young women who had loved not wisely but too well. With heart-breaks she had confessed her weakness to her mother, and told her how, under the promise of marriage, Ted Debenham had taken advantage of her love for him. Her mother had not loaded her with reproaches as some mothers would have done. Her child was manifestly suffering too acutely and too overwhelmed at the thought of her coming shame for Mrs. Muller to still further increase the depths of the great despair in Gretchen's heart. Her one thought was to protect her daughter from the world's sneers, which in such cases return like boomerangs, since the best of women may well hesitate before casting the first stone. Were everything known, and all told, who would be sinless? What is sport to some men in such cases is ruin to most women, if they are abandoned by their own flesh and blood. The courage of despair is not given to every woman when

" . . . she stoops to folly
And finds too late that men betray,"

to wring their betrayer's heart by dying. Such " wringings " are very problematical !

Mrs. Muller gave Gretchen the support of a sympathetic mother, who, though grievously saddened, was not overwhelmed by her daughter's shame. Life's battle had made Mrs. Muller a fighter. In no attribute of her being was there more abiding power than in the great motherly instinct for the protection of her young. Gretchen was her daughter, and, being so, she would shield her with the might of her great love, and save her, at any cost, from sinking into those awful depths that yawn open at the feet of betrayed and abandoned women. In her heart Mrs. Muller knew her daughter ; knew that she was a pure girl who had been as innocent and as happy as any maid could be. Had Gretchen known more of the wiles of men she would have not been so easily led astray by her love for Ted Debenham, who now shilly-shallied over the plain duty before him to make Gretchen his wife.

Muller himself, from whom the state of things could not be concealed, stormed at his wife and daughter. Had he been able, he would have turned his daughter out of doors and sent her to find her ultimate fate on the streets. Mrs. Muller, however, quickly brought him to a more reasonable frame of mind when she threatened that if Gretchen was cast forth from the house, she would go too. Muller demanded to know who was the man who betrayed Gretchen, but the two women were

adamant on that point. Mrs. Muller for the reason that she knew that any hope of Ted Debenham marrying Gretchen would be gone once her husband, in his coarse, brutal way, attempted to right wrongs by bully-ragging and browbeating. Gretchen because she would not betray her betrayer. Such is the love of some women. They take a pleasure in immolating themselves on the altar of love even when they themselves are the victims in the sacrificial fires!

Later, Muller saw eye to eye with his wife. His desire was to help her to conceal Gretchen's shame. Muller was now full of compassion for Gretchen, so liable to change are the minds of drunkards, but he had more pity, of a maudlin sort, for himself.

A year or so before Gretchen's trouble Muller made a will in her favour. He bequeathed to her his farm, subject to a life interest to be enjoyed by his wife. His first impulse when his family thwarted him was to revoke this will. Later, he thought he would let the will stand. Gretchen had need of his property now more than ever. Gustave could fend for himself.

Gustave, to his father, was aggressively Australian. He hurt his German parent's feelings by scoffing at the Fatherland: in burning an oleograph portrait of the Kaiser! Since Gustave could fight his father, Muller declared, let him fight his own way through the world.

Gretchen, on the other hand, had shown herself

to be an obedient daughter, but when Muller was drunk she treated him, well, perhaps as he deserved. The one thing Muller felt sore about was the family refusal to give him the name of Gretchen's betrayer. If he was sure of the man he would know what to do !

These discussions, heartburnings, and rows in Muller's family circle were known to Martin, but he had not told his wife the particulars of them. "Women," in Martin's opinion, "were not to be trusted." Therefore when Mrs. Hickford commenced to talk about Gretchen he cried out to her :

"Knock off ! Knock off ! Bill wants a drink."

"As I was saying——" Mrs. Hickford went on.

"Mother, will you kindly attend to Bill ?" said Martin.

There was no mistaking Martin's tone. It meant "stop." Mrs. Hickford suspected that she had touched forbidden, if not dangerous ground, but in what direction she could not guess.

Muller felt that what he most feared was coming to pass, even more rapidly than he anticipated. He was conscious of no anger against Mrs. Hickford. She was quite innocent of any intention to open any family cupboard of his wherein to expose a skeleton. It was her husband who had blundered. It was the bungle of a good-natured man whom he had trusted ; a man who had promised him that he would not tell his wife.

Martin had obviously been as good as his word, but Muller felt that the men in the bar knew the meaning of the hotel-keeper's warnings to his wife.

Franz believed from the first time the crushing blow had fallen upon him that it was impossible to keep a secret in a country hamlet. In the city, perhaps yes, but not in the hills.

When he borrowed Martin's buggy to take his daughter to the railway station ten miles away, he had to tell him why he did not want to send her by the coach. Martin was as sympathetic as the most distressed father could desire. It was due to Martin's advice that he, Muller, had not shot the man he suspected.

Martin had pointed out to Muller that he, Muller, did not know anything, nor could he unless Gretchen told him. Muller could not say for certain if his wife was aware of the name of the author of his daughter's undoing. One thing stood out clearly. His daughter declared Jack Danvers was not the man.

To Muller the wrong done was distressing and puzzling.

How that beast Boder would chuckle if he only knew !

Muller's merciless conscience held the past up to him like an accusing mirror. He recalled a saying he had often heard Sam use—"The might-have-beens are mostly ain'ts." He thought of the Australian girl he had taken to wife in the first bloom of her womanhood. What was she now, after he had almost Germanised her into a Frau of the field ?

From dawn to dark she had worked with him

to make their farm what it was. In addition to that she had attended the births of half the youngsters in Ironbark to earn extra money for him : she had laid out most of Ironbark's dead.

There had not been any sentiment in their lives as they led them. Only hard work, changed sometimes to harder days of toil, but always hard work. What a life ! And his wife had " stuck it."

The bitterness was that the realisation was too late. Their vigorous manhood and womanhood had flown on the wings of the past ! The empty husks of existence only remained ! As through a glass darkly he realised, when it was too late, the greatness of love ! How the soul of his wife had been starved for want of it ! How he had strangled her affection ! How love had flamed, not wisely but too well, in the heart of his daughter !

What a mess he had made of life !

Nature was greater than Franz Muller. When the German, crushed, realised that his mind was in a mental storm that he was unable to stay, he thought he would go mad ! He was already tottering on the line that divides reason from insanity.

He heard Martin telling him to go home. It was as a voice heard in a dream.

Franz Muller went into the night—drunk with liquor, drunk with wrongs done, drunk with wrongs suffered—to meet in the hills, the next day, an old friend of humanity.

CHAPTER IV

MULLER FOUND DEAD ON THE HILL-TOP

FRANZ MULLER passed a troubled night in one of his farm outhouses. At dawn he was awakened by the whistling of magpies as they hopped in and about the cowsheds looking for beetles.

Away from the steadying influence of Martin Hickford, Muller was obsessed with the thought that Jack Danvers was the cause of his family trouble. He determined to have it out with him once and for ever. Danvers' blood must be on his own head if he refused to marry Gretchen.

Franz's state was deplorable, though a judge and jury would have probably pronounced him sane enough to be held responsible for his acts. But then judges and juries, even while honestly desiring to give a prisoner justice, often fail to learn what are the motives and springs that lie hidden in a crime. Pre-natal influences are seldom taken into account however inconclusive an estimate may be formed of them.

Muller was born during the time of the Danish war. His father fell, a soldier, in the fiercely contested battle of Düppel. The loss of her husband inflamed the mind of Muller's mother with hate and murder. Who can tell how far these passions were inherited by Muller? In that respect we are

of the tribe of Issachar. On the one side we crouch under the burden of our ancestors' vices, while on the other side we bequeath our personal burdens to our descendants.

Muller made his way into the hills in the direction of Jack Danvers' house. On the road he met Nipper Tippins, who was taking home a couple of horses from the sawmill that his father had bought from Ted Debenham. Muller's first impulse was to avoid him, but it was too late to do so.

"Hullo, Nipper, an early bird, you !"

"You've got to be early at our place," replied the boy. "The old man's got an alarm clock. Bought it off an Indian hawker. The darn thing at first went off in the middle of the night. Times doesn't go off at all. Got to get up just the same as if it did. I put it in a bucket of water the other day, now the old man swears the hawker swindled him. What price alarm clocks ? No good to me."

"Have you seen Jack Danvers ?" asked Muller.

"No. He told me last night that he was going rifle-shooting this morning. I haven't heard them firing yet. If the old man lets me, I'm going with Jack when he goes to Melbourne to enlist."

"You are too young," said Muller.

"Garn ! You'll see," Nipper replied as he pressed his heels into his horse, and rode off.

Jack's house stood some distance from the track, in a pleasant garden of rosemary, wallflowers, lavender, mignonette and such sweet-smelling favourites. The old-time flowers were favoured

by Jack because they, together with other plants, lemon thyme, salvia and crocus, were beloved by bees. Jack kept a dozen hives, from which thousands of bees, on summer days, were to be seen coming and going, and humming. Busy bees they were on a sweet-smelling two-acre bean patch that was out in blossom a hundred yards away.

When Muller knocked at the front door no one answered. He went round the back to the kitchen. The door was open. He entered the house. On the table was a pot half filled with cold tea. Hot and fevered from his night's debauch, he was glad of the cool drink. Hanging from a nail over the mantelpiece was a loaded revolver. He took the weapon in his hand. The sight of means to do ill deeds bade fair to make ill deeds done.

Early as Muller had stirred that morning, Jack was first abroad. He was after some dingoes that had been howling near his sheep. With his dog "Tim," a half-bred English terrier of quick intelligence, he followed the trail of the wild dogs. Their tracks led across Boder's paddocks to somewhere near the Ironbark rifle range.

Not finding Jack at home, Muller went towards the bean paddock in the hope of meeting him there. Disappointed again, Muller climbed over a log fence into Boder's property on his way to the rifle butts, from where sounds of firing came. When he crossed the paddock, Boder, who was slashing down bracken in an abandoned sawpit,

stopped his work. Muller passed by without seeing him, but Muller was close enough for Boder to hear him muttering, "I'll kill him." Boder saw the revolver in Muller's hand. He guessed that Muller intended the contents of the weapon for him.

Boder went to his house for his rifle. Then he hurried after Muller. Rifle in hand he stalked Muller. The primordial instincts of man, to kill, were awakened in him by the hate he bore to Muller and his family.

Sheltering behind trees and bush, Boder's belief grew stronger that Muller intended to kill him. He determined that if Muller looked back he would shoot him. Growing in a tangle of brambles and ferns on the hill-top was a thick clump of wattle. Half-way down on the other side of the hill were the rifle butts, from where bullets fired wide of their mark sometimes whizzed upwards into space.

Boder became suspicious. Muller looked neither to the right nor to the left. Was it possible that Muller knew he was followed? Did he intend to lie ambushed? If so, Boder saw he would be taken at a great disadvantage. Muller could choose when, and the position in the brambles from where he would fire. To hesitate was to be lost. Muller's figure was not so clear against the wattles as he had hoped. In a moment he would be hidden by the bush. Then it would be too late.

From behind a log, whereon he rested his rifle, Boder took a steady sight on Muller, and fired. He did not wait to see if Muller disappeared. As Boder was hurrying away he heard the report of a revolver shot. A great fear came upon him. Muller was alive, and well enough, at least, to return his fire.

In an agitated state, Boder returned to his house. Not long after he saw Jack with his dog crossing the paddock. He watched him climb the log fence, and pass into his own property. Boder thought he must have been at the rifle butts, but evidently he had not passed over the hill-top. Had he done so he would have seen Muller, who, if alive, would probably have called out for help. Danvers would not, in that case, be on his way home. Boder was far from feeling relieved. Was Muller alive or dead? He could but wait in a hell of anxiety for time to answer.

* * * * *

For some days prior to Muller's death, the weather was threatening. Thunder rumbled in the hills. At last the storm burst in the night, as wild a one as any that the settlers remembered. In the morning the countryside was wet and dripping. The creeks were swollen, landslips and fallen trees blocked the tracks. Overhead was a dull grey sky, reflected cold shadows making the bushlands look dreary and inhospitable. Sheep in the paddocks huddled together. The

cattle stood with their tails to the wind, mournfully bellowing their protests.

Beyond the ranges was a break in the tearful heavens from where a shaft of light came as a rainbow of hope, holding out the promise of brighter days. It shone on the white trunks of the gum trees that had been "rung," causing the dead timber to stand in relief against the purple background of the hills. On the top of the rifle-range hill lay the corpse of Franz Muller. Above the body on a bleached bough, a laughing jackass chuckled loud, and louder :

" Ka-koo-koo-koo
A dead man see !
Ka-koo-koo-koo
Ka-ka-koo."

Other jackasses flew to the jackass, who was acting as the bellman of the bush. They too, in various tones, laughed abroad the gruesome news. Steers started and stampeded wild of eye, with pig-like jumps, down the hill when they caught sight of the body.

For two days Muller's body lay, unseen by man.

* * * * *

In consequence of the strange disappearance of Muller, Trooper Hawley came from the district police station, fifteen miles away, to search for him. Hawley went into the hills with Mulga White, a half-caste aboriginal youth, Nipper Tippins and Muller's son, Gustave.

Nipper was the first to draw attention to the crows gathering in the trees.

“What an infernal row they’re making,” said Nipper.

“Any tracks?” asked Hawley of Mulga.

“Too much rain,” replied Mulga. “Plenty crow show dead jumbuck, perhaps big fellow top of hill.”

The crows’ dismal “kar-kar-kar” seemed to foretell the nearness of carrion. The birds knew the thing lying on its back was dead, dead, aye, as any sheep’s skull or skin hanging bleaching on the rails of the slaughter yard.

Soon afterwards the party searching found what they sought.

CHAPTER V

THE INQUEST AT IRONBARK

WHEN the untoward fate of Franz Muller was known in Ironbark, the settlers, talking in little groups, indulged in wild speculation as to what the murder, or the suicide of Muller meant. Who killed him? Did Boder know anything about it? Was Muller a spy? So many men, so many minds!

In the end it was agreed that the inquest would probably throw light on the affair. The Police Magistrate for the district was to conduct the inquiry. A post-mortem examination had already been held on the body by Doctor Spiers. The doctor came from Fernlog, a township about twenty miles from Ironbark. He had not made much headway there, as the people were so "beastly healthy," yet for a young inexperienced man, who had just taken his diploma, he was at least making a living.

When Edward Stabbs, Esquire, P.M., alighted from Sam's coach, the usual group of settlers at the post office gazed at him in wonder. He was a dapper, middle-aged man, clean shaven on the upper lip and chin, but with tufts of white whiskers on each cheek. A hard flat-topped hat, modelled on a special block, shaded the legal wisdom within

his pate. But the settlers scarcely noticed the hat, at least not at first, since their attention was arrested by an eyeglass the P.M. was constantly fixing in his right eye, with a screw of his face that was intensely comical. The glass, as often as not, fell from his eye as soon as the spectators believed that it was "stuck at last." On his feet were patent-leather boots, surmounted with mouse-coloured spats. Leggings any horseman could understand, but spats! Truly the P.M. was not of their world. They could not "size him."

The inquest took place in the large room of Martin's pub. The settlers who could crowd into it did so, making the atmosphere close and unhealthy. Those who failed to squeeze in stood in the passage of the hotel hoping to hear some scraps of the evidence.

Sam was amongst the latter. He confided in a stage whisper to his neighbour, "that he would bet when the washing was done that the 'beak' would find a woman at the bottom of the tub."

Some youngsters flattened their noses against the window-pane in an attempt to peep into the crowded room. On the Coroner's order they were turned off the verandah by Martin, who threatened them with a whip if they came near the hotel again. They ran into the middle of the road. They put their fingers to their noses, but the lunar was not directed at Martin, but to the place where they imagined the representative of His Majesty's law

was sitting. Their troubles about Crown 'quest law or its administrator !

Public opinion in Ironbark was doomed to disappointment. At the conclusion of the inquiry that P.M., in his capacity of Coroner, said there was no evidence that shed any conclusive light upon how the unfortunate man received the fatal gun-shot wound. There was evidence of some mental disturbance, brought about by drink, that might have caused the deceased to commit suicide, but, in the absence of any weapon being beside the body, that theory had to be negated.

The evidence, the P.M. said, of Dr. Spiers showed that Muller had a shot wound in the right breast. Had Muller compassed his own destruction he would have probably shot himself in the left breast. It would have been easier for him to do so. It was a notable fact that the wound was, in most cases, found in the left breast, as the statistics of suicides by chest wounds showed. Dr. Spiers had corroborated his, the Coroner's, personal knowledge on the subject.

Dr. Spiers had very frankly told them that his authority was not personal, but from a medical jurisprudence book on the subject of suicide, and that he, himself, had no actual experience of gun-shot wounds, and, further, that this was the first time he had made a post-mortem examination on the body of a man who had died by a gun-shot wound.

After a readjustment of his eyeglass, which

certainly was not behaving itself, the Coroner continued his summing up.

“On the other hand,” the Coroner waved his right hand in a way that somehow conveyed the impression that he was at one with all the pros and cons of the case, “some rifle shots had been fired at the local butts on the morning the deceased was supposed to have been shot. That was important—very. The boy who gave his name as ‘Nipper’ Tippins, deposed that when he saw Muller on the morning of his death he seemed quite rational. The deceased had asked the boy ‘Nipper’ if he had seen Jack Danvers anywhere along the splitters’ track? Evidently the deceased wanted to see Jack Danvers. Why? Jack Danvers offered no explanation.”

Reverting to ‘Nipper,’ the P.M. said “that when he was asked what he said to the deceased, the boy replied, ‘nothing in particular.’ Pressed to answer he told a cock and bull yarn about putting an alarm clock into a bucket of water. He, the Coroner, half suspected the boy of trifling with the Court. Had he not apologised for the laughter the absurd story he told produced, he, the Coroner, would certainly have dealt severely with him.

“Further, there was the evidence of Trooper Hawley, who asked the boy if the deceased looked as if he contemplated suicide. He had replied, ‘I dunno.’ That was a most remarkable reply for an apparently intelligent youth to make, for

it left the court in the same darkness as it was before the witness spoke. Such, he might inform them, was not the function of evidence. Evidence must throw light on the subject otherwise it was not evidence, and without evidence justice could not be done. In short, 'Nihil habet forum ex scena,' a remark they might perhaps (the learned P.M. dwelt on the word 'perhaps') understand when he referred to the crass ignorance, if it was not contempt of court, in the witness Tippins's 'I dunno.' Any boy who had been blessed by a paternal government with a State school education, should know how a man would look if he contemplated suicide."

The P.M. again readjusted his eyeglass under his right eyebrow, and turned his eye on Martin, who looked supremely uncomfortable under the scrutiny of the eye with the glass pane.

"Did Franz Muller commit suicide? Martin Hickford deposed, and you all know Martin Hickford——"

Martin went as near to blushing as his red face was capable of doing, since his blush was a perennial of hardy growth. Martin, to cover his confusion, violently blew his nose. Martin's nose was noisy when in action.

The P.M. looked harder at Martin than ever, and continued, "Martin Hickford said the deceased was 'shicker' on the night before his death, and I learn from the same authority," he nodded towards Martin, "that 'shicker' means

drunk, a fact I had no judicial cognisance of before. Truly Ironbark is a remarkable place ! ”

“ I have noted with regret that while many men get drunk—too many indeed—yet they do not shoot themselves, more’s the pity.”

Getting well into his judicial stride, the Coroner said “ that he could not dismiss from his mind that the disturbance which had taken place in the Ironbark Arms between the deceased, and the German settler Heindrick Boder, was worthy of consideration. Boder had said in German, according to the deceased, that he ‘ ought to be shot,’ and they were faced with the fact that Muller was shot. On the other hand, the remark, and the subsequent death of Muller, may have been a mere coincidence. In his somewhat extended experience of the Courts, strange coincidences were not unknown to him.

“ Boder submitted to the Court an apparently satisfactory account of his movements on the day Muller was supposed to have met his death. He told the Court that the witness Danvers had crossed his paddocks in the early morning, and that his attention was first directed towards him by seeing his dog. Danvers, when recalled for cross-examination, admitted that was so, for he did return to his home after a dingo hunt through Boder’s paddock.

“ Danvers also proffered his opinion, which was not evidence (though sitting as a Coroner’s Court he, the P.M., had a wide discretion as to

what constituted evidence), that Boder could hardly have shot Muller, and be at the place he said he was to see Danvers returning home. In Danvers' opinion, Muller was not murdered, and he, the P.M., himself inclined to that opinion.

"He thought the man's wife might have given them a clue to the mystery. The jury had the opportunity to see her attitude in the witness-box. How did she impress them? Did she seem dazed? At first he was inclined to think that she was holding something back, but he was convinced, on reflection, that the woman was afflicted with bucolic dullness, the result of a life of hard work in the bush that always falls to the wives of farmer settlers in new countries. No doubt she had given her evidence, which amounted to nothing, to the best of her limited ability.

"Reduced, what were the facts before them? Muller was found lying dead in the line of fire of the rifle ranges. What was more likely than that he should have been shot in that way? He must repeat that he personally favoured the view that Muller had been shot by a bullet intended for a target at the rifle butts."

The jury accepted the Coroner's view as a direction, and a verdict of death by misadventure was accordingly recorded.

The P.M., in thanking the jury for their patient and intelligent investigation of the death of Franz Muller, remarked "that he was glad that the affair, which in its opening phases looked mysteri-

ous, had been cleared up satisfactorily, specially at such a time when any German found shot in the bush might be thought to be the victim of a murderous development of the spy mania.

“There was one thing, however,” said the P.M., “that the evidence taken had disclosed, and it was that Boder was a dangerous alien. Such men the authorities very properly were interning every day. He, the P.M., would communicate with the military authorities on the subject of Boder’s internment.”

The jury was dismissed. The Court’s business was concluded. The Coroner was in time to catch the outgoing coach. He once more readjusted his eyeglass, glad that he had not to pass the night in Martin’s hotel, reeking of stale tobacco smoke. Better a thousand times to be well rugged in the box-seat of Sam’s coach, smoking a cigar above suspicion (not one of Martin’s) and to watch the horses tooled along the track by Sam.

And so the worthy and well-groomed P.M. felt that he had done his duty in that sphere of life in which it had pleased a discriminating providence to place him. Feeling so, he thanked providence for the mercy that a month’s salary was due to him on the following day for upholding the dignity of the paid magistracy, in places where the inhabitants knew more of breeding cattle than the law of evidence, and more of “shicker” and less of Latin than he, the Police Magistrate and Coroner for the district.

CHAPTER VI

SCENE IN JACK DANVERS' HUT

PUBLIC opinion in Ironbark was not satisfied with the verdict the Coroner had recorded. Generally the countryside believed there was more behind the death of Franz Muller than had come to light.

Amongst the interested spectators at the inquest was Ted Debenham, and no one felt more relieved than he when the jury returned a verdict of "Death by Misadventure." He was as one reprieved. Acute as his sufferings had been he had hidden them from view. His great fear was that his relations with Muller's daughter would come out in evidence, but the line of cross-examination did not run in that direction, nor was it suggested that Gretchen was in any way responsible for her father's mental condition.

Debenham was under no delusion as to Mrs. Muller's intelligence. He felt it was only another proof of how clever she was since she could leave the impression of dullness on the Coroner that she desired. He knew too what was her attitude towards him and how much he owed to Gretchen's pleadings with her mother that she had not exposed him, though at the same time he thought there was some family consideration involved in

Mrs. Muller's silence. Still, it was very fortunate for him that things were as they were.

Reviewing his part in the tragedy, he admitted to himself that he was "a miserable sort of hound," but even so he had some regard for the shame that his mother and sister would feel if the truth came out. That he had such a regard he counted unto himself as a virtue, so eager and weak are we to decorate ourselves if there is what the riflemen at the Ironbark butts called a "possible."

"If the truth came out" he knew that Marion would not set her foot in Ironbark again, and that his mother would resign her position as post-mistress. How could she stand the sneers of the "cats of Ironbark"? Yet Ted stiffened himself with the thought that he had to consider himself. "A man was a man. Women did not count in his career. It was deplorable, of course, if the women had to go under, but better women's tears, shame and remorse, than that a young fellow should wreck his life for them. Anyway, his mother had done her dash. Her life was downhill. A pushing young party like Marion would marry, just when she willed it. She would then have the protection of her husband's name. What the devil was there to worry about? All would come right in the end. It was easy for Jack Danvers to talk, but suppose a man did not care to marry? Was he to be leg-roped into hitching up with a girl?"

Those were Debenham's views about the time when Muller was found dead. Since then he had

a dominant desire to leave Ironbark. Had it not been for Jack he would have done so. Muller's death had "got him down." He was not, however, so crushed by circumstances that had him now by the throat, as to be blind to the chance that he might be suspected of knowing something, if he suddenly disappeared. Jack would stick to him, of course, that was like Jack, but after all Jack couldn't do less since he wanted to marry Marion.

It was the night of the day after the inquest that the two men were alone together in Jack's hut. Danvers at first thought Ted would need support, or else he might break down and "give the show away." He too realised that the power claimed by the men of Ironbark, that "they gripped circumstances by the throat and compelled them to their wills," was slipping away. Circumstances were driving the men like whipped cattle. They had no choice but to obey. The march of events was as sure and as implacable as those in a Greek tragedy. The end would not be less than a tragedy to them all, Debenhams, Mullers, Boder, and himself.

Since events had moved as they had done, Jack recalled that he had been neighbourly to Boder, who could not have any malice against him. Boder might even be willing to serve him if such a course were expedient.

The two men had mutual interests through their holdings adjoining each other. Boder sometimes crossed over at night to Jack's hut for a

yarn and a smoke, and perhaps, just before he left, they would sit down to a billy of tea and a little "tucker," a "breaking of bread" that in the bush, brings men near to each other. Jack got along amicably with Boder, though he was not deceived by him.

Boder clung to Jack's friendship because sometimes even he felt a yearning for the sound of a human voice. He admired the sterling manliness that radiated from him, the straight look from his eyes, the strong grip of his handshake. Jack was the only man in Ironbark whom Boder trusted, and Jack would not turn him down, simply because the township gave the German a bad name. "Perhaps he is not much good," Jack thought, "but it takes all sorts to make a world, and Boder was decent enough as a neighbour."

Jack and Ted Debenham, almost mental wrecks, gazed into the fire-place. Fitful flames reflected their faces in a hut of gloom. On the hearth "Tim," with his tan muzzle on his two paws, lay blinking at the red burning logs. "Peter," a large tom-cat, was close beside him. For some time the men had not spoken. The fire was waning, just as hope was fainting in their hearts.

The boo-book owl from the dead gum tree in Jack's garden cried, "Mopoke! Mopoke! Mopoke!"

It was one of the owls that Jack had spoken of to Marion. He was an old tenant of Jack's—a lazy bird his landlord thought him. Neither the

owl nor his mate had ever made a nest. Their eggs were just laid on some rotted wood inside the pipe-like stem of a low bough out of Peter's reach. The eggs took their chance, but Jack had noticed that each season they were hatched and the owlets reared.

Man, wiser than the owl, took a hundred precautions to dodge trouble, but how often he floundered into a bog-hole. Jack had tried to wipe out chance in the attempted realisation of his hopes. That was the one thing he knew now he had not done. The bird was a wise old owl who, trusting to his luck, managed to pull through each season. Yet, on the other hand, the Coroner had given his verdict. Who would impugn it ?

The owl's continuous "Mopoke ! Mopoke !" recalled, as a long-remembered tune will recall other days and other scenes, the last night Jack had spent with Marion. Was there anything in it ? Were his nerves overwrought ? Marion's brother in his hut would not allow him to think he was in an agonising dream. It was too true ! There was the man ! Huddled together, shoulders hunched, chest sunken, head drooping, a man in despair.

A guilty secret lay between them. Yet the man was the brother of the woman he loved, and he, Danvers, had elected to ride with him since his love was capable of sacrifice.

Jack's life had changed. He was no longer buoyant and free from care. His conscience found

and hurt him as a heavy yoke that presses on a galled sore. He felt his deal in life was grossly unfair since he was doomed by circumstances that looked black against him. Debenham had made the trouble, yet so long as he, Jack, stood fast he had to bear the burden that his companion should carry.

At the outset, because he had seen Gretchen fearful and anxious, Muller had suspected him. Gretchen had appealed to him to see if he could sting Debenham into saving her from the shame of unwedded motherhood. But who would believe that? Debenham knew that Muller formed his wrong opinion on that secret meeting which he had surprised, and knowing that Debenham had let him, Jack remained under the cloud of having seduced Gretchen? Still, Danvers did not give him away. Marion or her mother would not learn from his lips what a heartless fellow Debenham was, richly as he merited the exposure.

If half the truth only came out, Jack felt he would cut a sorry figure in the eyes of his friends. What would Marion say? how would she act? Would she take the bit in her mouth after her imperious fashion, and decline to listen to any explanations? He had held to his code of honour, as he understood it, refusing to give Gretchen away. He saved Debenham. The probability was that his friends would scuttle when they found he was mixed up in such a sorry business. Jack was roused from his bitter thoughts by Debenham asking in a hollow voice :

“What is to be done ?”

“It is for you to do,” replied Jack.

“What do you mean ?” asked Debenham.

“You know well enough there is only one course for you and that is to marry the girl.”

“You can get that out of your head, Jack, I’m not going to marry Gretchen. Do you think a man can marry every woman he has made love to ?”

“Don’t try to make it look absurd. It does not become you. You have gone too far in this case. You must consider the girl, and you will be considering your best interests in doing so. There’s your mother and sister too, you must consider them. It is the right thing to do, though I don’t suppose that has weight with you. Mrs. Muller is not a fool, nor is her son Gustave. They may suspect that there is more in Muller’s death than the Coroner dreamed. Had he not been so full of his petty importance, and in such a hurry to get out of Ironbark, the inquest might have been adjourned instead of closed.”

“Do you think the Mullers think that—that—Muller did not come by his death in the way the Coroner said he did ?—they can’t go behind the records, you know.”

“I don’t know anything of the sort,” said Jack impatiently, getting up from his seat. “I know of a case where a man named Flack was found dead in his bed with his throat cut. A Melbourne jury returned a verdict of suicide, and Flack was buried.”

"Yes! Yes!" cried Debenham. "What happened? What happened? For God's sake don't pause like that."

Debenham had risen from the stool on which he sat, and was clutching Jack's arms. Jack was looking straight into the eyes of Debenham.

"A convict named Barnes, driven half mad by solitary confinement, confessed some time after, I forget how long it was, that he had cut Flack's throat. The authorities thought him mad, but they exhumed Flack's body. It was then found that his throat had been cut by a left-handed man. Flack was right-handed, Barnes was left-handed—Barnes was hung."

Debenham's hands dropped from Jack's arms. He went back to his stool. Jack kicked the red log into a blaze.

"Barnes was hung!" he repeated slowly and distinctly. "Barnes was hung."

The owl was still crying to the bush deeps—"Mopoke! Mopoke! Mopoke!"

"My God, that's awful," Debenham whispered, "suppose they were to exhume Muller!"

"It would be a bad look-out for us if they did, specially since the time for speaking has passed. No one is likely to trouble about how Muller died since there is the verdict of the Coroner to show them. The Mullers could make things unpleasant if they began to doubt the infallibility of the Coroner. If you marry Gretchen the situation is different. Without you or I go mad like Barnes, I

think we can agree to let sleeping dogs lie. I think that you had better make a virtue of necessity and marry Gretchen."

"If I did marry her, I would want the Muller property in my name."

"I do not think you any more of a man for saying so. You might get the property when you have won the right to be called a man."

"How? I don't understand you."

"I mean that after your marriage you shall enlist with her brother and myself and go to the war."

"Me go to the war! Not much."

"Thank God there are better men than you going to the war, Edward Debenham. But that won't excuse you nor allow you to stay behind in the boots of a slacker."

Debenham rose from his seat saying, "I'll not go to the war. This patriotism is rot."

"That's what blighters say, and what you say is of no account."

Jack jumped up suddenly from his chair and faced Debenham. "Look here," he said, in cold tones that bespoke suppressed passion, "you are not in as good a position as a slacker. Until conscription becomes law he is a free man. He can live at the price of his shame if he's craven enough to do so. You can't."

"Why can't I? Do you think you can dragoon me into enlisting?"

"I am not going to try. You think that now

Muller is in his grave that the past is buried too. Barnes' deed was buried with Flaek, but it came to light."

"Why will you drag in that awful case? Have you any idea of the state of my nerves?" shouted Debenham, pacing the hut in an agitated state.

"I do so because it bites you as it bites me—bites like the hangman's knot, and it leaves as little room for you to hesitate as a criminal has boards to stand on when the gallows bolt is drawn. Have you forgotten that scene on the hill-top? Do you think that I do not suffer, but not quite in the same way as you do? Would you say that there is no reparation due to the Muller family, that his death does not lie at your door, not mine, mind you, your door?"

"But I did not kill the man!"

"It was through you that he came by his death."

"Rot! The man was mad drunk, Martin swore that at the inquest. All Ironbark knew Muller was bordering on the horrors. Had it not been so he would have been alive to-day. Remember too that Boder fired at him. Don't forget that."

"I do not," replied Jack, "but what of it?"

"He intended to kill Muller," said Debenham.

Jack saw his companion's sinister suggestion. He felt his blood beginning to boil, but he controlled himself so far as to ask, "Suppose Boder did intend to kill Muller, how does that release us when we know that Boder did not hit him?"

“ Who knows Boder missed Muller ? Who can say so ? ” Debenham spoke in low tones.

Jack revolted at the position he was drifting into. Was he to be guilty of conspiracy to save the Debenham family at the expense of Boder's life ? It was asking too much.

“ It's no good, Ted, to nurse the idea your remark suggests. If the worst comes along Boder is due for a square deal.”

“ I don't see why.”

“ Man ! Would you let Boder be found guilty of murder and not tell the police what happened ? ”

“ Yes, certainly I would. Boder is legally guilty of the crime. Do you admit that ? ”

“ I don't know ; I am not a lawyer, but I do believe that you are morally guilty of Muller's death.”

“ Well, the law should take its course.”

“ With which man ? ” asked Jack, with dry emphasis.

“ There's only one in sight and that's Boder,” replied Debenham. “ If by hanging him it closes the case of Muller's death, so much the better for us, so much the worse for him.”

Jack was alive to the dangerous quicksands into which Debenham was trying to lead him. He did not answer. A silence came upon them.

Suddenly “ Tim ” jumped up from his doze and stood as alert as he did when his master called “ Rats.”

Master and dog understood each other in an almost uncanny way. Many a night when alone in his hut Jack had talked to his dog as if he were a human being. "Tim" knew every mood of his master, and followed the sounds of his voice with intelligence almost human. There was never greater love between man and dog than that which lived between Jack and "Tim."

"There's someone coming," said Jack to Debenham.

"Where can I hide? Quick!" cried Debenham.

"Don't be a fool! A man who hides has something to conceal. Stick it."

Jack opened the back door and looked into the darkness. A gentle breeze fanned his cheeks. On the wind came the fragrant perfume of native mints from a paddock next his bean patch. He knew the mint was being trodden under foot by someone. He strained his eyes in that direction. "Tim" had gone forward to the clump of mint, and commenced barking. Jack saw two men coming towards him. When they were close enough he recognised Trooper Hawley and Heindrick Boder.

"Good evening, Mr. Danvers," said Trooper Hawley. "Boder wanted to come up and see you with regard to Muller. He is at present my prisoner under a warrant for his internment as an enemy alien. When I arrested him, before I could tell him the charge against him, he asked if it was for shooting Franz Muller. I told him 'no,'

and then I asked him if he shot Muller, and he said he had done so, but under justifiable circumstances. He said he would make a statement if I took him to you."

"All right," said Jack. "Come on. Ted Debenham is inside."

"Ted," Jack cried out, "light the lamp, and buck up the fire. I've got visitors."

Debenham did as he was bidden. "Peter," black as night, sprang on to the table and sat there as he was privileged to do.

"This is a rum go," said Jack to Trooper Hawley. "How is it that it did not come out at the inquest?"

"No one suspected anything. I was satisfied that Muller was shot by a stray bullet from the rifle butts. I don't know what Boder's statement will be, but I'm glad of two witnesses. I have told Boder that his statement is made voluntarily, and anything he may say may be used in evidence against him."

Addressing Boder, Trooper Hawley—"You understand, Boder, you need not make any statement unless you like to do so."

"I understand," said Boder, with a snap. "I shot Muller, but he would have shot me if I had not potted him."

He smiled a grim smile that seemed to Jack to betoken satisfaction.

Getting pen and paper Jack said, "I'll soon be ready."

Debenham sat back from the fire in a darkened corner. He was afraid that Hawley might see that he was ill at ease. How Jack could appear so cool was to him almost devilish. The man had no more nerves than "Peter" purring loudly as he rubbed his head against Boder's right hand that rested on the table.

Boder's face was pale under the lamplight, but there was no other sign of any disturbing emotion.

His mouth was closed as tightly as a steel trap; his black shaggy eyebrows were compressed hard over his sullen eyes, while the face presented a frowning inscrutable mask.

Jack looked keenly at Boder under the cover of lifting "Peter" off the table. He was satisfied as he looked at the man that he had but his own story to tell. The purring of "Peter" about the men's legs was the only sound in the room while Jack arranged his writing materials.

"Good God!" thought Debenham, with a sudden and startled realisation of the situation. "Jack was going to write an account of the shooting of Franz Muller in the presence of Trooper Hawley." It was as much as he, Debenham, could resist the inclination to cry out, so tense were his feelings.

"Just commence by saying that the statement is made of his own free will without any inducement whatsoever being held out to him," said Hawley to Danvers.

Jack then wrote as Boder spoke, Hawley re-

peating Boder's words so that there should be no mistake in transcribing the story.

When finished, the statement read as follows :

"Heindrick Boder's statement concerning the death of Franz Muller.

"Of my own free will, without having any inducement held out to me by Trooper Hawley, and after being warned that the statement may be used hereafter as evidence against me, I make this statement concerning the death of Franz Muller :

"For some time ill blood has been between the deceased and myself. Muller has threatened to shoot me. He told a lie at Martin's hotel when he said that I said in German he ought to be shot.

"By Trooper Hawley : 'What did you say to the deceased on that occasion ?'

"Boder in reply : 'I decline to say.'

"Continuing : 'I saw Muller cross my paddock with a revolver in his hand. He was, as I truly believe, looking for me. I was in the old saw-pit when he went by. He did not see me, but I heard him saying, "I will kill the dog." He said it over and over again. The Mullers called me a dog because I wanted to marry their daughter Gretchen. I went back to my house and got my rifle. I followed him. He waited for me in the clump of wattle on the top of the hill. I screened myself behind the log of messmate close to the slip rail, at the bottom of the paddock, and then fired at him. I did not kill him outright, for he fired the revolver after me. I then hurried home, and saw

Mr. Danvers and his dog pass my house a little while after the occurrence.'

"By Trooper Hawley: 'Are you sure he had a revolver?'

"Prisoner: 'Quite sure.'

"Trooper Hawley: 'No revolver was found beside the body. I'm satisfied there was not one to find.'

"Prisoner: 'There must be. It is lying somewhere near where he fell. Find it and show that I speak the truth. If not, how can I prove what I say?'

"Trooper Hawley: 'Do you wish to say anything more?'

"Prisoner: 'I do not.'"

The statement was then dated and signed, and duly witnessed by Danvers, Debenham, and Trooper Hawley.

Then Boder spoke. He pointed to a vacant nail on the chimney.

"Where," he asked, "is Mr. Danvers' revolver?"

If ever the knell of death sounded on Debenham's ears, it was in the ring of Boder's voice when he asked where was Danvers' revolver? He was in a mortal funk that everything was about to be discovered. The fate of himself and of Danvers rested in Danvers' answer.

"Do you want to see my revolver?" Jack asked the policeman.

"It would be as well, I think. Boder seems to think that your revolver may be the missing

weapon. If that is so, then of course it makes the case a bit difficult, except of course you explain away the mystery."

"I don't see why Mr. Danvers should be dragged into this affair because Boder thinks things," observed Ted.

"It's no good talking," replied the trooper. "Mr. Danvers has nothing to hide, I take it, and so he can have no objection to produce his revolver."

"He can't do that," said Boder, "it always hung on that nail. Why is it not there now hanging?"

"It would be more correct to say that it 'sometimes' hung there," replied Jack.

He went to a box in the corner of the hut and took from it a Webley revolver, handing it to Hawley, with the remark, "Be careful, it is fully loaded."

"Let me see it!" cried Boder.

"Do you think the trooper's mad enough to hand you—a murderer—a loaded revolver?" shouted Debenham.

"Certainly not! You hold your jaw," said the trooper to Boder.

Hawley turned up the flame of the lamp to its full height and examined the revolver. He withdrew the cartridges and looked carefully into the chambers, but he did not find any signs of powder marks to tell of a recent discharge.

"I will keep the weapon for the present," he said to Jack.

"As you please," replied Jack. "You can take it from me that Muller never handled that weapon."

"In that case there is nothing in Boder's suggestion."

"I should think not," said Ted. "That German will be accusing Danvers of murdering Muller next."

Hawley: "That's hardly likely since I hold his written confession that he killed Muller. One thing that requires clearing up is whether Muller had a revolver as Boder states."

"I tell you he did or else I would not at him have fired."

"Did you see him fall?" asked Hawley sharply.

"No, I did not," said Boder, "I lost him when he in the wattles went."

"Then perhaps you missed him?"

"No, I miss him not, I think," replied Boder.

"Then what the devil are you driving at?" asked Ted angrily of the German.

"We'll end this," said Trooper Hawley. "It will be the subject of further inquiry."

He put a pair of handcuffs on Boder, and motioning him to come, said "Good night" to Danvers and Debenham, and then went with his prisoner on his way to Ironbark.

CHAPTER VII

BODER CHARGED WITH MURDER

AFTER the dramatic scene in Danvers' hut, the Crown Law authorities in Melbourne ordered another inquiry to be held into the circumstances surrounding Muller's death. The general opinion was that the Coroner at the first inquest had not elicited the evidence that was hidden. Had the witnesses been more closely pressed, it was felt, they must have told a fuller story, which might have enabled the police to take some definite action.

Detective Sergeant Trapp, a clean-shaven, big-nosed, white-haired police officer with keen grey eyes, that had a gimlet-like quality of "looking into things," was sent to Ironbark. He came by the coach with Sam, and was met at the post office by Trooper Hawley, who saluted him in a tired casual way, as he alighted from the box seat, and stood squarely on the ground, a broadly built man.

The Sergeant had a talk with Hawley, who endeavoured in five minutes to stuff the Sergeant's head with two months' happenings, just as a Strasburg fowler crams his goose with as much food in a day as the bird would eat, of its own accord, in a week, though this illustration used

of the goose must not be construed into a hint of anything personal to Sergeant Trapp, who, indeed, mixing in the best police circles, was quite a different kind of bird.

On Hawley's suggestion the Sergeant had Nipper brought to him because Hawley said the boy, who was as cute as a magpie, "knew something" that he, a mere trooper, could not get out of him. Hawley had no doubt but what the Sergeant's stripes would impress Nipper, if the Sergeant's gimlet-eyes failed to see what lay behind Nipper's sunburnt brow.

"I dunno wot he wants me fer," Nipper said to Hawley. "I'se got me work to do. Father's sheep are 'boxed,' and the job's ahead of me. What does he want me fer?"

"It's about Muller's death."

"I dunno nothin' about that, and it's waste of time, see?" replied Nipper.

Sergeant Trapp was interested when he saw the boy, and amused when he looked at Nipper's tousled head of hair.

Bush boys, he knew well, were not clowns, because the Australian bush does not mother clowns.

When Sergeant Trapp had finished what he was pleased to call his "examination" of Nipper, he felt that he had not made any more headway with the boy than Hawley had done. "He's fly all right. He is the cutest bush kid I've struck," said the Sergeant. "I do not know

whether the young gum-sucker knows anything or not."

Nipper's opinion of Detective Sergeant Trapp was given to Sam the same afternoon.

"The 'D' started askin' wot's wot, didn't he?" asked Sam.

Sam had formed his own opinion of the "D" as he rode up in the coach. Sam thought Trapp "too dam' liberal" at the start of the journey with his "caser." Sam was not to be bribed, so he had given the Sergeant poor value for the five-shilling tip which he had nevertheless pocketed with a "Thank ye!"

"I ain't got that much brains in me head as I'd let him suck 'um!" was Sam's comment to Nipper. "Did he try to trap yer?"

"Yes, no end. Before he had gone many chains he bushed himself," replied Nipper.

"How?" asked Sam.

"I dunno! I made him wild as a bandicoot."

"He's one of those smart coves," said Sam.

"Oh, he's a regular goanna of a man. Yer know, Sam, how a goanna goes round a tree trunk clawing his way up. That's about how he went on ter me. Tried to stick his claws inter me bark every time."

"These detective blokes," drawled Sam, "ain't healthy nosin' round. I can't sight 'em, ken you?"

"No, they're like goannas all right. Goannas ain't a bit perticular if a dead jumbuck is buzzing with blowies—a regular bush band! It makes

no difference to 'em. They buck in ! Yer knows that, Sam ? ”

“ ‘Course I do ! ” said Sam emphatically.

Nipper paused before he said any more. Bushmen ruminate in contemplative pauses.

Then he resumed, in a humorous vein : “ Hungry brutes, goannas ! So’s lawyer coves ! Try to be funny too, and twist yer up, the way a moss-covered rope of a supple jack will trip yer. That old mark on me nose, Sam, is where one floored me ! But I say, yer should have seed me in Court at the inquest, with the beak and his eyeglass a-peekin’ at me, and me cracking soft ; my oath, it was funny ! When he’d come at me straight, I’d off with a ‘whish’ on another track, like a scared wallaby doing a break. They reckoned they’d find out where the revolver was that Mulga and Hawley didn’t find. Wot ? And hav’ Jack ? Not much ! Guess Jack don’t know where it is hisself.”

“ Do you ? ” asked Sam.

“ Garn ! ” replied Nipper.

“ How did you get it when Hawley and Mulga White were with yer ? Yer could hardly pick it up without ‘em seeing you.”

“ I didn’t,” said Nipper.

After Sergeant Trapp had returned to Melbourne, it was noticed that Hawley and Mulga were re-examining the hill—most carefully searching, it was supposed, for the missing revolver. They did not find it, but they were successful in detect-

ing some minor signs of the tragedy that had escaped their notice when they first went looking for Muller.

Mulga showed to Hawley the spot where a bullet had glanced off the trunk of a she-oak, growing on the crest of the west side of the hill. It had scored the bark on the west side, therefore the bullet had not been fired in the east from the rifle butts.

It dawned on Hawley that Boder's shot had missed Muller. He remembered that Dr. Spiers had said in Court, Muller was shot in the right breast. Boder's bullet, had it found its billet, would have wounded Muller in the back.

Hawley was mightily pleased with himself. Detective Sergeant Trapp could hardly fail to see, when he made his report, that he was no common country trooper, nor was he, for he belonged to Melbourne. He knew why the "D's" in Russell Street were called "sleuth hounds." He felt like one himself.

This patching of scraps of evidence together he thought was a great game when it meant a successful man hunt. Unconsciously Hawley began to blunder into methods, and to try to arrive at the result of what was by the exclusion of all that was not.

He thought, however, that this Muller murder case was worrying. He felt, rather than he knew, there was a conspiracy of silence to outwit justice. What was at the bottom of the affair ?

Hawley billeted himself at the Ironbark Arms for the time of his investigations. When he got out of bed in the morning, he asked himself, as he drew on his breeches, "Who is the murderer?" Half an hour later the question was still with him when he crossed the hotel yard to the grey-slabbed stable to feed his horse, while the fine flock of Martin's geese hissed at him. It faced him in the evening, stabling his horse, when Jessie, the black retriever, wagged her tail, barking and growling at him, in the lazy half-hearted good-natured fashion of dogs in the yards of country hotels.

Hawley, in his report to Sergeant Trapp, pointed out to the police authorities that since the inquest some important aspects of the case had come to light. It was said that Jack Danvers had ruined Muller's daughter, Gretchen, and it was for that reason Muller was bent upon killing him. He had seen Mrs. Muller and questioned her on the subject. She declined to say where her daughter was, while she denied there was any truth in the rumour about Danvers.

He suggested, with great respect, that an order be made for the exhumation of the body of Muller, and he asked that the Government pathologist make the autopsy.

Trooper Hawley also informed his superior officers that he had a Webley revolver in his possession, and he was anxious to recover the bullet in Muller's body, so that it might be ascertained whether, or not, it was a Webley revolver bullet.

The Crown Law authorities, and Detective Sergeant Trapp, concurred. The Commissioner of Police made a favourable entry alongside Trooper Hawley's name as a promising officer for service in the Criminal Investigation Department.

The Governor in Council signed an order for the disinterment of the body. Dr. Broughton, the Government Pathologist, was directed to make the post-mortem examination. Horace Fison, K.C., was briefed to represent the Crown at the second inquest, which was to take place before Edward Stabbs, P.M. It was held in the school-room at Ironbark. Martin was not sorry that it was so, since he only received a guinea for the use of his hotel parlour when the first inquest was held, an inadequate sum, he said, to compensate for the annoyance he suffered in having his hotel passages blocked by people.

Heindrick Boder was present in custody. He nodded in a friendly way to Danvers, the only man he troubled to recognise in Court.

Out of the group of witnesses examined, Dr. Broughton tendered the most important evidence. Every word he uttered was followed by such breathless interest that a pin dropped could have been heard in the room.

The eminent pathologist said he found a gunshot wound in the right breast of the deceased Franz Muller, but no exit wound. The edges of the wound were torn and lacerated, skin ecchymosed, and discoloured by powder.

The injury was caused by a bullet from a revolver and not by one fired from a rifle.

The wounds made by each weapon were quite distinct and easily recognised by an expert.

A revolver bullet lacerated the flesh and skin where it entered the body ; a rifle bullet made a round wound—specially if it struck point-blank, or nearly so.

He would swear the revolver had been fired at very close quarters. The powder marks showed that was so.

If the deceased had been struck obliquely by a rifle bullet, the wound would have taken, more or less, an oval or valvular form. The theory that the bullet had glanced off a tree was not tenable. He had explored the wound and recovered the bullet. The bullet was of a different size from those in the weapon produced. The death wound in Muller's chest was not caused by a bullet from the revolver referred to as Jack Danvers'.

He was prepared to swear that if Boder fired at Muller with a rifle, he missed him. There was not the slightest doubt that Muller met his death through a revolver bullet fired at close quarters.

When the evidence was finished, Boder was formally charged, on his own confession, with the murder of Franz Muller.

The Coroner then said that in law Boder was not guilty of murder, nor was he guilty of the crime of shooting at a person with intent to commit murder, because he honestly believed that Muller

intended to kill him. What he did in the circumstances was really an act taken in self-defence.

Boder was guilty of the offence against the War Precautions Act of carrying arms, he being an enemy alien, and he was guilty also of the regulation against carrying, or discharging, a gun, but the prisoner had not been presented on those counts.

So far as the charge of murder was concerned, Boder would not be committed to stand his trial.

The order for Boder's internment, as a hostile alien, would remain in force during His Majesty's pleasure. He suggested that the police authorities should look elsewhere for the murderer of Franz Muller. The Court stood adjourned. God save the King !

CHAPTER VIII

A NOTABLE DINNER AT THE IRONBARK ARMS

WHILE the inquiry was proceeding at the school-house an unusual stir was going on in the kitchen of the Ironbark Arms. Mrs. Hickford was without a waitress. She had asked Sam to bring Nelly along to give her a hand in serving the six o'clock dinner she had to prepare for the professional gentlemen from Melbourne. Sam said he had no doubt that Nelly would be only too pleased to help her, but he felt she was not to be trusted alongside the beak with the eyeglass. When Nelly, Sam explained, thought of what Nipper had said about the eyeglass, and she saw the darned thing, falling and rising, dangling on a string, she went into fits of laughter.

"Yer know she's an awful girl to laugh if she starts."

"I know she is, but I hope, Sam, that Nelly will keep her place on this occasion."

"I'm not saying she will mind yer. I ain't responsible-like for her jest yet 'cos she ain't let me complete the title. Kind of got an equity over her, but no security until I gets the parson's certificate. Then I'm not too sure, yer see, I know women. When I was after her she told me once

she wouldn't pick me up with the tongs. Nasty jar, wasn't it? Now she jest doats on my ginger head! Ain't it funny how women change? Gosh it is!"

"I think you're a bit funny yourself, Sam," said Mrs. Hickford, laughing at Sam, who was running his fingers through his ample red locks as if to show how much Nelly had agreed to take for better or worse.

Mrs. Hickford had called in Mrs. O'Callaghan to cook the dinner that was straining the resources of the Ironbark Arms. Bridget O'Callaghan was a sack-like lady, without a waist. When she waddled along, for she did not walk, she palpitated as a quivering lump of jelly. She had a wonderful nose that could smell a drop of gin through a cupboard door. She always found the spirit if it was there to find. It not infrequently happened that after Mrs. O'Callaghan had found the gin, no one ever saw it again. Yes, she had what in a cook is an excellent thing—a good nose. All Ironbark knew what a heavenly cook Mrs. O'Callaghan was when the spirit did not move her too much to be otherwise.

What should the dinner consist of? That was the question that troubled Mrs. Hickford. Martin suggested "a good round of corned beef and cabbage." He had the dish twice a week; he would have had it oftener, if he could have had his way. Mrs. Hickford said she was sick of the smell of cabbage water, and Martin "had better stand

out." He went back to the bar. Mrs. O'Callaghan seized the opportunity to send word to him that she wanted a tot of gin to cure a pain.

"Divil a drop, until the dinner's cooked," said Martin.

"Then divil a dinner I'll cook," declared Mrs. O'Callaghan.

"These labour troubles are the curse of the country," growled Martin as he poured some gin out of a bottle, leaving about two nobblers in it. He sent the bottle to the lady with the wish that it would help her through the cooking.

"Gorrah!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Callaghan. "Is he after makin' me drunk? If I thought that divil a foot I'd come to the hotel again. Sure 'tis a nice drap and I'll chance it. Some spalpeens wouldn't give yer enough to fill a writing pen, hardly enough to dirty yer mouth wid, and then expect yer to cook a dinner!"

"What is the dinner to be, Mrs. O'Callaghan?" asked Mrs. Hickford, as that lady was wiping her lips with the sleeve of her blouse, after taking a "three finger nobbler."

"What do you say, me honey, to one of them fat geese of yours? When I cooked for the Sligo family, it was geese they ate on great occasions. God bless the Marquis! The Marquis said to me once, 'Bridget Flattery'—that was me maiden name—'you're a brick.' Look at me now. O'Callaghan's made a tub of me, that's wot comes of leavin' 'the quality.' But the saints be praised!

I saved O'Callaghan from drink. It's more 'en Muller's poor wife could do for him."

"Yes, but Mrs. Muller doesn't drink. If she did, where would she be in her present trouble?" said Mrs. Hickford.

"Poor soul! it's not the likes of me as would hurt her feelings," said Mrs. O'Callaghan, "though I'm sure a little drap, now and then, takin judiciously, would not be after hurtin' her. She's had a heap of trouble. Poor Gretchen! I'm mortal sorry for her, as sweet and good a colleen as yer find in a day's march. These men! Gar! They're bastes, that's what they are, bastes, every one of 'em. They spake so soft, they come to yer in the feathers of doves, and they go out, the spalpeens, trowsered serpents."

"That's right," said Mrs. Hickford, "men's games, Mrs. O'Callaghan, are as old as sin."

Mrs. O'Callaghan sighed. She took a chair and sat on it.

"Gorrah, me variscos vanes are powerful sore this day." She swayed her body to and fro, and rubbed her "poor legs" with her left hand, that showed her wedding ring, worn thin as wire, almost buried in the flesh of a stodgy finger.

"Do you do anything for them?" asked Nelly.

"An' I do. It's a little gin I take, or divil a dinner I'd cook. Sure the liayers will not ate at all if I don't stir me bones."

Mrs. O'Callaghan began to waddle about the kitchen to some purpose. A goose was killed,

plucked, and dressed. She sent a message to Mrs. Tippins for half a dozen of her large fine crown apples, for the settlers grew beautiful apples in the hills.

“A fat goose without good sauce was as bad a thing as a priest without holy wather,” said Mrs. O’Callaghan to Nelly, who had just been asked by Mrs. Hickford “not to go off the handle” if the gents growled at anything.

Mrs. O’Callaghan put her two hands on what she charitably supposed people called her hips, and exclaimed with an angry roll in her eyes, “It’s me as will deal wid them if they do. The likes of them skuts to find fault with my cookin’—’deed it’s more than O’Callaghan himself would dare do, and him and me married these thirty years gone St. Patrick’s day come.”

Nelly’s prayer was that Mr. Stabbs, P.M., would not let his eyeglass fall into the soup plate. “If he had to fish it out with a spoon, she’d just die right away.”

* * * * *

The dinner was a triumph. The goose was “done to a turn.” The P.M. sat at the head of the table. The distinguished pathologist, Dr. Broughton, a big fat man, carved the goose, as was only proper, and the eminent King’s Counsel, Mr. Horace Fison, did his share in helping his colleagues to eat it. Fison could not help feeling that he should have commenced the dinner with an oyster or

two, but that was the legal instinct, which, they say, is like the ruling passion, strong even in death.

Fison was a clean-shaven man with a dome-shaped skull and a precise mouth—a prunes and prisms mouth. When he was prosecuting a prisoner, he was precise in his statements, precise in his questions, precise in his courtesy to witnesses. He had a habit of lifting his gold watch-chain, and dropping it, of twiddling its links between his fingers when examining a witness, or when he was engaged in addressing a jury. To the most hostile witness he was quite genial. He put the most deadly questions with a bland innocence that was so misleading as to be often disastrous to the witness.

“It’s that damn twiddling of his chain as done it,” said one gentleman, a burglar, to his pal in the cells beneath the Criminal Court. “I seed the foreman first, his eye cocked on the twiddle, then the cove next ’im caught on, so it went down the line of mugs. ’E hyponosed ’em, and twiddled me into a stretch of five years. I don’t call that lor. The loryer bloke’s a conjurer, that’s wot ’e is, and ’e’s ‘on the cross’ takin’ money for lor when ’e’s all twiddle.”

When Fison unrobed, when wig and silk were stowed away in the brown tin box that had printed on its lid, in white letters, “Fison, K.C.,” this great legal light (the friend of judges) was no longer a “legal twiddler” but well known in club life as an agreeable rattle.

“I think,” he said to his fellow diners, “I recognised Trooper Hawley. A wonderful memory for faces—a family gift of the Fisons—quite exceptional. Fancy I saw Hawley box at the Amateur Athletic Middle-Weight Championship. He was runner up—yes, Hawley, he was the man. Ah, I thought so, Broughton, you’d remember. Hefty look about his shoulders, dynamic, awkward man, very, to be mixed up in a mill with.

“Remember saying to a ‘fan’ alongside me that Hawley lost his chance through temper. Bad thing in a boxer, quick temper. Keep cool, if your blood bubbles, keep cool.”

“I noticed he was inclined to be peppery in the witness-box,” said the P.M.

“Yes, he’s got a quick, restive temper. Handicap to any man’s life, a quick temper. Remember too the occasion of Hawley’s bout was an interesting one,” Fison continued, “went down to hear the Chief, Sir John’s remarks on the manly art of self-defence. Chesterfieldian! The only word in sight. It was Chesterfieldian—oh, yes, if you like, reminiscent of Rosebery’s happiest touches. Sir John, he’s ‘awake’ all right, not too bad with the gloves himself. Would have made Hawley look like a lemon. Eh? I remember Sir John’s quick left, rather ‘dirty ones’ every time. Knew so, first hand, have arrested them. Used to say I boxed like the ‘Staffordshire Chicken,’ or the ‘Tipton Slasher.’ Very nice of Sir John! Sir John is Irish—a Dublin man, explains a lot, eh?”

Fison had a weakness, common to many people who are not half as entertaining as he, of liking to hear the sound of his own voice. The judicial sense was dominant in Edward Stabbs, consequently he favoured the practice of steadfastness to the matter in hand, in this case, a bird.

"It's a very fine goose," he said. The fact was so obvious, that the remark, even to himself, sounded banal—still, if it halted Fison's rattle, it would serve. But no, it was another peg for the K.C. to hang a story upon.

"Say so! Rather the goose was! Reminds me of a goose I sent to Jeremiah Walstab—you remember Jerry at the Salamander Club. Hot stuff, Jerry! Mixed up with the Hitchins divorce case; swore it was a put-up game between husband and wife. Cost Jerry £1000, and he has been a Jeremiah ever since, though he swears he was a Joseph. You remember?"

The P.M. nodded, and the doctor smiled at Fison's wit.

"Jerry and I made a bet, club clock striking two, as to how many glasses on the table. Hardly believe it! I saw two tumblers to every one that was there."

"Beastly annoying," said Dr. Broughton. "The night of the day I got my first R.C.S. I had the same experience. An old Scotch doctor in the Savage Club said to me, 'You dom' young scoundrel, why must ye be a disgrace to the faculty?'"

"Anyhow," said Fison, "I lost the bet. At

least that was the verdict we brought in. Jerry insisted on my writing on his shirt front an I.O.U. for a goose. Silly thing to do, waiter about, club joke in no time. Jerry thought I might forget by the morning the name of the winner. Two weeks afterwards I sent him the goose. He wired back, 'Thanks, I can have my shirt washed now.'"

"Oh, well!" said the P.M. "Perhaps the shirt needed it."

Nelly started a delicate ripple of musical laughter. It fell on the ears of the diners like the distant murmurings of a strong flowing sea before it breaks on the shore with a roar.

Mr. Stabbs, astonished, adjusted his eyeglass and looked at Nelly. How suddenly obvious things dawn as surprises on some men! Here were three "gents at dinner," waited on by a good-looking, healthy young Australian woman, and they hadn't noticed that the bush Phyllis was attractive. As he gazed the P.M. saw that Nelly's complexion was of an olive-brown with the flush of roses.

"Gad!" thought the P.M., "she's a devilish good-looking girl." He felt a little of the old Adam stirring in his bones.

His quizzical peeping quite upset Nelly; "upset her apple cart," as she described it. She half tried to place her apron in her mouth to stifle her laughter as she rushed from the dining-room into the kitchen. Her loud laughter, no longer suppressed, reached the bar. "Polly," the cockatoo, commenced to shriek in sympathy.

Annoyed by the noise of laughter and at the cockatoo adding to the din, Martin promptly boxed "Polly" off her perch. For two minutes there was not a more astonished bird to be found in the hills, and there were thousands of them there. "Polly" slowly climbed up on her perch again, and remarked, "Martin's drunk." Martin had hurried to the kitchen. There he angrily asked, "what all the damn noise was about? What will they think inside?"

He saw Mrs. O'Callaghan sleeping in a capacious chair, a cherub of fifty-five, giving anything but cherubic snores. Mrs. Hickford, who had been "dishing up the dinner," was slapping Nelly on the back and imploring her, "for goodness' sake, stop laughing."

Tears of merriment were on Nelly's cheeks when, her boisterous fit past, she hurriedly told the tale to Martin.

"'Struth! They must have been drunk!" was his comment.

Nelly went back to the dining-room to find that the gentlemen were in the midst of a discussion on the Muller case.

"That's only supposition, Doctor, on your part," said the P.M. while his jaws went champ! champ! Obviously the eating was enjoyable. It was, he thought, a bad case, but the goodness of the goose made the badness of the case, discussed under such gastronomic conditions, quite tolerable.

"Quite so," replied the doctor. "I think it a

pity an attempt to reconstruct the crime was not made when Muller's body was found."

"Do you seriously think that could have been done?" asked Fison, K.C.

"I say so," replied Dr. Broughton.

"Doubt it! Doubt it!" said the K.C. "The evidence showed that the rain-storm had washed away any track of the man's movements that might have been there. You remember I cross-examined Mulga as to why his bush-craft had failed him."

"Yes, I was expectant," said the doctor, "but Mulga's instinct having been deprived of signs visible to his eyes, his reply showed his bush-craft was useless. He could not trace Muller, or the murderer's movements, because their tracks were not there."

"That's so," said the P.M. "An aboriginal works by instinct; a white man by reason. The less a black tracker has to do with civilisation, the closer he lives to nature, the signs of which are easily read by him so long as he remains half-Warragal."

"Instinct could not reconstruct a crime, though reason with science has often done so," replied the doctor sententiously.

He rather resented the instinct of an aboriginal being mentioned in the same breath as the reason of a scientist.

Fison, who delighted in the thrust and parry of verbal encounter, suggested that instinct was the

gift of God, and that⁷ reason was made by man. He asked Dr. Broughton if he knew Pope's lines :

“ And reason raise o'er instinct as you can,
In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis man.”

“ No, I did not,” replied the doctor, “ but I have reasoned to a definite conclusion, that the man Danvers has the key to the mystery ; and in my reasonings lies the great gulf that is set between reason and instinct. The crux of the case is that Danvers had two revolvers.”

“ Gad, you've hit it, Doctor,” cried Fison.

Dr. Broughton looked pleased, as he continued : “ When Trooper Hawley asked Danvers for his revolver, he simply handed another revolver that he possessed to Hawley.”

“ If Danvers did that,” said the P.M., “ he must have done so designedly—designedly, I mean with guilty knowledge.”

“ Exactly,” replied the doctor, “ that is my deduction—‘ with guilty knowledge.’ He intended to convey the impression that the revolver he gave to Hawley was the revolver that hung on the nail in the chimney-piece, whereas it was a second weapon that he fished out of a tool chest.”

“ Yes, go on, yes, splendid, so it is ! We are following your deductions closely,” said Fison.

Even the P.M. stopped eating, and brought his eyeglass into play.

Nelly thought she would faint. Was he going to say that Jack murdered Muller ? Good heavens, it would break Marion's heart.

“As my evidence showed, the revolver bullet I extracted from Muller’s body was of a different calibre to the bullets in the revolver that Danvers handed to Hawley, and he knew it was so at the time.”

The doctor paused.

“I wish to stress the point that he ‘knew so at the time’; therefore he knew that the man was killed by a revolver that carried a lighter bullet than the weapon he so promptly produced. His promptness was intended to suggest his innocence, and that he felt it was necessary to do that is to my mind a damning indictment against him, though it may not be legally quite conclusive?”

The doctor looked at Fison for a reply to his last contention.

“No, not legally conclusive, I think not, no! no! still a strand, a valuable one I should say, for the case for the Crown.”

“It is clear also to me,” continued the doctor, “that Danvers and Debenham both have a guilty knowledge of Muller’s death, and that their interest is a joint one in concealing the crime.”

“Why?” asked the P.M.

“Because,” said Dr. Broughton, “they both must have had a hand in the murder.”

“I recall now how Debenham tried to bluff Hawley off bothering Danvers for his revolver, and how they would not let Boder examine the weapon,” said the P.M.

“It occurred to me that Boder thought it was a different weapon to the one he had been accustomed

to see hanging on the nail. Do you remember I asked the Tippins boy, a friend of Danvers, about it, as he must have known the weapon on the nail well ? ”

“ Yes, and you know what his reply was,” said the P.M.

The three men laughed.

“ He’s got more ‘ dunnos ’ in his head than he’s got hay-seeds in his hair,” chuckled Fison. He evidently had enjoyed Nipper’s native shrewdness.

“ Observe too,” continued the doctor, “ how Hawley fell into the trap laid for him when Danvers impressed upon him that the revolver was loaded. Debenham backed Danvers up by calling Boder ‘ a murderer,’ and pointing out to Hawley the folly of handing a loaded revolver to Boder to examine. They simply bull-dozed Hawley. Though I feel morally certain that either Danvers or Debenham shot Muller, I feel equally certain that such an hypothesis cannot be proved without the revolver that once hung on the nail can be found, and the bullet, extracted from the body, be shown to belong to Danvers’ weapon.”

“ I think you have as an hypothesis proved your case,” said the P.M.

“ I concur,” added Fison.

“ Then you should give Hawley a search warrant to examine Danvers’ premises to see if he can find the revolver.”

“ I will do so,” said the P.M. “ We will ask for the production of the revolver.”

“Capital idea, capital, but——” exclaimed Fison.

“But what ? ” asked the P.M.

“Just that I think you might as well ask Hawley to produce as an exhibit in Court the birth certificate of Adam as to ask him to produce the revolver from which the shot was fired that killed Muller.”

Nelly had been coming and going to the dinner-table. She only heard scraps of the discussion, but she understood the P.M. to say that he would order that Jack’s hut be searched for a revolver. What did it all mean ? It sounded dreadful ! Nelly’s heart beat quickly. She was almost in tears. Even the sight of poor Mrs. O’Callaghan, her face red with cooking before a hot fire, sleeping, with one of her big fat hands spread out on her ample bosom, suggesting a five-fingered apology for the sins of her gin-loving soul, did not coax a smile from Nelly.

Of the two women, the young and the old, the old woman, the cook, whom they had not seen, loomed larger in the eyes of the diners, feeling good, than the young woman they had seen. Though Mrs. O’Callaghan had fallen in the hour of her triumph, still her triumph was complete. She had roasted a goose in a way that was fit to grace the table of Lucullus ! She had made some pastry, heavenly enough to tempt the gods ! That her skill was appreciated was shown by the two fat half-crowns the “gents from Melbourne” left with Martin “for the cook.”

CHAPTER IX

NIPPER TIPPINS AND SANDY PILKINS

WHEN the dinner was over, Nelly hurried to the hotel yard. She found Sam bedding his horses in the stables. She asked him if he knew Dr. Broughton, a man she dreaded since she had overheard the deadiy way in which he tried to fit the cap on the man who had killed Franz Muller.

“You mean the ‘big fat’?” said Sam. “Rather! Just afore I started he tried to clamber on to the box-seat though his two friends were camped there. Just tossed me head his way, and told him he hadn’t much to sit on. Said that weren’t his trouble; he had plenty to sit on, his life’s job was to find a place to put it.” Sam chuckled. “He’s a fat all right!”

Nelly did not laugh. Sam looked at her in surprise. Her face he saw, even in the dim light of the stable, was unusually grave.

“I say, Nelly, old gal,” he said in quick sympathy (for Sam was a sympathetic soul when women were in distress), “what’s the trouble?”

“This, Sam. Jack, according to that horrid doctor, is mixed up in Muller’s death, as if the German’s death mattered anyhow. While I was serving at dinner the doctor was waving his big first finger, up and down, in the air. It was

sticking out like a great fat worm, and he was trying to point out with it that Jack and Ted were the men. I felt like seizing the carving-knife and lopping the maggoty-looking thing off."

"Yer not pullin' me leg, Nelly," asked Sam anxiously.

"I wish I was, Sam. It's too true."

"My oath! That's serious. What did they say?"

"They said a good deal I didn't hear, and some things I did not quite catch. From what I could make out they say Jack knows more about Muller's death than anyone. They're going to search his place for the missing revolver."

"I like their chance of getting it."

"You'll warn Jack?" said Nelly eagerly.

"Nipper'll do that. Don't worry, old gal." Sam put his arm around Nelly.

"Those Germans! They bring luck to no one!" Nelly bitterly exclaimed.

Her heart was overflowing. Tears were never far from Nelly's trustful eyes that looked so sincerely on Sam's strongly-lined, honest face and on the "smudge of a smile" which always renewed her love and trust in him.

Emotional Nelly was, but it was the emotion of a healthy creature filled with the rich gifts of a full womanhood. She had not the hysterical weaknesses of some of her city sisters, whose feelings, though acute enough, are not so deep, so soul-possessioning as those that break in the hearts of the women of the hills. The Nellies of the

bush live closer to our common mother Nature, and therefore closer, much closer, to the springs of life, than the women who spend their days in the artificial environments of the city.

"Don't cry ! Don't cry, Nelly !" said Sam. "Jack wouldn't hurt a fly. Jack murder a man ! He ain't that sort !"

"I believe it ! I know it !" cried Nelly. "But those 'gents from Melbourne' would hang anybody ! They must have hearts of stone ! No feeling in them ! Pitiless ! Everything is in the city ! They just ate the goose, and talked the while how they could hang a man !"

"Well, ain't that their business ?" asked Sam, with his usual philosophic tolerance of things that were.

"Yer see," he explained, "they've got to try to hang some cove or else they'd lose their job. The more men they pot the better they're fixed in their jobs. See ?"

"But Jack's an innocent man !" cried Nelly.

"I know that," replied Sam, "but those blokes don't. That's where their bally coach is going to be bogged."

Suddenly in anger Nelly asked, "What's Jack want to save Debenham for ? Twenty times I've been going to tell Marion the truth. She's my dearest friend, why should I conceal it from her ?"

"Because yer promised me not ter," said Sam.

"Yes I know I did !" exclaimed Nelly, "but how much has happened since Gretchen was

wronged ! It is shameful, shameful how we all have to suffer for Debenham's sin, and Gretchen, poor girl, most of all."

"It is so," said Sam, "but wot's the use of kicking ?"

"I don't know that Marion will thank Jack when she learns the truth ! She must know it some day !" Nelly impatiently exclaimed.

"I suppose she will. Rum thing truth. Yer can't hide it, at least not for long. Seems to suffocate yer if yer try, least that's wot I think. Jack'll hev to speak sometime, of course, an' he'll do it, but when yer come to think on it, it ain't really his business to tell Mrs. Debenham and Marion that Ted's no bally good."

"I suppose not !" said Nelly bitterly, "I suppose not ! A mother who dotes on her son wouldn't thank you."

"Thank you ! Gosh, Mrs. Debenham wouldn't believe you !" replied Sam. "Funny what mugs some mothers are ! No ! Ted can't do anything wrong. Ted simply can't ! She's silly on him all right, but then she's his mother ! It would be pretty sick, Nelly, if our mothers turned us down !"

"She's a good little body, anyway," said Nelly, "if she is fooled by him. It's against him, not her, that she thinks he's what he is not."

"She thinks he's the best son in the world !" said Sam. "Most mothers do that. They born 'em, and that's everything. Same flesh, same blood, must be good ! You'll see it in cows, most

anything alive. Cows licking their calves clean, best calves in the paddock ! It's jest nature, Nelly, nature to love yer own flesh and blood, and not to see that it ain't always as good as the next."

"And it's just nature too, Sam, to hate what is bad," Nelly answered quickly. "And Ted's real bad, and the sooner Hawley gets him the better, not that I like that police man sneaking through Ironbark, like a stray dog seein' what he can smell out."

"Hawley ! Oh, he's all right !" said Sam. "Not a bad sort. He's got his job same as other people. Yer jolly hard on men, Nelly, now ain't yer ? If he didn't do his bit, someone else would, and he mightn't be near as decent a chap as Hawley. It's that gimlet-eyed bloke I don't like ! He wouldn't be too perticular how he got yer. Reminds me——"

"Never mind, Sam," said Nellie wearily, "what it reminds you of. Get Nipper away——"

"Right-o ! And you keep yer pecker up and yer mouth shut."

So it was that the same evening Nipper was looking for a stray steer in the hills. At least, that is what he told "Long Tom," the bullock driver, whom he saw as he passed in the shadows of the evening, on his way to Jack Danvers.

* * * * *

Hawley was early astir the following morning. When he went on to the verandah of the Ironbark

Arms and looked towards the hills he thought how beautiful they were. Each "draught of dew-laden air" that he inhaled gave to him a sense of pure joyous exhilaration.

It was vastly different to the days when he did his beat in the sordid back streets of the city, where the air, "cribb'd, cabin'd and confin'd," had not in it the health-giving ozone of the mountain breezes.

He could see the mists, which the settlers called the "Magic Lake," melting away. These mists filled the valley before sunrise looking like a lake, the peaks of the hills resembling islands in the sea of mist. Away in the distance was Mount Donna Buang, 4080 feet above sea-level, a giant amongst its fellows, beautiful against the blue skies of an Australian summer, and picturesque, covered in snow when winter falls on the hills that guard the valley of the Yarra.

The township was awakening. Signs of life, of "up and doing," were plentiful enough. Hawley could hear the clank of Martin's windmill by the pump in the cabbage patch belonging to the hotel. The magpie larks, flying in their heavy flapping way, were calling plaintively "pee wee, pee wee," as they enjoyed the mud and the water about the pump. A home-coming cow was stopping to browse and to bellow as she sauntered up the road. A little tot of six was behind urging her on, with a gum switch.

In the dreamy distance a cattle bell struck

intermittent notes as the beast that carried it moved from herbage to herbage.

At the hotel, Sarah, the "general," was washing the well-worn oilcloth in the hall.

Mrs. Hickford was in the kitchen, frying some of Martin's home-cured bacon, that was nearly as salty as Lot's wife.

From the verandah of a country pub a visitor, if he waits, can obtain a kaleidoscopic view of the passing life of the hamlet. While Hawley was quite content to enjoy the beauties the gods sent mortals, in the way of lovely views, such as the one before him looking towards Sawpit Point, he was also engaged in the more prosaic task of watching the valley road that led into the hills to the timber mill.

"Bush telegraphs" were wonderful in the way they worked, but they generally required a horse, a saddle, and a rider, though perhaps the saddle could be done without in the case of a hurrying emergency.

It was not long before he saw Nipper riding along the road at a hand gallop. If he went past the hotel he was either going to the post office, or else he was travelling straight to the top of the valley road. Hawley would have withdrawn into the hotel to watch Nipper through the parlour window, but he saw Nipper wave his hand to him, and he knew then that concealment was useless.

"Hello, Nipper!" he cried, "that's a rum-looking crock you're on."

“Gee, he ain’t mine, he belongs to the parsin. Left him with father three months ago to spell him. I’ve had to let out five holes in his girth since. Nasty-tempered brute, but not a bad fencer. Seein’ he’s the parsin’s I’ve called him ‘Jumping Moses.’”

Nipper laughed heartily at his own joke. Hawley laughed too, thinking how thoroughly Australian in his ways Nipper was. At the same time he wondered whether Nipper was not “pokin’ borak” at him. Did Nipper’s sheer high spirits that exuded from him, as gum from a wattle tree, serve as a cloak to hide his game this fine summer morning? If he could only get Nipper working on the case for the police, the mystery of Muller’s death would soon be unravelled.

“Where are you going, Nipper?” Hawley asked with assumed indifference.

“I’m going down to see Sandy Pilkins about a sow he has that’s just littered. Father wants to do a deal with him for some suckers.”

“I’ll come down with you,” said Hawley. “I haven’t seen Sandy for some time.”

“Yer best wait. Sandy yer know’s Scotch, he’s not too keen on yer sort. He don’t reckon yer any good for pigs, and if yer not good for pigs——”

Hawley laughed. He did not mind Nipper’s banter.

“All right, Nipper,” he replied. “See me when you come back. I’d like to have a talk with you.”

Hawley did not want to awaken any suspicion in the boy's mind that he suspected him of being in league with the men whose interest it was to balk the inquiries of the police. Nipper, he thought, could hardly ride the distance to the hills and get back to the township by dinner-time. If he watched for his return he could make a shrewd guess if Nipper had gone past Pilkins' place. It was only a couple of miles up the track.

"So long," cried Nipper as he dug his heels in "Jumping Moses" and that bony, long-limbed animal cantered off.

The boy mused to himself as he rode along: "Good thing I saw Jack last night, or else Hawley might have smelt a rat. I wonder does he guess I'm just going to see how Jeanie's getting on. Jeanie's good stock." Nipper smiled as he recalled his mother's words "children is stock." "Nice little figure, by gum, she has! Always looks clean and neat. I cotton to a girl as looks neat. Her mother was a big woman, her father's a big man. Both of 'em came from Scotland. I remember Mrs. Pilkins not long afore she died telling mother she did not feel so far away from home in these hills. Funny Jeanie's so small! Yer can't tell how stock'll throw."

Some of the men in Ironbark looked upon Sandy Pilkins as "a bit of a joke." But these men did not know Scotchmen, of whom it has been said that a good deal may be made, if they are taken young. With his small lack-lustre eyes and heavy

jowls, Sandy, everlastingly talking of his pigs, may have suggested a likeness to those animals. But after all it was more fanciful than real. There was certainly nothing swinish in Sandy's moral attributes.

In his youth he had been a gillie to a noble lord whose favourite sport was deer-stalking. Pilkins' eyes were then trained in searching hill-sides. The deer that could fool Sandy for days was not to be found in the Highlands.

On coming to Australia Sandy had gone to Ironbark, and settled down as a cockie. From mixed farming he had drifted, as he felt his way, into the calling of a pig farmer. Two years back his wife had died. He was left alone with his daughter Jeanie, to continue the profitable business he had begun so well near the Ironbark rifle-butts.

Nipper rode up to Pilkins' gate, a skilful piece of rough bush carpentry, swinging on a wooden pivot. He lifted the hoop-iron catch, opened the gate and entered. Sandy was in his pumpkin paddock ("pumpkins were the things to feed pigs on"), and seeing Nipper he went to meet him.

"Good mornin', Mr. Pilkins," said Nipper. "How's yer pigs?"

"Laddie, they're just gran'. I hae great reason to be thankfu'. They're all tawie. The litters are as weel as a good kirk-going man could wish. I've no swine fever the noo, the Loard be praised, in His great mercy He's spared ma poor pigs, on this occasion, the swine fever."

"Has He?" said Nipper without irreverence, but with genuine surprise. "I didn't know the Lord troubled about pigs, Mr. Pilkins."

"Laddie, a sparrow canna fall but they ken about it in heaven. Do you no mind the Gadarene swine?"

"No," said Nipper doubtfully. "Never heard of that breed. I know black Berkshires, and white Yorkshires, and red Tammies."

Mr. Pilkins sadly shook his head.

"Ah, laddie, I hae muckle reason to think young Australians are na releegious, which is awfu' at sich times as th' noo."

"The war's rotten, but our chaps are doing their bit," said Nipper.

"Ye're richt, laddie !

"Wha will be a traitor knave ?

Wha can fill a coward's grave ?

Wha sae base as be a slave ?

Traitor ! Coward ! Turn and flee !

"The dom' Kaiser had better been letten us alane. Ye ken he's the deevil of a body ! Germans, hoot, man, I'd out wi' 'em all ! I'd stick my gullie into every man of them that showed fight."

Pilkins was quite excited. Nipper was amused at the old man's warmth. He was a gillie again. It was so unlike the normal Pilkins to get excited over anything except the fine quality of his porkers, or at a local football match.

"I hear that braw man Danvers is going to enlist ?"

“We’re all going, you bet,” Nipper replied confidently. “We ain’t fer knucklin’ down to Germans. Not much.”

“Do ye ken when they gang?” asked Mr. Pilkins.

“No, this Muller business has mixed things a bit. Hawley watchin’ ’em to see which one moves. Reckons some would like to clear out of Ironbark.”

“Does he speer if Muller was murdered?”

“Wot’s the cop know? Do you think Muller was?”

“I mickle fear! I mickle fear! It’s a sad business anywa’, and I na say the dom’ German was murdered, but I wouldna have them speer too closely.”

“Hawley wanted to come with me an’ see if yer knew anything?”

“Na! na! I hae great reason to be thankfu’. I can keep a secret as weel as the maist part o’ men and better than the maist part o’ women.”

“Go on, Mr. Pilkins! What do yer know?”

“I ken what I ken! I was nae born in the Hielands for naething, so it’s nae good ye speerin’, Nipper!”

“I ain’t speerin’, Mr. Pilkins. I was going somewhere else till the cop spot me, so I kidded I was comin’ here after a pig.”

“I ken. The deevil of a thing he’ll get fra me. I munna say a word! Now, laddie, you gang yer gait and na gie th’ man room to crack.”

Nipper was straining his eyes towards the cottage.

Surely Jeanie had seen him. He was not mistaken. She was coming towards them. The boy got off his horse and hung him to a fence rail.

"Yer lang ganging, laddie," said Pilkins, half amused at Nipper.

"Just spot Jeanie!" said Nipper.

"Ah weel, I suppose ma lassie wi' be glad of a crack."

In a few moments Jeanie was alongside them.

"Hello, Nipper!"

"Hello, Jeanie, how are yer?"

"Fine! How's yerself? Come down to see father?"

"Ye—es!" replied Nipper with a long-drawn monosyllable.

"Thought yer come to see me!"

Nipper looked at Pilkins. The boy's face was one great smile. He was as pleased as Punch, and he thought (as he did think, in a jerky idiomatic way), "Jeanie's a bit of all right." Though he had before that day cast sheep's eyes towards Jeanie, and that young person was not insensible nor indifferent to his homage. Nipper was summed up in Jeanie's mind as "shy, powerful shy." Nipper astride of a galloping horse, swinging a twelve to fourteen feet stockwhip, made by himself of green hide, and bellowing his hoarse "Holloa, you cows!" to the skurrying bullocks, did not suggest any shyness, but then bullocks were bullocks, and they don't make you shy, they are too cussed for that, they make you swear. If

they can go the wrong way they will, and Nipper many a time had made, by a well-placed cut from his whip, the hair and skin fly from the hide of some perverse maddening beast that was trying to do a break-away.

“Will you come to the house?” asked Jeanie.

“Why?” asked Nipper, with the broad smile still on his face.

“Thought ye might taste one of ma scones I just made.”

Nipper was still smiling as he looked at Pilkins, thinking “how’ll the old man take it?”

“Gang and get ane, laddie, she’ll gie ye nae peace. I’ll gang and see how that so’s getting on in the new sty, a braw lot of suckers—a braw lot! Nipper, ye should just study pigs. They’re simply great! Ye get more than grunts frae pigs!”

Nipper’s immediate studies were directed towards Jeanie. The two of them walked to the house. Pilkins went down to the new sty, well drained, with a brick floor, where the sow lay with her profitable litter, rejoicing the heart of Sandy.

They passed a tree on which was nailed the pelt of a dingo.

“How are yer fowls?” asked Nipper.

“I’ve lost eleven of my beautiful leghorns. A dingo got into the fowl-house. There was such a scatter. Father rushed out, but the dog got away. Just before I heard the dingo howl, as I

thought, about a mile away, but he must have been pretty close."

"Dingoes are like that," replied Nipper, thoroughly versed in Australian bush lore. "I've noticed it often. You'll hear them like as if they was miles away, and then their shrill howl seems to come from the next paddock. I'm sorry you lost yer fowls, but I see yer dad bagged him."

"Yes, he came once too often. Father spot him one moonlight night, and bowled him over from the verandah."

"Good enough!" said Nipper.

They went on without speaking for a while, Nipper, with a switch, cutting, as they walked, at the heads of some dandelions.

Suddenly Jeanie said, apparently following out her own train of thought:

"You're a bit thick in catchin' on, Nipper!"

"How?" asked Nipper.

"You're a bit shy, ain't you?" said Jeanie coquettishly.

"No! Who told you that?" replied Nipper, getting very red.

"Oh, no one told me. They had no need to, Nipper. I've got eyes in my head."

"I suppose yer have!"

"I'll bet you yer can't tell me the colour of 'em."

"How do yer know I ain't looked?" asked Nipper.

"Never saw yer look at me eyes. Yer never looked into them."

"No—oo," said Nipper with a mischievous drawl.

"No—oo," said Jeanie, humorously imitating him. "What's their colour?"

"Wouldn't yer like to know?" said Nipper.

"I'd like to know if you know."

"I know what they're like."

"Do you, Nipper?"

"Rather. Gum, I do jest!"

"What are they?" demurely asked Jeanie.

"They're just right-o, Jeanie!"

"That ain't a colour," said Jeanie, with affected disappointment.

"Ain't it? I thought it were. Yer know a man don't look at a girl's eyes like he does at a horse. He don't ask her to open her mouth and show her teeth. Gum, if he did, he'd soon get shut!"

"You can look in my mouth if you want to," said Jeanie. "Clean teeth, ain't they, and good? Don't be frightened, Nipper, I won't bite yer head off. No gold! Every tooth sound!"

"They're all right," said Nipper.

"I wouldn't have shown 'em to you if they weren't."

"No! I suppose not."

"That I've blue eyes and brown hair is nothin' to you?"

"I dunno so much about that," replied Nipper. His courage was rising. Jeanie was a little peach! Her breath, he had really noticed that, was sweet, like the smell of new-mown hay.

“ Yer ever been in love, Nipper ? ” she asked.

“ No. Hev you ? ”

“ Dozens of times, Nipper ! ”

“ Go on ! ” replied Nipper incredulously.

“ Yes, same boy every time ! First I think I love him ; then I don’t ; then I do ; then I don’t ! ”

“ That’s a bit snakeheaded, isn’t it ? How are yer with him now ? ”

“ Just ’twix’ and ’tween ! ’Twix’ and ’tween ! ”

“ Gum, that’s funny ! Does yer father know ? ”

“ Do you think I’d tell him ? Yer don’t seem to know much about women.”

“ Yer ain’t a woman,” said Nipper, as if he had suddenly made a discovery.

“ Oh ! What am I, if I’m not a woman ? ”

“ Yer just a girl—yer no more ’en sixteen ! ”

“ Yer seem, Nipper, to know me age ? ”

“ I jest guessed it, straight dinkum ! ”

“ No you don’t, Nipper ! Your sister told yer ? ”

“ Now I think on’t, she did,” said Nipper.

“ Thought so ! What else did yer ask her ’bout me ? ”

“ Heaps,” replied Nipper.

They had reached the house. A kettle hung over the fire. From it Jeanie poured some water into the teapot, and gave Nipper a drink, a couple of her scones, and a lump of butter. He sat on a bench beside the door, and Jeanie stood beside him.

“ They’re real good scones, Jeanie.”

“ I’m glad yer like ’em. I may make some more

for yer some day if yer get a move on the right way!"

"I know the track yer mean," said Nipper, with a meaning look at Jeanie.

"How are they down at the post office?" she asked. "I hear Marion's coming to Ironbark."

"The news don't take long to travel, does it? How did yer hear?"

"I saw Nelly the other day. She can only talk of Marion and Jack Danvers, and the murder."

"Don't get callin' it murder, Jeanie. They don't know what it were, and talking like that puts it about."

"All right, Mr. Jolly-Know-All. S'pose you know all about Marion and Jack."

"I dunno anything!"

"Yes yer do. But yer won't tell. Marion's too stuck-up for me."

"Why?" asked Nipper.

"'Cos she is," replied Jeanie; "she used to laugh at father and his pigs. If father said what he knows about her brother it would wipe the funny smile off her face. She always looks dour at me. I don't like her much."

"She's all right," said Nipper. "You can't turn her down before yer know her—properly, I mean."

"That's the way she strikes me anyway. I'm sure she's got an awful temper. I've noticed folks with thin nostrils have. Blown-out nostrils like yours, Nipper, show yer good-tempered."

"Go on! What 'er yer givin' us? That's

yer breathing ! ” said Nipper with the air of one who is demolishing an absurd remark. “ Might as well say,” he continued, “ that because Sam’s got hair on his head like a bush fire at night, that he’s a bush fire. Don’t be silly, Jeanie ! The Debenhams are all right. Yer may not have any time for Marion, but that ain’t to say others haven’t. Never seed yet a mob where every beast was marked in the same way. I know Marion well, and so does Sam, and we both thinks she’s all right. One day she went off at Sam like a packet of crackers ’cos he delivered a new hat-box banged in, an’ because her hat was crushed. My gum, she did go off—flew right off the handle, called Sam nothin’.”

“ I should think she did ; so would any girl ! ” replied Jeanie. “ What did Sam say ? ”

“ Sam said, ‘ just like a woman.’ Gum, ye can’t beat Sam on women. They don’t put him out. Sam likes Marion ; says a woman ain’t worth much if she’s got no temper, and she didn’t hurt him, and as it seemed to do her good he didn’t mind, because the box was bust up afore he got it.”

Nipper laughed heartily.

“ Which hat of Marion’s was it that was crushed ? ” asked Jeanie with natural feminine curiosity.

“ Gum, Jeanie, ask me somethin’ easy ! ” replied Nipper, almost stupefied that such a question should have been put to him.

"You were up in the big hill the other day, Nipper!"

"How did you know?"

"I saw you!" said Jeanie.

"You couldn't tell that it was me from here!"

"Yes I could, because I looked at you through father's glasses. You have a look through them. Father says they're the best deer-stalking glasses he ever used. He brought them from Scotland."

"They are good glasses," said Nipper in admiration. "I can see the spot exactly where Muller was found. You could easily recognise with these glasses anyone there, couldn't yer?"

"Yes, father saw yer figure, and then he got his glasses and put 'em on yer. He told me it was you, so I had a peep to see what girl it was you were after on the hill-top."

"Garn!" said Nipper. "I'm off!"

"Time you were," replied Jeanie. "Yer doing no good here."

"I say, Jeanie!"

"Yes, Nipper."

"How is it?"

"No chance!"

"Just one!"

"You're a thief, Nipper."

"So long, Jeanie! Don't wipe it off! I won't wait for yer father, yer ken I'm a bit shy."

"I think yer powerful bold!" shouted Jeanie good-humouredly after Nipper's retreating figure.

Nipper, as he rode homeward, had a lot to think

about. First of Jeanie, who was "just it," and then of her father's attitude towards Germans. Those field-glasses appeared to Nipper to have discovered something on the hill besides himself. Jack, he thought, was hunting a pack of dingoes the morning Muller was killed. The dingoes were a pest at Pilkins'. Pilkins may have been disturbed by the same pack, near his hen roost, as Jack tracked past Pilkins', holding to somewhere about the rifle butts, where Jack's dog "Tim" lost the scent.

Nipper was quite satisfied when he had finished his reflections that Pilkins knew a lot that Mr. Hawley would give a great deal to learn.

Hawley was in the main street when the boy rode past Martin's hotel. He beckoned to Nipper, who pulled up his horse.

"I've great news," he said.

"What's that?"

"There's a reward of five hundred pounds to be offered for information that will lead to the discovery of Muller's murderer."

"Go on!" said Nipper.

"Yes. It would give a young fellow like you a good start," said Hawley suggestively.

"By gum it would," replied Nipper.

"Why don't you get it? Who murdered Muller?"

"Gum, Mr. Hawley, are yer losin' yer bloomin' block over the case? Yer dead funny! Five hundred quid! My oath! Don't I wish I knew!"

“ Will you help the police ? ”

“ Garn ! Ain’t I been doing so all the time ? Didn’t I come trackin’ with yer ? Five hundred quid ! My oath ! I should just smile ! ”

Nipper dug his heels into “ Jumping Moses ” and rode home after singing out once again, “ Five hundred quid ! By gum ! ”

Trooper Hawley stood disconsolate in the road looking after Nipper. He felt exasperated. The kid was too much for him. He went swearing to himself, along the road to the pub, to see Martin.

CHAPTER X

TROOPER HAWLEY SEEKS INFORMATION

THE Court of Appeal that Martin Hickford represented in Ironbark was not sitting on the Muller case. The Court was in vacation, though Martin was still to be seen perched on his high stool behind the bar, but he was not delivering judgments. Like "Polly" in her pensive moods, Martin thought things, but his thoughts were left unsaid.

Because Nipper brushed away Hawley's proposal that he should assist the police, Hawley resolved to interview Martin. The £500 reward would surely bring some information of value. That the Government had offered such a sum could not be made known too widely in Ironbark.

It was most annoying that the calico bills publishing the reward had been lost in the parcels post from Melbourne. Sam's story that they might have been jerked from the coach at Rattlebone corner was a bit thin. Had that happened the parcel must have been found by someone and brought, Hawley thought, to him. The loss of the bills was very suspicious. He would requisition for more bills to be sent up so that he could have them nailed to every prominent tree along

the valley road from Ironbark to the sawmill in the hills. In the meanwhile he would get Martin's permission to pin the advertisement of the reward appearing in the "Government Gazette" on the notice-board hanging in the hotel bar.

Why was it, Hawley asked himself, that Martin avoided discussing the subject of Muller's death? He must have opinions formed on information that he had from reliable sources. And again, Hawley asked himself, what man is better situated in a bush hamlet to hear the news than a popular publican such as Martin? Different characters went to the bar. Most of them had much to say before Martin collected the price of their last "long sleeve." The general opinion in Ironbark would be worth knowing. Martin's bullet-like head held it all. How was he to extract it?

Martin walked on to the hotel verandah as Hawley got there. "Jessie" was following Martin, vigorously wagging her tail and uttering low, good-natured barks, her brown eyes shining with affection.

"She is half-human the way she talks to you in her barks," Martin said to Hawley, nodding towards "Jessie." "She's after me to open the garden gate for her, to get the drink of milk she has when they're milking the cows."

"Do you give the dog milk?" asked Hawley in astonishment.

"She's got no teeth, only old stumps. Nothing she likes better than a sop of bread, milk and tea

in a pie-dish. She's a regular old woman, 'Jessie,' in her fondness for tea."

"Well that's the first I've heard of a dog liking tea."

"You've got to like dogs to know 'em. 'Jessie's' a bush dog, born and bred. She'd be dead frightened of a Melbourne tram. Can't you see woman written all over her? See that pleading look in her eyes, that's not a dog's eye. A dog has a bold eye: she has a soft eye. Did yer ever notice that in dogs, Mr. Hawley?"

"Can't say I have," said Hawley.

Martin was making him feel somewhat uncomfortable. He did not like confessing that he, a police trooper, did not notice things as acutely as a bush publican.

"Many a bushman has been kept sane by his dog," continued Martin. "A dog with you breaks the lonesomeness of the bush, I know. We've padded the hoof together. That's why 'Jessie' gets her milk. We don't miss it same as the old girl would if she didn't get it."

"I suppose that's why Danvers keeps a dog, likes its company?" said Hawley.

"'Tim'? 'Tim's' a good dog, a clever dog. He's got a cold nose, keen on scent," said Martin. "There's dogs and dogs, like men and men. Some are good, some are rogues."

"I wonder," said Hawley, carefully feeling his way, "how it was that Danvers did not discover with the help of his dog with such a keen nose,

as you say he has, Muller's body lying on the hill-top? When Danvers was returning from the dingo hunt, he must have passed close to it."

"Do you think so?" asked Martin.

"I'd like to know what you think, Martin?" said Hawley. "Who do you suspect of the murder?"

"Well," said Martin, "I hev not been sayin' what I think. But since it's you who ask me I'll tell you."

"Do," said Hawley, "tell me all you know. It's worth your while. There's a reward of £500 to anyone who'll give information that will lead to the conviction of the murderer of Muller."

"I'm afraid it will not come my way. Boder's the man, he told you so himself. I know, no one better, how the two Germans hated each other," said Martin.

"Boder used a rifle, as you know. How then do you explain the revolver bullet found in Muller's body?" asked Hawley.

"I'm not out to explain anything," said Martin.

"You think that's my business?" asked Hawley with a touch of humour.

"If you put it that way, I do," Martin replied.

"I sell beer, not men," added Martin with just a touch of contempt.

Realising that he was not going to get anything out of Martin, Hawley said, "Oh well, I must be going."

"So long!" said Martin.

Hawley, with a nod of his head, went on his way to the post office, where he intended to interview Mrs. Debenham on the subject of the revolver that Danvers had given him. He found the widow alone in the office. Producing the revolver he asked Mrs. Debenham if she had ever seen it before ?

Mrs. Debenham glanced almost indifferently at the weapon, not displaying much interest in the question. Why should she ? She did not dream that her family happiness was involved in the question. It flashed across her mind that Hawley thought as postmistress she was more likely to have a general knowledge, in excess of anyone else, of what the residents possessed.

Her first careless look was changed to one of fixed intensity when she saw a weapon long familiar to her reposing in the strange hands of a policeman. She felt a short catch in her breath, and her heart, a weak one, suddenly began to thump violently. The colour faded from her cheeks, and her face assumed an anxious-looking expression.

“Where did you get it ?” she asked.

A vague alarm took possession of her. In what direction was the blow she felt impending about to fall ?

“You recognise the weapon, then ?” said Hawley, thinking he had a clue.

“Yes, it belonged to my late husband.”

“Can you tell me how Jack Danvers came by it ?”

Mrs. Debenham's mind reeled. She was like to faint. Had the question anything to do with the death of Muller ?

She remembered hearing the people say that Danvers' revolver was produced in Court, but it was not the one the police wanted. And here was she being cross-examined by Trooper Hawley, whose hairy hands made her shudder. She could not take her eyes off them, or off the revolver.

Strange, she thought in her worry, that she had not observed the hair on the man's hands before. He had been in the post office a hundred times, laughing and chaffing, and she had never before noticed the horrible black hairs. The trooper's eyes of steel too seemed to have hard lights in them, that were strange to her. As he spoke she noticed his teeth were yellow with smoke from his pipe, while his tobacco-laden breath was far from having the sweetness of a whiff of air from the hills.

These thoughts, she knew, were very incongruous at such a time, yet there they were, and from them sprang her repulsion to Hawley. He seemed to be as merciless as an eagle-hawk while she, fluttering in his grasp, was almost as powerless as a wren would be in the hawk's talons.

Quite unwittingly she disclosed the trend of her mind to Hawley by her answer, that was no answer, to his question how did the revolver get into the possession of Danvers ?

"Is that the revolver that was produced in Court?" she asked.

"Yes," said Hawley.

"O heavens! you don't say so?" she gasped.

Mrs. Debenham staggered to a chair, shrinking as she did so from the open hands that were put out to save her from falling.

"I am sorry if I distress you, Mrs. Debenham. I feel for you—really I do—but I must get to the bottom of this revolver business. It will be better so, because of the wild rumours flying in Ironbark."

Mrs. Debenham inclined her head, as if in accord with Hawley. He came closer to her, as she sat on the chair, and placed his right hand on her shoulder. She drew her head on one side, and pushed his arm away. She shrank from touching his hand, and said, with some dignity, "Keep your hand off me, Mr. Hawley: I am not your prisoner."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Debenham. I meant nothing rude. My anxiety to learn the truth must be my excuse. When last did you see the weapon?"

"Not for a long time. It was kept in an old sea-chest of my husband."

"Can I see that chest?" asked Hawley.

"Certainly! Why not?"

She led the way to the back of the house on to a verandah, with a red floor of hand-made bricks, worn soft and crumbly. The floor was netted

in from the garden. A small hand-rail ran its length, over which scrambled and sprawled, flourishing in the sunlit spot, nasturtiums of many colours. The brass-bound sea-chest of oak formed a seat at the end of the verandah, having, after many years, ended its voyages and found an anchorage at last. The chest was one of strange associations—of voyages out, and voyages in; of alien men and of foreign merchandise. Swarthy seamen had sat on its black top, stained with sea stains, and ship's dirt, telling between watches their hopes, their joys, their fears, their griefs, in weather fair, and in tempest foul.

What manner of man was he who first used, proud in his possession, this fine old sea-chest? Had its past owners voyaged on the Spanish Main? Had they ploughed the flowing seas to the end? Where were they now? Were they scattered along the compass points in unknown lands, or did their bones bleach on ocean sands?

Did Captain Debenham do ill to leave the chest behind him, and in it, his revolver to keep company with the ship's chronometer, an old brass bell, a broken compass, and a few odds and ends that still smelt of tar and still had the tang of brine, and the odours of the sail room?

"It's a curious old chest, Mrs. Debenham," said Hawley.

He lifted the chest's heavy lid, and looked at the queer collection of the sea's flotsam and jetsam.

"There's no sign of a revolver here, or even

of an old cartridge. Was the revolver kept loaded ?” he asked.

“ Oh dear, no ! ” answered Mrs. Debenham in alarm at the thought, “ I wouldn’t have a loaded revolver about the place.”

“ I will go now, Mrs. Debenham,” Hawley said, “ and I thank you for your information. I have only to say that if you can remember anything more about the revolver, you must let me know.”

“ Good day,” said Mrs. Debenham.

The trooper went to his horse that he had hung up to the hawthorn-hedged fence of the garden attached to the post office.

From the window of her parlour the widow had a view of the valley road leading to where, pencilled against the sky, the white leafless boughs of colossal trees, 400 to 450 feet high, sapped untimely by axemen, stretched their twisted remains upwards into space as if in a mute appeal to heaven. She watched Hawley, from behind her faded dusty curtains, until he disappeared in a bend of the road that she knew led to the sawmill, where her son was. Not till then did she sink into a chair, her hands clasped tightly together on her lap, in a state of bewilderment. She tried to compose herself under the stunning blow that had so suddenly fallen. She prayed to heaven to spare her the bitter cup of woe that even then seemed to be touching her lips.

After turning the bend in the valley road, another three-quarters of a mile had to be travelled

before the mill was reached. Hawley drew rein a little before a "glue pot." A team of bullocks was swaying from one side of the track to the other, in the stress of an attempt to pull out of the mud a bogged timber-jinker. He could see "Long Tom" swinging his whip handle, eight feet or more in length, with its short heavy lash, and the big silk cracker at the end. He heard the crack of the whip like a pistol shot over, but not on, the bullocks, while "Long Tom" encouraged them with coaxing words. He shouted to each individual bullock by name, starting with the two leaders "Poley" and "Bluey," and so he ran down—as a man calling a roll—the team of twenty-four, naming each bullock in turn. Was it surprising that in a short time the "glue pot" no longer bogged the jinker?

"Long Tom" was one of the men of Ironbark. No one in the hills could overlook "Long Tom." Indeed few men did overlook his six feet three inches of pure Australian manhood. His gentle voice worked wonders with his oxen, and with man the liquid depths of his soft eyes won their hearts. They were as free from dross as the fern-fringed streams of the hills were clear of impurities.

He was as kind to his kine as a soft-hearted woman is to her first born. He went about his bullocks along the tracks with a lurching gait that was essentially "Long Tom."

"Good day, Tom," said Hawley.

"Same to you," was the teamster's greeting.

“Any news?” asked the trooper.

“Not much,” replied Tom. “Tippins lost a fine young bullock; I was after it two nights back. Limb came down and broke his back. I offered him ten quid for the beast, but he wanted me to spring another quid. Too much, and there you are. The beast’s gone. The dingoes will have him. It’s rum up here in the ranges if someone or something don’t get a cut in somehow.”

“Seen anyone up the tracks this morning?” asked Hawley, showing by his question how much he was interested in “Long Tom’s” troubles about the sudden death of a fine young bullock.

“No! It’s a bit early. The last cove I saw was Nipper Tippins; saw him last night. He was after a white-faced steer that had gone astray. He reckoned as Jack Danvers bred her she might have gone back to his paddocks.”

“Nipper’s a pretty cute kid,” observed Hawley.

“He is so!” agreed “Long Tom.” “I can’t help liking that kid. A real young bushman. He kin track a steer through the bush as well as Mulga.”

“I know that,” Hawley replied.

“I’ve seen him fix a bit of fluff to a bee and follow it to its hive in a gum tree.”

“Never?” Hawley said incredulously.

“Gospel truth,” asserted “Long Tom.” “He did it the other day. Where do yer think he got the hive. Top of hill where the German was found. Big hive too, in a hollow trunk.”

"Which tree?" asked Hawley.

"The one that was burnt out last bush fire. Stuck on the top of the hill, it looked at night like a big squib sending millions of sparks out. Nipper gave me the honey."

"Why did he do that?" asked Hawley.

"That's like Nipper. He said the kids would like it, and my word they did. Told him he'd better have some himself, but he said he was all right, he got better'en honey."

"What did he mean?" asked Hawley.

"It kind of puzzled me," "Long Tom" confessed, "but I s'posed he thought of the kids' pleasure. It's good honey for colds when it tastes like this does of the gum flowers."

Hawley was thoughtful when he bade the teamster "good day" and rode up the track to the mill.

In front of the mill Hawley saw Ted Debenham, who looked a picture of an Australian as he stood in the sunlight of a sky-blue day looking down the track at the coming horseman and at the retreating team going for some blackwood logs, a small belt of which timber he was having cut out to be worked up into legs for billiard tables.

Debenham had an audacious look in his eyes that was capable of denying a man ten times thrice. When he smiled he was not unattractive, but there was "something," "something" about him that the apparent spontaneity of his frankness did not entirely conceal.

"Ah, Hawley," he said, "mornin' to you ! What brings you up this way ?"

"To have a word or two with you. What a row the mill-saws make ?"

"You'd get used to them," Ted said, "if you were here every day. You should hear the lyre birds imitating the sound of a saw. You'd think sometimes that another saw was going in the valley. We'll walk down the track if you think there's too much row here from the mill for the 'mag' you want."

Hawley dismounted, and led his horse by the reins which he slipped over his right arm. The two men sauntered along the track that was cut into the hill-side, which the teamsters had strengthened in places, with heavy logs, to prevent the land-slips caused by soakages. On the valley side of the track was a drop, hidden by tangled brush-wood, of hundreds of feet. Looking down the valley, over the tree tops, the sight was a beautiful one of a sea of waving olive-green.

When they reached an overturned timber trolley, Ted sat down on it and lit his pipe. Hawley stood, leaning his back against the horse's saddle.

"You look deadly serious, Hawley, what's up ? Aren't you well ? Case got you down or what ?" observed Ted.

"No, the case hasn't beaten me—at least not yet," said Hawley.

He resented Ted's sarcastic badinage.

"Oh, well, that's a bit cheery, though it's a beastly gruesome job you're on."

"Do you think so?" asked Hawley.

"Rather. Fancy you having to hunt to find a man for the hangman! That's what it amounts to, eh?"

"I want you to assist me to find the man," said Hawley.

"With all my heart, old fellow, if I can. Nothing I should like better. My opinion is that Boder is the man. He should have been potted. What's the good of a smart cove like you making a clever arrest as you did and then to be turned down by the beak?" asked Ted, assuming the air of an unconscious flatterer.

"Will you tell me how Jack Danvers became possessed of the revolver he gave to me in the hut?" asked Hawley.

Ted gave a long whistle.

"That's the stunt you're on is it? Why don't you ask me something easy, Hawley? How do I know?"

"Did you ever see that revolver," asked Hawley, "before the night when I brought Boder to the hut?"

"I don't think so," said Ted, "in fact I am sure I did not."

"Then it wasn't," Hawley said quickly, "the revolver that usually hung from the nail over Danvers' mantelpiece? Being a frequent visitor to the hut you knew the appearance of that revolver?"

Ted was silent for a space. Then he said slowly,

"Are you trying to trap me, Hawley? I'm not takin' any of that sort of 'gyver,' you know."

"I only want the truth," said Hawley.

"You have come to the right mill," confidently asserted Ted. "I never looked at the revolver, and I don't know whether the weapon you've got there was the one that hung over the mantel-piece. It may be that it is. Danvers could tell you that."

"I suppose so," observed the trooper in a grim tone. "Was the revolver ever in your possession?"

"If it was," replied Ted, "I must be telling you lies. If you think so, why don't you call me a liar at once?"

"I have just come from your mother's," Hawley said impressively. "She says this identical revolver in my hand was the one that belonged to your father. What do you say to that?"

"My mother has made a mistake, that's what I say. She could easily do so, because now that I look at the revolver I see that it has some resemblance to my father's."

Ted's face was as brazen as brass as he told the lie.

"Where was his revolver kept?" asked Hawley.

"I don't know," replied Ted. "I haven't seen it for years."

"Was it kept in the old sea-chest that's on your mother's back verandah?" asked Hawley.

"It may have been—as likely as not. I cannot say."

"Would you be surprised to know that your

father's revolver is not in that chest?" said Hawley, watching Ted narrowly, but Ted did not turn a hair.

"Not at all. Any tramp could collar it if he wanted to, if he chose his time when mother is sorting the mails in the office."

"That's possible of course," observed Hawley.

"It's not only possible," said Ted with vehemence, "but it's damn probable. I s'pect that is just what has happened if the revolver is not there. This isn't it anyhow. I know for a fact that a scarab was taken out of the box."

"What's a scarab?" asked Hawley.

"A scarab! You don't know what a scarab is! How could you? How could you?" Ted spoke with impatience. "Well, a scarab is a dung beetle, at least it's a carving of a dung beetle. Do you take that in—a dung beetle carved in stone, just as if the Egyptians had carved your dial in stone, Hawley, just as if your hard chivvy was what it looks like—a stone."

Hawley brushed aside the insult though his hot blood boiled. He was not too sure about the scarab. It sounded to him as if Debenham was having a joke at his expense. However, he would follow any gleam, any clue that came along.

"When did you look for the scarab," he asked with suppressed anger.

"About eight months ago," replied Ted.

"Did you notice if the revolver was in the chest at that time?"

“ ‘Pon my word, old man, I didn’t. Why should I ? I say, Hawley, what’s your game ? ”

“ You know my game all right,” sneered Hawley. “ You are one of the clever ones, you are. You know my game.”

“ You’re a liar, I don’t ! ” said Ted with sudden bluntness.

“ Don’t you speak to me like that ! ” cried Hawley in a threatening and warning voice.

“ You can come on as quiek as you like,” said Debenham.

“ There’s no need to fight or to lose your temper,” said Hawley.

“ Well, you drop sneering. That coek won’t fight with me,” said Ted.

“ All right ! I didn’t mean anything,” said Hawley in a mollifying tone. “ I want to ask you this. If the revolver did not belong to your father, and you did not give it to Danvers, can you tell me how it is that on the butt of the revolver is cut a small ‘ D ’ ? ”

Hawley showed the butt of the revolver to Debenham and pointed out the “ D ” neatly carved, as a sailor might carve it, in a small scroll that allowed a tight grip to be taken of the weapon.

“ You’re a fair wonder ! ” exclaimed Ted, “ a fair wonder, Hawley. The Chief Commissioner of Police will be looking for a job when you are transferred to town. You find a ‘ D ’ on the butt of a revolver and therefore it belongs to a

man named Debenham. Why not 'D' for Danvers? For Danvers the man who gave it to you!"

If ever a trooper felt nonplussed, Hawley did. So obsessed was he with the idea that the revolver was Debenham's, that he quite overlooked that the "D" could as easily stand for Danvers, the man he suspected of the murder, as Debenham, who he felt sure was mixed up in the affair in some way he could not at that stage precisely define. What an ass he had been! He could kick himself. He mounted his horse with the intention of going to Danvers to execute the search warrant, not venturing to speak to Ted as he rode off.

Debenham cried out to him:

"Say, Hawley, you are like a cuckoo that lays its eggs in a finch's nest."

"What do you mean?" asked Hawley, drawing rein.

"The cuckoo," shouted Ted, "eats insects, finches feed on seed. When the cuckoo fledglings are hatched they die for want of suitable food,—twig? Their foster-mothers are stuffing 'em all the time with the wrong stuff. That's what you have been doing to yourself, Hawley."

"Go to hell!" was the only remark Hawley permitted himself to make audibly, as he rode away, a very angry man. Ted had baited him. He felt as wild as a mad bull. How would he fare at Jack Danvers'?

Ted went back to the mill and entered his office, the door of which he shut and locked. A

cold sweat was on his brow as he took a whisky bottle from a cupboard. With a somewhat tremulous hand he poured out half a tumblerful of spirit and drank it down neat. The spirit almost choked him. He spluttered and coughed. When he recovered his breath he ejaculated :

“ By God ! It’s going to be a close thing.”

CHAPTER XI

THE FIGHT

JACK DANVERS' hut stood in a cleared patch on the hillside out of the reach of any falling timber.

The settlers had to take that precaution for, after days of rain, followed by muggy weather, some of the great trees of the forest came down with startling suddenness. When that happened the still air would be filled with noise as of a mighty rushing wind. Smaller trees borne to the ground by the weight of the fallen giant cracked and shrieked as they were hurled to their untimely deaths, while the monster would hit the ground with such a thud that the report of the fall boomed through the forest. Such a fallen tree near Jack's hut measured 450 feet. It formed a portion of the fence to the upper line of his bean patch. From the tree trunk to the door of the hut was a clear space, which Jack kept free from cathead ferns and bracken that soon sprang up if he neglected to use the "slasher," a large broad half-moon knife fixed to a stout ash handle, so great was the fecundity of Nature in the invigorating air of the hills.

Jack was busy slashing down some bracken growing about a dead black butt. The tree's burnt-out trunk was used as a shelter for Jack's grind-

stone, which was covered by an old wheat bag. He heard his horse whinny in the paddock, one side of which ran along the track hidden by scrub, five or six hundred yards away. Jack looked in the direction of the sound. "Tim" came out of his kennel, made of shingles, that was placed beside the black butt at the end of the "yard." "Hi, lad!" cried Jack to his dog, motioning him across to where the horse was turned out. "Tim" went off through the bush, and then commenced to bark.

"I thought so," said Jack.

He resumed his slashing. Warned the night before by Nipper, he was quite prepared for Trooper Hawley's visit to his hut to make a search for the missing revolver.

Hawley soon came into view. Jack bade him a "good day," asking him at the same time how it was that he was thus honoured with a visit. In reply Hawley, still surly from the effects of Debenham's gibes, produced a search warrant.

"You are quite welcome to search my hut. I do not know what you expect to find. I am not aware that there is anything in the place that will assist you in the Muller case," said Jack.

"I'm not so sure there isn't," replied Hawley.

Hawley dismounted from his horse. The two men, followed by "Tim," went up to, and entered the hut. Jack seated himself on one of his home-made stools and watched Hawley's movements with amused interest.

Not so "Tim." The terrier growled at the stranger turning over his master's property. Never since the days of his puppydom could he recall having seen such liberties taken with their household gods. He would not allow the man within a yard of his kennel, yet here was his master calmly looking on at the hut's contents being turned upside down. It was beyond his understanding, but not beyond his angry resentment. He walked towards Hawley intending to have it out with him, big as the trooper was in his doggish eyes.

Jack motioned the terrier back.

"It's all right 'Tim,'" he said soothingly, "lie down, you old rascal, and be quiet."

"Tim" did not think it was all right, but he did as he was told, though he kept his keen eyes on Hawley and continued to growl.

Hawley did not expect to find the revolver, but he did hope to discover some cartridges to match the bullet recovered from Muller's body. He took a small box off a shelf on the chance.

By way of remonstrance Jack asked Hawley, "You are searching, I understand, for a revolver?"

"I am searching for what I may find," answered Hawley. While speaking he opened the box, and found to his surprise therein lay the scarab.

"Hello, what's this?" he asked.

"It's a scarab," replied Jack; "and now that you have looked at it, oblige me by putting the

scarab again in the box and placing the box in the place where you took it from."

Instead of complying with Jack's request, Hawley deposited the box and the scarab on the table.

"Here was a find at last!" he thought. "The missing beetle! Danvers must have found it in the old sea-chest at the time he took Captain Debenham's revolver."

"Where did you get that?" asked Hawley, pointing to the scarab on the table.

"Don't you think you have a hide to ask me?" was Jack's reply.

"You can't bluff me!" replied Hawley, his anger rising. "This is one of the things I've been after."

"It has not anything to do with the case," said Jack.

"I'm going to keep it, anyway," declared Hawley.

"You are not," replied Danvers decisively. "The scarab is a keepsake, and I am not going to let you take it."

Jack made a grab at the scarab, but Hawley was too quick for him. He suddenly hit Danvers a heavy blow on the jaw that forced him on to a stool which he tripped over, falling heavily to the floor.

"Tim," with an angry growl, rushed at Hawley who made a vicious kick at him, but he missed the dog that circled him, a whirlwind of black and tan.

"Come here, sir!" shouted Jack in a loud, commanding guttural.

"Don't you hurt him!" he yelled to Hawley in a rough voice that had a power behind it. "If you kick my dog I'll kick you. I'll stand a lot, Hawley, but, by God, I'll suffer no man to hurt my dog."

"Tim" went very slowly to his master who sat on the floor, feeling badly shaken, but full of fight. "Tim's" hair was standing up along his spine like the quills on a fretful porcupine. The dog eyed Hawley with blood-red eyes and growled continuously as he withdrew from the zone of immediate danger.

"It was a cowardly blow you gave me, Hawley," said Jack as he got on to his feet. "If you're a man you'll take a hiding yourself, or give me one."

"Have you not had enough?" asked Hawley.

"I may feel like it when I get a bit of my own back," he replied. "You take off your jumper! I want to fight you, you, your mother's son, not Trooper Hawley of the Police Department."

Hawley's reply was a quick one. "I'll put the handcuffs on you if you talk fight to me. What right had you to try and snap the scarab?"

"Every right, since it is mine," said Jack.

He faced Hawley with a pale determined face marked by an angry flush where the blow had struck him.

With deliberate precision Jack said: "You

are not going to have the searab if I can prevent you. It has nothing to do with Muller's death."

"So you say," sneered Hawley.

The searab lay on the floor between the two men where it had fallen. He who would pick it up must do so at his own peril.

"It's you or me for it," said Jack.

"Don't be a fool," exclaimed Hawley, his anger growing apace. "Do you know," he shouted, "what you are taking on?"

"You, you, the bally middle-weight amateur champion bar one. I know what I'm doing, Mr. Hawley. They were a poor lot that year, Hawley—a damn poor lot. Anyhow, before you're through with this little contract you'll know the difference between boxing and fighting."

"This sort of thing can do you no good," said the trooper, who, while not a coward, did not view the fight that was being forced upon him with any pleasurable feelings.

Jack touched Hawley "on the raw" when he giped at him that he did not know the difference between boxing and fighting. Was Danvers a determined fighting machine? Public-school men were often very hard nuts to crack, notwithstanding that they spoke as gentlemen and that few of them borrowed the oaths of blackguards in the hardest of rough-and-tumbles. As for himself, Hawley was conscious that he was only a rapid-fire boxing bundle of tricks. Whether they would give him victory in a fight that would not be a

cake-walk, he did not know. Jack's bare knuckles, he feared, were going to talk vastly different from the muffled whispers of a pair of boxing gloves !

"We can't fight here !" said Jack. "There's not room. One of us may get hurt on the table. Anyway, I can't have my dog in the way. I'll lock him in the hut, and we'll go outside and settle who is to have the scarab."

"You think I'll fight, then ?" asked Hawley.

"Dead sure if you want the scarab !" replied Jack. "You have the advantage over me in height and weight. What more do you want ? If you are not a coward you'll off with the jumper and come outside."

Stung by Jack's words Hawley hastily took off his jumper, placed the revolver on the table, and threw a pair of handcuffs, which angrily he loosened from his leather belt, alongside them.

"I'll give you your bellyful, Jack Danvers," he hissed, "and not as Trooper Hawley either."

"Now you are talking like a man," said Jack quietly.

Jack motioned Hawley outside. Then he pushed "Tim," trying to squeeze past into the yard, when the door was being shut, back into the hut. The dog gave a howl of protest and sprang on to a stool. From it he jumped on to the table, and rushed to the window, flattened his head against the glass, looking at the two men.

"What game were they up to that he should

be shut in the hut ? His master had never treated him before with such scant ceremony ? ” were “ Tim’s ” thoughts.

The cleared patch in front of the hut was level enough for the purposes of a fair fight. Jack led the way to the centre of the yard, took off his blue cotton shirt, but left his flannel on. His fore-arms showed brown to the elbows—the russet-brown of faded fern leaves ; his biceps, large, soft and pliable, were beautifully white.

The two men faced each other in a fighting attitude. Hawley was more powerful than Jack. He had a further advantage over him inasmuch as he had a longer reach.

Jack’s head was set squarely on his lissom shoulders. He proudly faced Hawley with the light of battle in the steely glint of his blue-grey eyes. His limbs were quivering with nervy game-ness as he stepped warily around Hawley seeking for a favourable opening.

“ Why don’t you start ? ” cried Jack. “ You’re a champion, you know, not a dancing poodle ! ”

Jack’s intention was to provoke his adversary.

“ I’ll make you dance, you dog,” replied Hawley with warmth. “ I’ll give you what you’ve asked for.”

“ Don’t be so aggressive, Hawley, you make me nervous,” said Jack.

Hawley literally tore at Jack, who side-stepped him with the swiftness of a dragon-fly’s flight. Then he socked two heavy blows on to the

trooper's body. Hawley, recovered from his mad impetus, replied with a stiff drive to Jack's chin, but he stepped back, and the blow failed to connect.

"Well meant! Well meant, Hawley! but just a bit short. Try again!" said Jack with the utmost good humour.

"Take that!" retorted Hawley. As he said so he drove a hot one to Jack's mouth whose teeth cut his lips. Hawley himself took delivery of a chin jolt that jerked and jarred his head.

"First blood to you," said Jack as he spat the blood out of his mouth. "That ought to hearten you."

Hawley was wild with passion. Full of fury he drove stinging blows on to Danvers' wrists.

"You are not angry, are you?" asked Jack with affected solicitude, as he stepped in to clinch. He had no intention of letting Hawley pound his guard away by reason of Hawley's longer reach.

For a minute the two men stood toe to toe, and stabbing lefts and rights in fair exchange. Then they became locked, swaying and floundering about like a pair of wrestlers.

Hawley hung on, throwing his weight on Jack in an endeavour to wear him down. As Jack broke away from the clinch he planted his left on to Hawley's nose, followed by a right over the trooper's heart.

Hawley replied with a stinger on Danvers' ear. A well-meant hook with his right to Jack's chin was blocked. Jack feinted with his right. Hawley

fell into the trap, enabling Jack to get home with his left on Hawley's face.

"You're a cunning dog!" cried Hawley, inflamed at being out-boxed. "You thought you had me, didn't you?"

"I think I got a bit of you anyhow, but you ought to know, Hawley, you took the punch like a toff."

Hawley rushed at Jack, but he hit wildly. Jack ripped a right to Hawley's body and then gave him a strong jolt under the jaw, but it just missed the point, or it would have outed Hawley. It steadied the trooper, and made him realise that if he continued to lose his temper he would lose the fight.

"I'll hit you, you ——!" cried Hawley, smashing into Jack.

For the space of three minutes they fought furiously. Repeatedly Jack landed on Hawley's mouth, whose lips were very much swollen. Then they drew off each other for a space for breath.

"It's a 'dirty word' you used, Hawley! A 'dirty word' in the mouth of an honest man!" Jack observed as he recommenced the fight with a straight left once more on Hawley's tender lips.

"An ugly mouth for a dirty word, Hawley, every time," said Jack.

Hawley closed with Jack. He tried to uppercut him. Jack glued his chin to his chest and "smothered," watching his opportunity to in-fight.

Jack broke away. Hawley followed him with a rain of lefts and rights. Jack tried to manœuvre

for the sun to be in Hawley's eyes. He failed. There was no respite from Hawley, who was fighting like a madman. He kept whaling away with both hands, but Jack's footwork saved him. Hawley's long-range shots did not do much damage.

Suddenly Jack saw an opening. He ducked a left swing of Hawley's, and from underneath gave the trooper one under the jaw that rattled him so far as to stop his mad rush.

Both men were blown. Each bore signs of severe punishment. One eye of Hawley's was almost closed, a bruise on his forehead was almost as big as a small mouse. His lips were shocking to look upon. Jack's two eyes were swollen, one of his ears were bleeding, and his lips looked anything but kissable.

The two men paused and panted. It was hot fighting in an Australian sun with the bite that is in its heat about four o'clock on a warm day in summer.

Jack was a yard or two from a water tank on the tap of which hung a pannikin.

He nodded towards it, and said in a friendly way :

"Have a drink, Hawley?"

"What's your —— game?" demanded Hawley.

"Haven't you had enough?"

"No! Have you?" asked Jack with provoking calmness.

"Time!" cried Jack, and he waited a moment to let Hawley set his guard. Then he went at him with renewed strength.

"You're an obstinate dog !" Hawley hissed.

"Tut, tut ! Hawley !" said Jack. "We are but at the beginning, 'twere a pity not to be a sport right through."

Jack drove his left and right to Hawley's mouth. Hawley countered with two heavy blows, closed and hung on.

"Why don't you fight ? This is not a wrestling match," said Jack as Hawley tried again with his weight to wear the lighter man down.

"I am fighting !" answered Hawley, but without much heart in his words. Life was too strenuous for him to say more.

"Are you ?" said Jack in a surprised tone. "I thought you were fiddling."

"Curse you, Danvers !" ejaculated Hawley, in a tone of mingled rage and admiration. "Where did you learn to fight ?"

"At school, Hawley, at school ! Just for such a little scrap as this," said Jack with the cheeriness an Australian displays when he is "up against it."

They swayed together. Both were tiring, but the trooper was the fresher man of the two.

"Your eye is not too good. You ought to see a doctor," said Jack with wicked humour. He felt that his one hope lay in his success in provoking Hawley to hit wildly and thereby to lay open himself for a "knock-out blow" that Jack felt he still had in his right bunch of fives.

"What the hell's that got to do with you ?" Hawley shouted.

He made an angry and a determined attempt at an upper-cut with his right, but Jack fended the blow. The two men broke from the clinch. As they did so Hawley swung his left heavily on to the side of Jack's head. Its force made him stagger and turned him half round. Hawley followed up his advantage by one to the point, but it had not much devil behind it. Jack was dazed beyond hope of recovery. Yet Hawley was not taking any risks. He delivered a smashing hook to the jaw. Jack sank to the ground. For a moment he rested on his right elbow, and resisted the departure of his dazed and fast fleeting senses. To no purpose. The faint gleam that he had of consciousness was suddenly snuffed out and, he fell backwards, bleeding, "dead to the world."

Hawley stood over the prostrate figure. He felt sorry for Jack. Sorry too, that he had given him the last hook which was cruel and unnecessary. He felt he had been cowardly towards a beaten man.

"He's a game 'un, anyhow," he thought. "By George, he very nearly did me in. He died hard, as hard as he hits. I can scarcely believe that he's a murderer. He's too fair a fighter to do anything foul."

In the hut "Peter" was clinging to the highest shelf. His tail was standing out like a bottle brush. The cat had gone through an eventful time while the fight was in progress. "Tim," by

his wild, infuriated rushes about the hut, by his maddening jumps on and off the table, had put the cat into such a panic of fear that puss's eyes blazed and shone as red-hot disks. "Tim" himself was not answerable for his acts, so demented was he to get out of the hut to go to his master's assistance.

When Jack came round, which he did very slowly, he had a vacant look in his eyes. When he sat up he made an effort, hitting out wildly as if he would continue the fight.

Hawley, kneeling beside him, said, "Be quiet, Danvers. It's all right !"

Gradually Jack's head cleared.

"You knocked me out ?" he said.

"Yes," answered Hawley. "I had the luck."

"You did," said Jack ruefully.

"I had the advantage !" admitted Hawley.

"How ?" asked Jack.

"I rattled you with the blow I gave you in the hut. It was cowardly, but I lost my temper—it's a beastly one—when you tried to grab the scarab."

"Say no more about it," said Jack, offering Hawley his hand.

"You're a man, Danvers," observed Hawley, as he clasped the outstretched hand.

"I'll say as much of you," replied Jack. "What about the scarab ?"

"You can keep it," said Hawley.

CHAPTER XII

“THE AUSTRALIAN WAY”

DANVERS went into his hut and calmed the fret of “Tim” with a “good dog.” He picked up the scarab, placing it in his hip pocket. He took a tin dish, towel and soap from a gin case, and went outside with them to the tank.

“There you are, Hawley,” he said, “you can have a clean up. I’ll have one after you.”

The men gave their faces a good sluicing. They then went into the hut.

Jack kicked a half-burnt smouldering log in the fire-place. He slung a couple of handfuls of dry gum leaves on the embers. Aromatic odours of the burning leaves filled the slabbed room. The bluest of gum-wood smoke drifted up the tawny, baggy chimney of bark, patched as the trousers of a Dutchman.

Jack put a big billy, well blackened with the smoke of many camp fires, on to the red-hot ashes. Soon water was boiling for tea. The billy served as a tea-kettle and a teapot. A piece of sassafras bark was tossed into the billy. The bushmen of Ironbark declared that the bark was good for rheumatism, and that in tea sassafras bark suggested the flavour of the finest congou. When the tea was made they sweetened it with brown sugar,

and each drank a pannikin full. After that any trace of ill-feeling between the men was gone.

Hawley, in a measure, took his cue from Jack, who was acting up to the best traditions of public-school life. "Give, or take a hiding. Avoid a swollen head, if you cannot dodge a swollen face. If your luck's dead out and you are licked, then congratulate the other fellow on his victory and ask him to give you 'another go' at a convenient season."

Something like that too is the Australian spirit in its best manifestation. The Australian will fight and fight. Once through with the mill, he's done with the business. He's more often than not eager to ask his adversary (if he has "played the game") to go to the nearest pub so that he may "shout him a drink." The nature of the Australian is not to entertain malice, nor to be downhearted. Specially is that true of the bushman. The ozone enveloping the gums in the forests fills a man's being with the verve and spring of life. In the presence of the physical glow, born of the bush, a sense of depression soon disappears as the mists of the hills melt when the morning sunshine floods their peaks.

"I have treated you fairly over the scarab, may I ask where you got it?" said Hawley.

"It was given to me as a keepsake by Debenham's sister," replied Jack.

"If you had told me that at first it would have saved us this break up."

“ I would not have missed the scrap,” said Jack.

“ You’re a glutton ! ” observed Hawley.

“ I don’t think so,” Danvers said. “ When a man’s blood is hot with fight, he’s not so much concerned about what he’s getting himself as in trying to make a punching ball of the other fellow. You know that yarn about the other fellow ? ”

“ No ? ” said Hawley interrogatively.

“ Brown met Smith with a ‘ lovely pair of black eyes.’ ‘ Hallo ! ’ said Brown, ‘ you look as if you had been getting it hot.’ Smith replied, ‘ that’s all right, you should just see the other fellow ! ’ ”

The trooper laughed uneasily.

The near application of this yarn, Hawley felt, was his being the “ other fellow,” and in this case he considered the “ other fellow ” had not anything to brag about. He had learnt that day what power lay in the hard fists of an axeman, like Danvers, to “ bark ” a man’s face.

In some ways Hawley was a “ bit green, and sappy ” for he had not schooled himself to suffer and to endure, whereas Jack, in strong contrast, was a laughing stoic, the embodiment of the Australian who takes “ hard lieks ” with a “ cheery O ”—for such is the way of the sun-browned race.

“ I thought,” said Hawley, “ that you had taken the scarab from the late Captain Debenham’s old sea-chest.”

“ No, I did not,” replied Jack, “ though I

know the chest well, on the back verandah, close to the big lilac tree."

"You see, you would tell me nothing," said Hawley, by way of mild expostulation, as well as explanation, to the man towards whom he now entertained the friendliest of feelings.

"That's so," admitted Jack. "It's like this. I'm not going to be bounced by any man. When you came with a search warrant, held out to me like a pistol to my head, well, naturally I couldn't stand it. You can lead Australians, but you cannot drive them. Submission is not in their blood. We're as free, free as——" he paused for a simile to suit the expansiveness of his thought—"yes," said he, pointing through the open door, "as that eagle flying yonder over the ranges."

"I know that is so," said Hawley. "Though I was born in Devon, I have spent a few years of my life in Australia."

"I guessed you were English," replied Jack.

"How?" asked Hawley curiously.

"Your seat in the saddle is not that of an Australian. It's too damned tight for we loose-limbed bushmen who are not particular whether there's daylight or not between us and the pig-skin when we are going 'hell for leather' after cattle. You made the remark that 'you'd tie up your horse'—an Australian 'hangs' his horse to a fence."

Hawley smiled. These bushmen were keen to

detect any traits in the stranger that betrayed him as not to the manner born.

"I hadn't thought of that," said Hawley. "You bushfolk see differently from people in towns. I have felt that since I came to the hills."

"We have longer sights than city men," explained Jack. "We peep at the world from the hill-tops. We look upwards at timber trees, and in doing so we see heaven more often than the man whose eyes are glued to the paving stones of the city in the streets, covered by corrugated-iron verandahs that blot out the sky."

"Human nature, however, is the same wherever it is," said Hawley.

"That's so!" replied Jack.

"See how you fought for the scarab," observed Hawley.

"That's sentiment," replied Jack.

"A pretty willing mill for a bit of sentiment," the trooper said with a semi-gruesome air.

The two men laughed.

"Our eyes will look like blackberries in the morning," said Jack.

"Damned awkward!" replied Hawley. "I've got to see Sergeant Trapp."

"I'm in a worse fix. I am going to see Miss Debenham," said Jack.

"Did her brother know that she gave you the scarab?" asked Hawley.

"No," answered Jack. "I believe that Ted Debenham claims the scarab, but his mother says

her late husband intended the charm for his daughter. Ted wanted the scarab some time ago. He looked for it and failing to find it he thought the scarab was stolen from the sea-chest, but Miss Debenham told me it had not been there for ever so long."

With the information Hawley had he was aware that Danvers was speaking the truth. The more he knew of Jack the less he liked the task he was engaged upon.

"The best thing," Jack continued, "you can do is to camp here to-night. There's no points in going down to the township until to-morrow."

"Thanks," replied the trooper, "but I intend to camp in Boder's empty hut when I shall make a thorough search of the German's belongings. That will not prevent my coming to you to-night, seeing the hut's only across your paddocks."

"As you like," replied Jack. "What are you going to say to-morrow to Sergeant Trapp as to the result of your search of my hut?"

"I'm going to report that I've not discovered anything. I will account for my face by saying my horse stumbled and threw me on to a fallen bough."

"Not a bad stall," said Jack. "In that respect I think you will get off better than I shall. Miss Debenham will imagine queer things—she's a young lady with imagination."

"She's always nice to me," said Hawley. "I'm told she's a splendid nurse. She attended

to one of my sisters in a private hospital in East Melbourne. My sister cannot say enough of her. What she liked about her was that she had none of the foolery that some nurses go on with.”

“ There’s no foolery about Miss Debenham,” said Jack. “ She’s dead serious. She means what she says, though she does not, like a good many young women, always know what she wants.”

The men laughed. Men usually do when they indulge in a good-natured harmless gibe at woman-kind.

“ When I saw her mother, she told me what she could about the Muller case. I am sorry, but I think I upset her a bit,” said Hawley.

“ That’s very likely, she’s a nervous little body,” answered Jack. “ I do not suppose she could tell you much ? ”

“ No, not a great deal. She identified the revolver you handed to me on the night I brought Boder here as Captain Debenham’s revolver.”

The trooper felt his remark would go home. What would Jack say ?

“ Did she ? ” said Jack without emotion. “ Even so, it has not been suggested by anybody, that I know of, that the revolver had anything to do with the death of Muller.”

“ I know that,” replied Hawley ; “ what I can’t get over is Ted Debenham stating to me that it’s your revolver, and that your initial ‘ D ’ is on the butt.”

“ There’s more things in heaven and earth,

Hawley, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. Debenham is coming here to-night, and you can have it out then. I have made to him a proposal that he is inclined to turn dog on."

"What is that?" asked Hawley.

"I know you know about Gretchen Muller?"

Hawley nodded his head.

"Well," continued Jack, "he's got to marry the girl."

"He has?" said the trooper in astonishment.

"He has?" he repeated. "I thought you——"

"It's a base lie, Hawley. Muller believed so, but he was a drunken fool, too mad to discern that he was saddling the wrong man. All the harm Muller has done in blathering about me I do not yet know."

"How did Muller get you into his head?" asked the trooper.

"Because he found me with Gretchen, alone, in the bush near Sawpit Point."

"Then Muller had some reason for his suspicions?"

"Yes," replied Jack, "but only so far as surface appearances. I went to meet his daughter because of a message her brother Gustave gave me."

"What had she to say?"

"She told me the sad old story—a story as old as the hills—of man's way with a maid. She knew I was a friend of Debenham's," explained Jack.

"That's why she sent for you?"

“Yes,” said Jack, “she wanted me to persuade Ted to do right by her. I promised I would try to sting him into playing a man’s part. Her father came upon us. She ran like a guilty surprised creature down the track. I faced Muller, who abused me and swore roundly. In the end he struck me. I smacked him sharply across the face with my open hands, and he took to his heels.”

Jack laughed heartily at the remembrance of the encounter.

“That,” said he, “was the foundation of Muller’s statements, and of his hate towards me.”

“When I saw Mrs. Muller, she denied that you were responsible for her daughter’s condition, but she refused to tell me where her daughter was,” remarked Hawley.

“Why should she?” asked Jack. “The girl was in enough trouble without you police poking in your oars; besides, Gretchen could not have assisted you even if she were agreeable to do so.”

“Mrs. Muller struck me as being almost callous regarding her husband’s death?”

“Would it be any wonder if she were, seeing the way he treated her?” said Jack. “Gretchen and Gustave had little love for him. His harsh bullying German ways had turned them against him.”

“Yet in his own way Muller loved his children?” said Hawley.

“I suppose so,” replied Jack, “but he managed

most successfully to dissemble it. You would have a hard time in trying to persuade the people of Ironbark into believing it."

"Do you know where Gretchen is?" asked the trooper.

"Yes," replied Jack. "She's being well looked after."

"But where?" said Hawley.

"I am not going to say, because it does not really concern you."

"Do you know," asked Hawley, "that my inquiries have been blocked in every direction? The feeling against Germans is most bitter, and no one who I think could give me information will do so. It makes you ask yourself if the job you are on is one to write home about."

"I don't think it is," replied Jack. "People have no time for Germans after their kultur demonstration in Belgium and elsewhere. If I had your job I'd quit it."

"I am thinking that way," replied Hawley thoughtfully. "I would like to know if Debenham is the man? You cannot believe how glad I am that you are not."

Jack waved the last remark aside by ignoring it.

"Ted Debenham is the future husband of Gretchen Muller," said Jack decisively.

"Does his mother and sister know?" the trooper inquired.

"Good God! No!" said Jack. "That's the

one thing that must be kept from them, though I suppose that can only be done for a time. Can't you see that Mrs. Debenham's pride would not let her stay in Ironbark, after such a scandal? As to her daughter—well, I don't know what she'd do. You can guess I'm interested in her. Then there's Gretchen, who is suffering silently. Now if Debenham marries the girl the scandal has its fangs drawn, and the atmosphere is cleared. After that Mrs. Debenham will just have to 'stick it.' She could do so in that case since her son would have done the square thing by the girl, even though somewhat tardily, in marrying her.”

“But you can't force him to marry Gretchen?” said Hawley, puzzled.

“I hope I can,” replied Jack confidently. “I think you can help me to overcome him. I can do a bit of bluff with you here. It's important to me also since it's a case now of clearing myself. If Debenham marries Gretchen the running rumours about me are scotched.”

“I will help you if I can,” said Hawley.

“There's one stipulation I must make,” said Jack, “and that is what takes place in my hut to-night, is oyster.”

“You can trust me,” said the trooper.

“I believe so, but I want you to pass your word.”

“I do so.”

“Thanks!” said Jack. “What you will hear may to some extent clear up things that are at

present mud to you. At the same time you will not learn everything."

"I am agreeable to that," replied Hawley. "I was keen enough at first to clear up this affair, but I have gone off it. Muller was a drunken cruel German. His family is well quit of him whatever way he met his death."

"I don't say that," said Jack.

"I do, when I've got to hound a man like you. I know now that you are not the one to save yourself by lying."

"Thank you," replied Jack. "It's good of you to say so, but don't think I'm a plaster saint. I'm a long sight from that. I'm pretty contemptible. I played a low-down game; a game no man worth his salt would play!"

"How?" asked Hawley in surprise.

"Well, I knew Boder was innocent of the death of Franz Muller—never mind how I knew—and I let you arrest him. I even returned to my vomit. I wrote Boder's confession of a murder, and remained silent when it looked a guinea to a gooseberry that he would be hanged—he, an innocent man! If that was not an exhibition of criminal cowardice on my part, words have no meaning. Think of the mental agonies Boder must have suffered! Do you wonder that I feel mean and that kicking is too good for me?"

"But you would not have let Boder be hanged?" said the trooper.

In earnest tones Jack said, "I did not intend

to go as far as that. Let him be hanged? A thousand times ‘No!’ Before that could take place I would have surrendered everything.”

“I interviewed Boder,” said the trooper, “and asked him if he recognised the revolver you gave to me as the one belonging to you? He said at once that he did, and added, ‘that if he had not, he would not have put you away as you were the one man who had not turned upon him when the war was declared.’”

“I feel, if possible, meaner than ever,” said Jack.

“I know now,” continued Hawley, “that he was telling me a lie, yet he meant well by you. How did Muller come by his death?”

“By his own act,” declared Jack.

“Do you mean he committed suicide?”

“I have told you all I shall tell you,” replied Jack.

“I am curious to know where the revolver is,” said the trooper.

“Yes, I suppose so. You think it is the key to the mystery?”

“It is!” said Hawley. “I’ll tell you now, since I’m going to chuck this job, that the Crown Law authorities have been advised by counsel that unless the missing revolver is found, a prosecution for Muller’s murder must fail.”

“If it is ever launched,” said Jack emphatically. “I think it will fail.”

The same night the men sat in the hut expecting

that Ted Debenham would come in at any moment. A tacit understanding seemed to have taken place between them not to refer any more to the strange events that had brought them together. Three or four opossums were racing about the roof of the hut, evidently having a row, if their sharp guttural chatterings meant anything. "Tim" was pushing his cold nose into Jack's hands to coax him to open the back door to let him out to race round the hut to bark at the 'possums.

"What a lot of 'possums there are about here," said Hawley. "I wonder you don't go mooning, you'd soon bag a rug."

"I've no heart," said Jack, "for that sort of cold-blooded slaughter. When I was a kid, on one occasion I spent my Christmas holidays on a selection off McDonald's track, in the Strezlecki ranges. I saw for the first time a native bear on the bough of a black butt. You know, Hawley, the grave look bears have, and how whimsical they are, with their big hairy ears! That she was one of the mildest and most inoffensive of all God's creatures did not save her. I fired at her with a charge of swan shot from an old muzzle-loading gun. Poor little beggar! I saw her winee. Her cry of pain was almost human. She clutched the bough with a convulsive grip, firmly embedding her sharp and long claws in the bough. My heart bled for her. I shot her again to put her out of pain. She still hung on to the bough grunting pitifully. I could stomach it no more

and left her hanging to the bough. . . . I returned about an hour later and found her dead on the ground with a baby bear, jerked out of her pouch, beside her. I felt as mean a boy that morning as I do to-day a man, when I think of the part I played at Boder's trial. I swore beneath the black butt that I would never shoot a native bear again, nor indeed any harmless creature. The world's big enough for them and for me.”

“I think I can understand your feelings,” said Hawley.

The trooper was getting some sidelights on Jack's character that were making ducks and drakes of his preconceived notions of him before the fight.

“Tim,” who had lain down on the hearth at his master's bidding, jumped up with a growl, his ears were cocked, and he stood listening, alert in every limb.

“Here's Debenham coming !” remarked Jack.

“Shall I ‘do a duck’ over to Boder's ?” asked Hawley.

“Yes, do,” replied Jack, “it will leave the track clear for me to find out what he intends to do. But you will come back ?”

The trooper nodded his assent as he went silently and swiftly out of the hut unseen by Ted, whom Jack met at the door.

“Hullo !” Ted exclaimed in surprise, when he saw Danvers' swollen face by the lamplight. “You've had a serap with him ?”

"Yes," Jack admitted with a humorous smile, "we had a bit of a go—it was a fair dinkum—hot and keen as mustard—the best man won."

"You gave him a hiding?"

"Nothing to brag about. The honours were divided. Hawley knew he was fighting, but he knocked me out."

"Knocked you out?" shouted Ted with incredulous vexation. "Do you mean to tell me the dog outed you?"

"Hawley's no dog and you're no sport to call him one."

"Yes he is—he's a regular mongrel."

"He's nothing of the sort; even if he were, what's the odds? Australians are of a mongrel breed, but what splendid mongrels they are!"

"That's begging the question," said Debenham. "I'm not talking of Hawley's breeding, but of his mongrel mind."

"I don't think," observed Jack in a tone of regret and of mild reproach, "that you try, as much as you might try, Ted, to play the game."

"Bah!" snarled Ted. "This 'play the game' gag of yours is pure claptrap; public-school guff. I'd have outed the —— somehow. Playing the game as you play it is no good to me."

"I'm sorry to hear you say so. But negative philosophy and self-denial never had a place in your scheme of living," Jack said with cutting emphasis.

"Will you tell me in what respect?" Ted

inquired with a provoking sneer. “I have not been to a public school.”

“If you had, Ted, you would not have so much swank about you. Your rule of life is to squeal, and to squeal loudly, when you are hurt, and to make yourself a confounded nuisance till your mother or someone else goes along and stops your cries by jabbing a bread and sugar comforter in your mouth.”

Jack laughed at the image he had conjured. He knew, of course, that Ted was his “mother’s boy,” and that she, simple little soul, still believed she could guide her man son as she had led him, an innocent child, by her apron strings. She deluded herself with the thought that she was still the haven to which he turned for peace in hours of stress. It never entered her mind that she was merely a port of call. Jack admired Mrs. Debenham for her staunch motherhood, heart-full and without reason, that would have scorned any suggestion that her son was unworthy. But that did not prevent him enjoying his sly thrust at the apron strings, the more so because Debenham snorted under it.

“You think you are funny,” said Ted, nettled. “Will you tell me why I should not squeal if I am hurt?” he asked in mocking tones.

“By putting that question you show the gulf that is fixed between the man who plays the game and the man who does not.”

"How?" asked Debenham with an interest that rose above his late resentment.

"Playing the game," Jack explained, "is a strong negative philosophy of 'Don'ts,' and if you, at the beginning had known the virtue that lies in a 'don't,' we wouldn't be staving off an arrest for murder."

"Do you still think we may be arrested?" Ted tremulously inquired.

"They are searching for the man who killed Muller, and whom in the end I think—indeed I am sure—they will find."

Jack said the words slowly and in a low impressive whisper. He had made up his mind, as he said to himself, to "put the fear of God" into Debenham before he was through with him.

"But you are in it as much as I am," flashed Ted, "and don't you forget it. I know the thing's going to be a close shave—it grips me with a fair panic sometimes—but I get over it."

"If you can head a bullock you can mostly turn him," observed Jack more encouragingly. "Hawley's the man we've got to head."

"I like your chance," sneered Ted. "I wouldn't trust a 'trap' as far as I could fling him. I know Mr. Hawley."

"I don't think you do," Jack said quietly, and then he added determinedly, "I've paid the piper in the past, now I'm going to call the tune."

"You are not going to give the show away?"

“As sure as God made little apples I am, if I do not have my way.”

“You are not such a miserable skunk! You—you could not turn King’s evidence? It isn’t in you!”

“You’ll see what I can do!”

“I know better than that.” Ted gave a little laugh that had no merriment in its tone. “You would think of my mother, of Marion, for cert—you might even think of me.”

Jack became angry. He cried out:

“It’s been you, you, you, the whole time, Ted Debenham. You have only thought of yourself: others could go hang. The time has come when I’ll make you think of others.”

“You needn’t talk like that, Jack. You are going a bit fast, aren’t you, in threatening me. You’ve a cheek to interfere in my love affairs, anyhow.”

“You call it love, do you, love?” Jack laughed derisively. “Love? Does love ruin a maid and leave her stranded. The dog that has glutted his lust which he has lyingly called ‘love’ always deserts the woman in the end. Are you going to be that dog?”

“How dramatic we are!” sneered Ted.

“You are up against it, and you’ll look as cheap as your sneers,” said Jack, “if you don’t climb down and face the music. You have a short memory!”

“I forget, when I can, unpleasant things,”

replied Ted. "I hate the fools who will persist in living in graveyards."

"But you have not buried the past," asserted Jack vehemently, "you are still in the graveyard with the dead man Muller, and his spirit still cries aloud the wrong done to his daughter, and thou art the man !"

"What if I am ?" asked Debenham defiantly.

Ted was very uneven in his temperament. Some days the Muller trouble, father and daughter, covered him as with a heavy pall. He could see in his frolic of lust nothing but his ultimate utter damnation. At other times he brushed the affair away as lightly as thistledown floats on a hot wind. On those days he quite forgot that he might yet have to stand his trial for the murder of the German, and that Jack Danvers was the buffer that stood between him and the Debenham family's shame. Ted's spirits were too mercurial to take things seriously for any space of time. When Muller's death was from his mind, his texture was that of the Australian who makes the best of everything. If the story of Muller's death had to come out, let it be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So he argued in the sunlight, when the buzz of the saw-mills sounded. "Sharp misery could not then wear him to the bones." When the sun shone, when the sunlight danced in the leaves of the topmost limbs of the gums where the bell birds called to each other, and thousands of white

cockatoos screeched, the bush to Ted was normal; but when darkness came, the hounds of his conscience gnawed. He hated to hear the dry metallic rattle of the long strands of bark that hung from the trees as they were blown to and fro in the night wind looking like tanned ropes, ropes that might have hung from so many gallows trees—waiting . . .

His superstitious Irish imagination, inherited from his mother, made him smart as nothing else could. In fancy he heard, still ringing in his ears, the monotonous drone of Jack Danvers, as solemn as the dirge of a miserere chant, sung at night in the muffled lights of some great cathedral, “ Barnes was hung ! ”

Debenham told the truth when he groaned that night in mental pain, “ Why will you drag in that awful case ? Have you any idea of the state of my nerves ? ”

The past scene was vivified to him a thousand-fold this night as he sat in the same hut, and watched the fire flickering much in the same way as it leapt fitfully on the eventful occasion when Danvers, like some implacable personification of Fate, kept repeating, “ Barnes was hung ! ” The same relentless tones were in Jack’s voice to-night. Ted shuddered at them in the way Marion had shuddered, when she heard the boo-book owl calling “ mopoke ! mopoke ! ” on the evening when she and Jack had parted. Ted felt that his defiant “ What if I am ? ” in reply to Jack’s indictment, “ Thou art the man ! ” did

not amount to much. He knew he was "against it," that his bluff was going for naught.

"A defiant attitude will not help you, Debenham. You will end by bringing us all down. You cannot have forgotten the scene in this hut on the night when Hawley brought Boder here. Though time had passed, you knew that the stain of Muller's death was as fresh on our souls as the newly spilt blood lay, on the night of Muller's death, dabbled amongst the fern leaves on the hilltop. You must remember how we groaned under a burden akin to Cain's ; how awful was the thought of discovery ! Much water has passed under Sawpoint bridge since then, but it has not washed away the track you have to travel since you blazed the way yourself. You have tried to hold up your end, and I have tried to do the same with mine, but you know the thing's getting us down."

"I know that," groaned Ted, "but I'm not going to cry small before Hawley."

"It's not Hawley I'm troubling about, the question is, 'Will you marry Gretchen' ?"

"I have nothing against the girl, but I'm not going to tie myself up by marriage—that is not my game at present. . . ."

Before Ted could say any more the door of the hut was pushed open. Hawley entered.

The clouds gathered on Debenham's face. He felt he was trapped. The two men had been fighting, yet they were apparently working in agreement. The situation to Ted was puzzling.

He bucked himself up. Whether Jack had played him false or not, he was an Australian. He was not going to show the white feather.

The trooper nodded to Ted, who did not return the greeting.

“There’s no need,” said Jack, “to beat about the bush. I just want to tell you, Ted, that Mr. Hawley and I came to an understanding this afternoon.”

Ted laughed a bitter, hard laugh.

“Judging by your battered dials I should say you had,” he said with a sarcastic sneer.

“Hawley was under the impression that Muller was murdered,” said Jack, going on with his statement.

“Damn Hawley and his impressions,” shouted Debenham in an angry tone.

The trooper rose from his seat. Jack and Ted did likewise. The situation was tense.

“Look here, Debenham,” said Hawley, with ill-concealed rage, “I’m here at Mr. Danvers’ invitation. If you throw off at me I’ll arrest you in connection with the death of Muller. I should be quite justified in doing so in view of the lies you have told me about your father’s revolver. I’ve stood all the insults that I shall stand from you to-day.”

“You see,” said Jack in a voice with tones as soft as those he would have used to a child, “it’s no good to be insulting. Let us sit down once more. There’s nothing tragic in sitting down.”

"Hell !" exclaimed Ted as they again took their seats.

"Hell be it, if you please, but let us get out of it as soon as possible," replied Jack with a smile.

He looked at Debenham and asked him if he could see the drift of things.

"No !" replied Ted indignantly. "What," he demanded in loud tones, "have you told this man ?"

He waved his hand contemptuously towards Hawley.

"Very little beyond what he already knows. I have not betrayed you, but I'm going to have my say now. Do you think I'm going to skulk through Ironbark, and skulk off to the war with the dogs barking that I betrayed the German's daughter ? Since it has come to the pass that I have to defend myself, I'll see you hanged first."

While talking Jack had risen from his seat. He stood facing Debenham. Ted went to rise. Jack put his right hand heavily on his shoulder. The trooper placed his pair of handcuffs on the table. Ted, at the sight of them, was not reassured.

A silence ensued.

"Well, your answer ?" said Jack.

"Yes !" snapped Debenham, as if the word was choking him.

"When we arrive in Melbourne you'll marry Gretchen Muller ?"

"Yes," replied Debenham.

“Then there’s no more to be said,” remarked Jack.

Ted rose from his seat, and left the hut without saying any more.

* * * * *

“I’m surprised that he took your proposal as quietly as he did,” remarked Hawley.

“Ted knows on which side his bread is buttered,” replied Jack.

“But he was almost lamblike—that is, as lamblike as a blustering fellow like him can be.”

“Ted is only a fool,” said Jack, “so far as he thinks he can override convention, outrage moral laws—in short, that he can be a law unto himself—a mistake many men make.”

“Does he dislike the girl?” asked Hawley.

“No! No man with a pair of eyes in his head could dislike Gretchen. After five minutes’ talk with her you’ll think of her for hours afterwards. Half the Ironbark fellows wanted to marry her. It was her bad luck to pick the rake of the bunch. She ought to have known, too, that Ted had a good many strings to his bow, and that he was not of the marrying sort.

“Good girls often cotton to the rotters,” Hawley assented with the wisdom of a man of the world.

“Ted would take Gretchen to-morrow on his own terms . . . until he grew tired of her. He never intended to pay her the price of her surrender—marriage—if he could help it. That’s the situation in a nutshell!”

“ But he’s promised to do so now ? ”

“ Ted knows what he is doing. I think he loves her in his free fashion as much as he loves anybody, but he also knows that she is interested in her late father’s property. Let me tell you, under the rose, that legacy has sugared the pill Ted pretends to make such a damn fuss about taking. It’s really the compulsion he does not like.”

“ I suppose so. Few of us have enough horse sense to refrain from dodging what is for our own good, if it’s put to us by compulsion. We pride ourselves that we are too high-spirited to knuckle down to anybody, but the fight’s an unequal one, we end by knuckling down to somebody. I, for instance, have no intention of knuckling down to Sergeant Trapp, and I shall kick against the pricks if he goes rusty over the Muller business. I’m going to hand in my resignation, anyway. I think it’s up to me in these times to do my bit, and I’m going to do it,” said Hawley.

“ Do you mean you will enlist ? I know you are a fighter.” Jack felt a glow of admiration towards his late antagonist.

“ Well,” said Hawley, “ there would be more sense in pounding the enemy than in belting each other, eh ? ”

“ Rather,” replied Jack.

“ What do you say to us enlisting at the same time ? ”

“ Certainly,” said Jack, “ if we are not blocked.”

“ I think that will be all right,” observed the trooper. “ I don’t really think the authorities are keen on this Muller business. You see, they have left it almost in my hands, and I think on my report the inquiry will peter out. Will you tell me the strength of Muller’s death ? ”

“ I will,” replied Jack.

“ When ? ” asked Hawley eagerly, noticing that Jack was not saying more just then.

Jack deliberately lit his pipe, and thought for a while before he replied.

“ Yes, Hawley, I will, when we are in the firing line.”

And in the silence which followed Jack’s promise, the two men were conscious that the wind in the tree tops was moaning a long, long monotone.

CHAPTER XIII

MARION DEBENHAM'S LOVE TROUBLES

“Is Jack Danvers a delusive lie?” was the question Marion Debenham asked herself when she first heard of the rumours concerning him from some friends from Ironbark whom she had met in Melbourne. To her there seemed to be only one thing to do, and that was to return to the hills without delay, and probe the whole sordid affair to the bitter depths. She simply could not live in the agony of doubt that assailed her. Far better, a thousand times so, that she should know the worst. If Danvers was a delusive lie, if a man so fair of face as he was could be so foul at heart, then the sooner she learnt the extent of his ignominy the quicker would her agony cease.

Marion was no coward. Suffer she would do, she knew, but fooled she would not be. She loved Danvers passionately, but her love was insistent, demanding measure for measure. The thought of any love-note ringing false was anathema to her. Why had he not spoken of the rumours concerning Gretchen Muller and himself in his letters? If he could give the rumours the lie, why had he not done so? It was impossible that he could be deaf to them?

Had not her mother in the past warned her

that Danvers might ride beyond the post office to see Gretchen if she was not more amiable ? Those thoughts came home, stinging Marion in such a way as to jangle her whole being. Her poignant feelings leapt reason's barriers of caution. Her jealousy fed her thoughts, which consumed her in fires of doubt and awful heart-burnings. She was a demented creature, for she could only arrive at one conclusion, and that was that the man she loved beyond everything on earth had swept away her hopes ; he had shattered her ideals, and in doing so he had left her heart desolate indeed. Her thoughts turned instinctively towards her mother. Her mother ! She was the one being on earth who could, and would, comfort her ; the one soul who could pour balm on her passionate pain. Her mother ! She would take her in protecting arms with a mothering love, pure and unstinted, while she sobbed out her troubles.

Nor were Marion's hopes in vain, for a mother's love is the most divine thing on earth, the preciousness of which, alas ! many only realise when it is too late !

There was a sad time when Marion arrived home. Tears, sobs, and heart-breaks, sympathy and love were mingled, mother and daughter both breaking down. Marion, completely worn out by her emotions, fell asleep, her mother sitting by her bed as she was wont to do when Marion was a child.

With the grey morning lights the steel entered

Marion's heart. Her being rebelled at what she considered the hollow mockery of life, its lying and its deceit. She was sick of everything. The mental restlessness that she used to feel in the old days at the post office was once more with her. Why had she troubled to come to Ironbark ? What did it signify that Jack Danvers had played her false ? Such a man was not worth a second thought ! Yet, since she had come, she would see him, before she returned to town, after which she devoutly wished she would never again set eyes on him or Ironbark. The whole place seemed changed to her eyes. The charm of the country had fled. The long valley road to the hills was a hideous way, a way of sorrows ! Country life, forsooth, with its flies, its inconveniences, who that could avoid them would suffer such things ? And instead of finding beauty in the forests, and men whose words could be relied upon, the forests to her eyes were ugly in the extreme, and the men, she thought, were as false as the ocean that had left her fatherless.

Even the post office parlour that once to her had all the sacredness that is contained in the world "home," met with a sweeping condemnation from her eyes. She was impatient of the whims, the old time-knitted antimacassars, the wool mats on the table, the faded red hearth-rug ! The steel irons in the grate were rusty—did her mother have so much to do that she let the home get into such a state ? Was it that one pair of

hands could not cope with the work of that small dwelling?

The dust-grimed portrait of her father's looked down upon her from the walls, the picture hanging askew, as Captain Debenham's life had gone amiss! So too had hers, she thought, with bitterness. Tossed anyhow in the corner, as sea waves cast flotsam on the seashore, in a litter of untidiness, was her music, dog-eared and torn. A cracked glass shade over some wax fruit jarred on her nerves. The whole place with its worn horse-hair suite was out of tune, out of date; the yellow and worn keys of the piano suggested that the soul of melody was dead in the home of the Debenham's, as indeed it was.

Over the piano was a remarkable engraving. Cupid was shown pressing valiantly against Death, who was forcing his way through a half-closed doorway. The picture was called "Love defeats Death." It annoyed her. It was a palpable lie. The things she loathed most on earth, at that moment, were lies; Jack Danvers was a living lie. But even as she thought so she knew that she could not stamp out her love for him, but she swore that he would never know it.

"Love!" she laughed a little hysterically, and asked herself, "What is the world without love, and what is love but a dream?" There was no such thing as love! It was nothing but selfish animal attraction. How hateful everything was!

In turns, she was defiant and despairing, being

swayed by conflicting emotions. In the circumstances, was it any wonder that she paced the room like a caged tigress, impatient one moment for Jack's coming, in the next breath hoping that he would at least show a sense of enough shame to keep away from her.

Jack had sent word that he would be down at ten o'clock. She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece, and saw that it had stopped. She muttered under her breath that the whole cursed universe might stop, so little did she care what happened !

On the mantelpiece, which was adorned by a red plush mantel drape with wattle blossoms, elaborately worked in yellow silk, Marion's work in happier hours, was a seated figure carved in marble of Cleopatra—a statuette that was overdue for a good wash in hot soapsuds. Cleopatra's right arm was outstretched, but in the moving of Mrs. Debenham's household goods the hand had been broken off. An attempt to cement the hand on to the wrist stump had failed, and the cement applied had left a dirty patch. Round the arm in Serpentine folds was an asp with its head outstretched towards the Egyptian queen's bosom. The statuette was representative of that last and historical moment when Cleopatra conjured the asp :

“ With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate
Of life at once untie : poor venomous fool,
Be angry and despatch.”

Would to heaven, Marion thought, that she had

an asp to end her suffering! The statuette appeared to mock her misery, or did it point the way to an escape from it?

How was it that in the very room where she waited for her recreant knave of a lover that the inanimate objects should play upon and further lacerate her feelings? Surely she was one of the most unhappy of women! The most unfortunate in her surroundings! In the midst of her lamentations Jack Danvers entered the parlour unannounced. He had come in the back way, since he did not desire any loiterers in front of the post office to see his blackened, swollen eyes.

Marion gave a gasp of astonishment when she looked at him. With a flash of what she believed was a woman's natural intuition, she thought she saw at once how he had come by his punishment. Before Jack could say a word she asked in a hard voice, as she stepped back a pace or two from him:

"Is that the handiwork of Gustave Muller?"

The question was couched in the tone of a cold sneer.

Jack was dumbfounded. The question implied so much. His face flushed with shame. His blood quickened. Was this woman, who asked him such a question, the woman he loved?

"I will not pretend to misunderstand what your question implies," he said, his voice a little broken, "but I shall say that I thought you would have been the first to defend me from such an

accusation, and the last to believe such a slander of me."

"So I might have been had I been a simple little fool; unfortunately for you, perhaps for both of us, I am not."

Marion laughed uneasily, a forced laugh that was intended to deceive Jack into believing that she did not care, but her laugh failed to make him think anything of the sort.

"It is no good you pretending you don't care," said Jack; "at least let us be honest with each other."

"You talk of being honest," exclaimed Marion. "Have you been honest with me?" she asked with withering scorn.

"Yes," replied Jack, "I have not done anything to forfeit your love."

"Love! Love! Don't mention love to me, Mr. Danvers. I know your sort of love—the love that blights a woman's life! God! I don't think men know what pure love is."

"Are you mad?" asked Jack.

"If I am you made me so—your acts have crazed me! Why did you ever come to me with your lying tongue?"

"I have not lied to you, Marion. I gave you love for love. I asked no more, no less than what I gave. Will you not believe, will you not trust me?"

Marion's pale lips were pressed tightly together. A great fear was in her despairing heart. For a

moment she felt that she could forgive him any wrong he had done her. Then the remark of her mother about Gretchen Muller came to her with a hideous flash. The poison of the thought was not less insidious and fatal to her belief in Jack than the poison in the asp was to Cleopatra's life.

"Did you meet Gretchen Muller secretly in the bush at Sawpit Point?" Marion asked, her eyes blazing.

"If you tell me who told you I did I will answer you," said Jack in gentle tones.

"I have the best of authority—my brother told me—I wrote and asked him. Now answer, did you meet her?"

"Yes, I did," said Jack, "but I can explain why."

"I want no explanation! It is enough—more than enough that you met her as you did. Oh, Jack!" Marion cried in her agony, "why have you deceived me? Why have you done so? How have I deserved such baseness? Have you not told me you loved me? Have you not sworn so a thousand times in the shadows of the lilac tree? Did your professed love live and die as the breath on your lips? Had your love no root in your heart? Have the kisses you have given so freely been the kisses of a Judas? Good God, Jack, I thought you were a man!"

Her whole form was throbbing with the acute misery that a woman feels when she believes that her lover has played her false.

Jack stood listening to Marion's outburst with a bursting heart ; his sad face looking into vacancy. He longed to take her into his arms and tell her that it was all a horrible mistake. He made a movement as if he would do so, but she motioned him back. He took no notice of the rejection, but seized her small white hands that had so often held his big brown ones in the caresses of love. Marion bowed her head down, and he felt her hot tears falling upon them.

" Marion ! " he pleaded.

But Marion was inflexible. Woman she was, and she could not help her tears, her heart might waver, but her determination must stand. A man who had deceived a woman as Jack had deceived her had no right to expect forgiveness. She drew her hands away from his, and said with cruel directness :

" Go, Jack Danvers, to the woman whom you have betrayed ! I pray to God that I may never see your face again, and that I may forget you."

Jack took her in his arms before she could stop him. He held her tightly looking into her face. " You speak, Marion, as you believe," he said. " I do not blame you. Good-bye, my love, good-bye ! I am going, but the time may come when you will think less harshly of the man who loves you."

He kissed her lips. She did not resist. Then he left the room.

Marion flung herself on the sofa in a wild outburst of passionate weeping.

Mrs. Debenham came into the room. As she did so she saw on the table the scarab.

"Never mind, my poor darling," she said, "the worst is over now, you'll soon forget him."

"Forget him, mother, never! I love him more than ever. Oh why, why did he deceive me?"

"He has left the scarab," said Mrs. Debenham.

"Then the end has really come!" Marion exclaimed with a fresh flood of tears. "He has left my love token, and he has taken away his heart! Oh mother!" she cried in sudden pain, and fell swooning into her mother's arms.

CHAPTER XIV

DANVERS SEES THE MULLERS

JACK was sorrowful as he rode away from the post office. It saddened him to think that Marion had made herself utterly miserable by doubting him. He was glad, now that his interview with Marion was over, that he had not told her what he thought of her brother, though he had been sorely tempted to do so, smarting as he did under Debenham's perfidy in telling Marion of his meeting with Gretchen. Obviously Ted had left on her mind the worst possible impression of his secret meeting with Gretchen at Sawpit Point. Jack could come to no other conclusion.

He was conscious of only one weakness of which he had been guilty during the course of the sad and painful interview between himself and the woman he loved. Had Marion asked for the explanation he had said he could make, he was afraid he would have surrendered his silence, and have told her everything. Had he been so weak, he would have fallen in his own eyes as a man who, knowing the rules of the game, had failed to follow them.

On the other hand, he asked himself was he not too quixotic in his outlook on life? Were not

chivalrous men in these venal days as extinct as the bunyip ? Was he as one

. . . " who pursues a shadow,
As one who hunts in a dream,
As the child who crosses the meadow
Enticed by the rainbow's gleam " ?

Were his aspirations but phantoms of idealism, beautiful in the abstract, but almost wholly elusive, coloured chimeras like the rainbow's gleam ?

Ted Debenham had told him that playing the game was " public-school guff." Ted had sneered at honour for honour's sake, and Ted was not ashamed to show him that his soul was a sordid and a materialistic one !

Jack asked himself if the nice sense of honour he tried to make a part of his manhood, was but the outcome of his own self-deception ? Was he a child in the meadow of life following a gleam ?

Was his love for Marion the same as other men's love for other women ? Was he simply attracted towards her by the magnetism of sex ? He had tried to believe that there was something unique in their love, and what had now befallen it ? He had not wooed Marion with the honeyed words of a lover ; it was not his nature to play the mountebank in Cupid's Court. He lived in the stern realities of life, in the everlasting hills, and his nature was permeated with his environment as a man. He was as straight and as strong as one of the giant blackbutts, that never bend to

any gale, nor had he swayed in any wind of adversity. The tree might be blown down, his life might end, but he would fight on for his ideals, even if it was as impossible to attain them as it was to hitch Long Tom's timber-jinker to a star.

Though Marion did not know the extent of his sacrifice, and not knowing, was unable to grasp the effort his silence cost him, he felt that when she learned the truth she would find that his love was worth the having. Even if her nature was such that she failed to realise what he had done for her, it was still up to him to play the part he had marked out for himself. It was not a question whether the Debenham family was worth saving, but the more personal one of whether he should save himself, at the expense of sacrificing the woman he professed to love. Whether the woman he loved was worth the sacrifice he was making for her crossed his mind, but the thought did not linger there, since he regarded the very essence of love as being capable of making any sacrifice. He did not blame Marion for the attitude she took towards him. If she believed, as she honestly did, that he had ruined Gretchen Muller, then Marion had by him an affront put upon her that no honest woman could forget or forgive.

At the same time Jack was disappointed. Marion had not shown the perfect love for him that casteth out fear.

As the world was wagging it was of very little moment whether a love affair ran smoothly or

not. When dynasties were being shaken to their foundations, when the life's blood of millions of men was being spilt like water, what was the significance of the heart-burnings of lovers? These were not the days of the lute and the song, but of the sword and the burst of shell. The Empire's voice was the one call that must be answered. If Marion was not fair to him . . . If she made no move to see him before he went to the war, then he would go without a farewell. He would not explain anything. His plans could be changed only by the refusal of Debenham to marry Gretchen or the Crown Law Authorities detaining him over the Muller case. Pique had no part in his attitude towards Marion, nor had he with a feeling of wounded pride left the scarab behind him. He simply did not want the charm, since the donor "had proved unkind." He was not going forward to the war with the hope that a bullet through his heart would end his difficulties. He was quite prepared to face his difficulties, to stand toe to toe to them and to plug them, one by one, as he had plugged Hawley. If he fell fighting, in what better way could he cut the ravelled skein of life? His dominant hope was not that he should return to Ironbark, that issue lay in the lap of the gods, but that he should acquit himself of his soldiering job as a man. If he was destined to be killed, then it was but the shortening of his span of life, Kismet! What was born must likewise die. Death was inevitable! He did not fear death,

but he was anxious that he might not fail when the supreme test came. That was the only thought in his mind.

“ Death was no ill, but shamefully to die.”

He could face circumstances with courage while he preserved a rational outlook on life, and plenty of work in life was in his belief the only antidote to despair.

Had Mrs. Debenham not been solely occupied with Marion she might have looked through her parlour window up the valley road. If she had done so, she would have seen that Jack was not riding back to the hills, but going the other way in the direction of the homes of Mrs. Muller and Mr. Tippins.

Jack wanted to see Tippins in order to make arrangements to have his holding looked after while he was at the war. He thought that with Nipper's assistance the place would go well enough until he came back. Tippins would be a considerable gainer by having the run of Jack's paddocks for grazing, for it was well known that Jack's paddocks, full of cocksfoot and clover, had fattening qualities equal to any block in the hills.

Jack found Tippins in his cow yard. Nipper was not far away, bailing up a cow that was the most vicious kicker in the dairy herd. “ Kick,” said Nipper, “ she's kicked more buckets of milk over than the sod's worth. She's as fat as butter

and should be sent to the slaughter yard. Wot's the good of a cow as annoys yer, or anything as annoys yer? Sam swears it's 'cos she is a cow that she's contrarie. He says all females are."

"Have you found them so already?" asked Jack.

Nipper looked up, and saw Jack's face.

"Say, Jack, where did yer get it?"

"Never mind, Nipper—it's nothing to a man going to the war."

"Gum, yer takes it like that do yer? How did the other cove take it?"

"Much the same way," replied Jack.

"I should say he got the worst of it," said Tippins, speaking for the first time. "I saw," he continued, "Hawley to-day. Of course, I asked how he came by his black eyes. Seems he hit a stump or something."

"G'wan! Something hit him he means," said Nipper. "I hit him up a bit meself when I kidded him off the £500 reward for the Muller business."

"What's going to come of it?" asked Tippins of Jack.

"The case is a 'shicer' already," replied Jack. "Hawley has given it up. He's a straight man. He is going to chuck his trooper's job and to enlist with me."

"I thought he was that way when I spoke to him this morning. He had just seen Sergeant Trapp and told him that he couldn't make any headway with the Muller case as none of the

settlers knew anything about it. He said he thought Nipper could, but the boy wouldn't tell him a thing."

"Well, he told no lie when he said that," observed Nipper. "I'll screw the damned tail off you if you don't keep quiet, you cow," he remarked to the animal as he tethered her leg.

The cow swished her tail round viciously and hit Nipper on the face in a way that stung him.

"You're a bad-tempered cow anyhow," he said as he seized the tail and tied it up.

"Sam's great on that trick," Nipper remarked. "Sam said he had often tied up a cow's tail, but he had never yet been able to tie up a woman's tongue. Sam knows women all right. You ask Nelly, eh, father?"

"Sam, I understand, is going with you to the war?" observed Tippins to Jack.

"Yes, and Gus Muller."

"I'm going too," said Nipper.

"You are too young," his father said decisively.

"They wouldn't take you, Nipper," said Jack. "Besides, who's to look after Jeanie while you're away?"

"Jeanie's all right," replied Nipper, with one of his winning smiles. "Sam says the young 'uns know as much as the old 'uns. I dunno! Told Mrs. Muller that. She handles a few. I asked her were it true? Said I was born askin' questions and that I was a sight too saucy. Gum, she's funny. But she's all right!"

The men smiled at Nipper, who was always prepared to say that the most of the folk at Ironbark were "all right." It was his boyish, generous nature that made him such a favourite with everybody. Jack and he were specially good pals.

"You see," said Jack, addressing Nipper, "I want your father to let you look after my place while I'm away."

"We'll do that for you with pleasure," replied Tippins. "Martin, I know, would be glad to give you a rental for it. He told me so. There's Sandy Pilkins too. He is keen after that crop of spuds you have in. It is looking fine and healthy, and must turn out well if the frosts don't get it."

"I would rather you took the place over," observed Jack. "I don't want to make anything out of it. You can have the spuds, and the feeding, for your trouble."

"What about 'Tim'?" asked Nipper.

"You know what I think of 'Tim'?" said Jack. Nipper nodded.

"I'm going to leave 'Tim' with you because I know you will look after him."

"That I will," said Nipper.

"There's a small box up at my hut. I want your father to have that to take care of for me until I return. I have nailed it down. I do not want it opened unless you get news that I am killed. If you do, then you can tell Ironbark what you have found in the box."

"Is it the missing revolver?" exclaimed Tippins involuntarily. He would not have asked the question had he thought for a moment. He was not the man to try to probe into the secret contained in the box, which he intended to regard as a sacred trust until Jack's return or news of his death was received.

Jack knew this. He only smiled at Tippins being so startled out of himself as to ask the question.

"I can tell yer it ain't," ejaculated Nipper, with an air of triumph.

Both men looked in surprise at the boy.

"You can?" his father said.

"You're right," observed Jack, "but how do you know?"

"'Cos I do! I know where the revolver is, and no kid."

"Where is it?" Jack almost demanded.

"Yes, where is it?" asked his father sternly.

"It's at the bottom of the big hole, below the Saw Point bridge. There's twenty feet of water over it. Anyhow, I put it through the fire. The butt's gone. I've broken it to pieces with an axe. I guess it won't tell any tales."

"Where did you find it?" asked Jack.

"In the hollow trunk on the top of the hill where Muller was shot. I guessed it was there."

"How did you?"

"'Cos it's just the place a man would chuck a revolver if he didn't want to see the thing agin."

Jack bit his lips. Had Hawley been so shrewd as Nipper, the position would be vastly different.

"I couldn't rest," continued Nipper, "while I thought the revolver was there, lest the cop should strike the same idea. I knew there was a hive of bees in the trunk, so I kidded 'Long Tom' that I'd track a bee with a bit of fluff tied to him to his hive. The blacks used to do that. Course, I made a bee line for the trunk and cut into it, got the honey, and what I was after. Yer see, if Hawley had come at me I'd have told him that 'Long Tom' knew I was after honey."

Jack could not refrain from laughing.

"Perhaps," said Jack, "you know what is in the box?"

"No," replied Nipper, "I'm licked there. I couldn't even guess at that. Could you, father?"

"I'm not going to try," said Tippins. "We'll take the box, Jack," he said. "Whatever secret it possesses will keep until your return, or for such time as I hear of your death."

After leaving the Tippinses, Jack turned his horse's head towards the Mullers' home lying three miles down the track. Half-way there he could hear the Ironbark coach coming along, though it was hidden in a bend of the road. Sam was singing at the top of his voice. His song resounded through the bush :

"Cheer, boys, cheer! Don't you hear the jubilee?
God bless Australia, the land of liberty."

That was Sam. He sang for the joy of life exhilarating and pulsating in the drive through the bush, full of the health-giving draughts of peppermint gum-scented air.

When the coach came into view, Jack saw that the mail-man had no passengers with him. Sam pulled up the coach horses, and greeted Jack with a "chippy" "How goes it?"

Then, at Sam's request, Jack gave him an account of the fight, laying stress on the fact that Hawley had acted the part of a man.

Sam was vastly interested, though he expressed his regret that it was not Hawley who was knocked out. Jack, on the other hand, maintained that his defeat was the best thing that could have happened. Had he outed Hawley, the whole complexion of things would have been changed. He did not think that he and Hawley would have got on the same terms if the trooper had been licked. There was always a danger of offending a man who has been runner-up in a boxing championship if you make him appear "like a lemon," however flattering your own prowess might appear to yourself.

Sam agreed. He was pleased that things had turned out as well as they had done.

"It was funny," remarked Sam, "that yer fought over the bloomin' searab though. I 'spect it's one of those jiggers yer read about, with evil eyes, or poisoned fangs, or somethin' as brings trouble to its owner."

"I don't know about that. The damn thing's brought enough trouble to me. It certainly wasn't worth fighting about."

"Can yer show it to me? I'd like to see the thing," said Sam.

"No," replied Jack. "I've given it back to Miss Debenham."

"Is there anything wrong?" asked Sam.

"No more than she has given me the mitten. You have got to face that sort of thing, Sam. A woman is always at liberty to change her mind."

"Women are—damn me! if I know what they are," exclaimed Sam. "If Nelly had her way she'd blow the whole gaff. She's got no time for Ted Debenham."

"We'll make a man of him yet, Sam. I think that he's got good stuff in him. We may find it is so in the trenches. The war and discipline will knock the swank out of him, and bring home to him that low-down tricks are at the best fools' games. He's going to marry Gretchen Muller as a beginning."

"If that is so, how is it that his sister has changed her mind about you?" asked Sam, puzzled.

"She does not know it. So far as he's concerned it's to be a secret marriage—that is the condition. His mother and sister must not know of it until his return."

"He won't come back," said Sam.

"The bad penny always turns up again," observed Jack.

"And I tell yer another thing I've noticed," Sam said. "The birds always pick at the best fruit. Gosh! I don't know how yer've stood it: the tongue-wagging, I mean, about you and Gretchen."

"Nor do I, when I look back, but that's often the way. We think we can't stand things, but when we have to stand them, we stick them."

"When are you going to town to enlist?" asked Sam.

"Next week! I'm going to Muller's now to see when Gus will be ready to go. We take Debenham with us. You and Hawley can follow as soon as you are able. We'll meet in Melbourne before we enlist, and arrange to get in the same tent."

"Right O!" replied Sam. "I've got to call in and see Nelly, so I suppose there'll be another growl in Ironbark because the mail is late."

Sam shook his horses up and the coach rattled on its way to Ironbark. Sam was not thinking of the mail-bags he carried in the boot, nor of a roan horse he had newly purchased which he called "Carbine," but rather of the young woman who he was certain was waiting at Tippins's slip rail to have a "few words" with him.

Jack cantered his horse along the track until he reached the home of the Mullers, where he found that somewhat portly lady preparing the midday meal.

"Come inside," said she, "I'm glad to see you, Mr. Danvers."

Gustave Muller came from an adjoining room with a stirrup iron, he had been polishing, in his hand.

Gustave was a short, thick-set Australian, without any trace about him of his father. Mrs. Muller said he took after one of his uncles who had a temper as short as his inches. Gustave's temper was as quick as the flash of a parrot's plumage when seen as the bird flies swiftly across a sun-lit track.

"Fighting Gus," some of the boys called him, since he had once offered to fight a football team from Bongolook, one after another, owing to the Ironbark umpire, whose decisions were declared to be biassed, being given a bloody nose by the captain of the Bongolooks. The rivalry between the Ironbark and Bongolook teams was great. The Bongolook team strongly objected to the Ironbarkers being cheered on to victory by a strong Scottish voice, yelling like thunder through a ship's megaphone, an instrument that was believed to have once belonged to the late Captain Debenham.

"Braw lads! Braw Ironbark! Give 'em just hell!"

The voice, much enlarged by the megaphone, was that of Sandy Pilkins, whom Martin declared "always lost his block at the local football match with the Bongolooks, when he had a couple of inches of mountain dew under his kilt,"

Sandy did not wear a kilt at football matches. He only put on a kilt when he went down to Melbourne to attend the Caledonian Sports. Martin was not speaking by the card when he referred to Sandy as wearing a kilt, though Martin was ready to swear he was speaking by the measure as to Sandy's consumption of whisky.

Gustave's head was not as well seasoned to whisky as Sandy's. A couple of stiff nobblers were responsible for the comprehensive challenge he issued on that memorable occasion when the Ironbarkers and the Bongolooks left off playing football, to have a general fight, to decide whether a central umpire with a bloody nose was competent to continue to umpire with equity towards both parties.

Trooper Hawley was present, but he could not prevent the riot. He wanted to arrest Gustave, but Jack told him if he did so it would make the row worse than it was. Hawley took Jack's advice. The row subsided by the Bongolook men getting on their horses, and riding out of Ironbark with what dignity they could muster. Sandy Pilkins caused shrieks of laughter by bellowing through the megaphone, "Will ye na cum back agin?"

Gustave greeted Jack cordially.

"How are you, Jack?" he said. "Had a fight? Who with? Hawley, you say—never!"

"Nothing much anyway!" replied Jack, "I'll tell you about it at another time."

"I don't like Trooper Hawley," exclaimed Mrs. Muller. "I don't think he has been as nice as he might have been in making his inquiries. I have heard, too, he has been saying things against us in the township?"

"I think you are mistaken," Jack said in reply.

Mrs. Muller shook her head.

"The hills have ears! You can't say much in the valley that is not heard on the hill-top. The trooper's been talking."

"Cannot I convince you?" asked Jack.

"I'm afraid not," Mrs. Muller replied. "How was it he did not arrest Ted Debenham? He knows that Ted was the cause of my husband coming by his death. No! The trooper couldn't do that. 'There was no reason,' he said, 'no legal justification.' Yes, that's what he said when I twitted him with being as slow as a blindworm. As if you want reason, or justification, when the course you should take is as plain as the nose on your face!"

"Mother doesn't hold with reason," observed Gustave, "if reason doesn't agree with her views. All the same, I don't think Hawley got much colour for all his 'fossickin'.' What I don't like is that he repeated the reports going about that it was true what my father said that you were responsible for our trouble. Why didn't he go to Mrs. Debenham, and ask her if she did not think it was her son, the apple of her eye, who should have been shot, and not my father? Father had his faults,

God knows ! He was a German, but he was not all bad ! If it had not been for Gretchen's prayers I'd have blown Ted's brains out long ago. What is he going to do ? I'll stand no further humbug from him ! ”

“ We've made up our minds as to that, Mr. Danvers,” said Mrs. Muller.

Jack listened. He felt that the Mullers were right. He was not there, however, to argue; besides, he had long entertained the opinion that it was better to let people blow off their “ hot air ” before attempting to reason with them. Relieved that way they were then more likely to listen to the other side.

“ Of course,” said Jack quietly, “ I can understand and sympathise with your feelings, but I really do think that if we are to get forward we can only do so without heat. There's no good in pressing a falling man too far. He becomes desperate. Debenham is just such a fellow who would take the bit in his teeth, and you'd get no good out of him.”

“ Could you get any good out of him whatever you did ? ” asked Mrs. Muller.

“ Time alone will show,” replied Jack, “ though do not misunderstand me, Mrs. Muller. I hold no brief for him. I have no time for him except on the condition that he marries Gretchen.”

“ But will he ? ” asked Gustave.

“ He has promised me that he will,” replied Jack.

"I am more than glad to hear you say so, Mr. Danvers. You have been a good friend to us all," said Mrs. Muller.

"I have not moved altogether in your interests," Jack confessed frankly. "I was principally considering the many things that hinge on this marriage, all beneficial to the parties concerned, including myself. That I myself have dropped out of the running a bit does not affect the total happiness involved."

"Do you mean Mrs. Debenham, and her daughter?" Mrs. Muller asked.

"Yes, they were in my mind!"

"I see," remarked Mrs. Muller, "I see."

She looked knowingly towards Jack.

Jack smiled, though he felt a tug at his heart-strings. The Spartan boy smiled with the fox eating his entrails!

"I came up to tell you that Ted was going to ask Gretchen to marry him, and also to ask Gustave when he would come down to Melbourne with Ted and me for the marriage, and for the enlistment."

"I can go to-morrow," said Gustave, "but somehow I don't feel like being a pal of Ted's at once. What do you think, Jack? How would you feel?"

"Time will show. I can't say. Whether a comrade in war becomes a pal to hug when the shells are bursting is beyond my knowledge at present, but I think I would take Ted on trial. I think he'll pan out all right."

“ Will you answer me one thing, Mr. Danvers,” said Mrs. Muller with great solemnity.

“ Certainly, if I can.”

“ Do you think that it would be decent for a man who murdered a father to marry his daughter ? ”

“ It would be unthinkable,” Jack declared with conviction.

“ Would you be a party to such a horrible thing ? ”

“ I would not.”

“ Then who killed my husband ? ”

“ Yes, that’s the question,” said Gustave, “ who killed father ? ”

“ I cannot tell you,” said Jack ; “ as like as not he was killed by his own act.”

“ He had no revolver to take with him,” said Mrs. Muller. “ Whatever he did, even as he was at the time, he would not commit suicide. He was not that sort.”

Jack thought for a few moments, and then he said—

“ His possession of the revolver has not been explained. Nor has it been proved that a revolver was used ? The medical evidence suggested a revolver bullet. I’m not denying it is not true, but it would have been more satisfactory if the revolver had been produced in Court.”

“ Those that used it took care of that,” said Mrs. Muller. “ Do you think Boder killed him ? ”

“ I am sure he did not,” replied Jack. “ I am

sure on his own statement only that he fired at your husband intending to kill him but he missed his aim."

"Did you kill my father?" asked Gustave, looking straight up into Jack's face.

Jack looked down into Gustave's eyes, and answered him firmly, "I did not."

"I never believed you did, but I have not had the courage before to ask you outright. I would not have done so now, only mother's question seemed to lead to it. I'm satisfied to enlist with you."

* * * * *

Martin gave the boys a send-off. Ironbark took the departure of the men seriously. "The few remarks" had not much hilarity in them. It was realised that the chances were that some of "the boys" would not return to Ironbark.

CHAPTER XV

MEN OF IRONBARK ENLIST

THE men from Ironbark went to the Victoria Barracks to offer themselves for enlistment. Sam reckoned his togs were not up-to-date. Jack pointed out that the King's uniform would not only remedy that, but that the khaki also covered a multitude of sins. They entered the barracks with an attempt at military precision. Jack and Sam headed the line, Debenham and Hawley came next. Gustave, the smallest of the men, brought up the rear. When they reached the barrack gates a sentry challenged them, demanding to know their business.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Sam, "can't yer see our business? We've business with the King."

The sentry looked at Sam suspiciously. He was not to be chaffed by raw recruits. What soldier of six weeks' standing, who knew his sentry-go, would stand that sort of nonsense?

"Halt!" cried the sentry as he brought his bayonet down level with Sam's midriff.

"We are going to enlist," said Jack by way of explanation.

"Should have said so at first," said the sentry. "You must state your business to a sentry, or you may be put into the guard tent."

“ Who says so ? ” asked Sam.

The sentry looked at Sam's freckled face and his red head with an expression of surprise at his pitiful ignorance. Six weeks before the sentry himself was an inconsequential, irresponsible “ sort of bloke,” but now he was a soldier of the King, and as such, a man of importance in khaki, who, with bayoneted rifle in hand, could enforce respect.

“ Where do you come from ? ” he asked.

“ Ironbark, we're from Ironbark,” said Sam, with a wave of his hand towards his mates. “ And see here,” continued Sam, pushing the bayonet away, “ yer keep that toothpick down. Yer must be young at the game. Eh ? ”

“ What did you say ? ” asked the sentry, thoughts of putting Sam in the guard tent flashing through his mind.

“ How long 'er yer been enlisted ? ” queried the imperturbable Sam with the usual “ smudge of a smile ” on his face.

“ Go about your business,” answered the sentry.

“ Which way ? ” asked Jack.

“ Go in that door,” replied the sentry, pointing to where there was a notice board, giving information to such as the men from Ironbark on how to become soldiers of the King.

They went through the doorway into a room where they found about a dozen fellows, standing in line, in front of a pompous Sergeant-Major, who was seated at a table, filling in forms of

enlistment. He told them to go to the end of the line. When it came to Sam's turn to give his name, the Sergeant-Major queried :

"Sam Harebrown? Look here, young man, don't you try to enter the Army joking. It's a bad sign! It means trouble! You'll probably go out crying. Sam Harebrown! What's your name, sir?" demanded the Sergeant sternly.

"Ain't I given' it to yer?"

"Do you still say it's Harebrown?" asked the Sergeant, his face getting red as Sam's head.

"Wot 'er yer got agin it? Do the army take stoek of a man's hair?" asked Sam with a humorous twinkle.

The recruits gathered in the room were enjoying Sam's chaff of the Sergeant-Major, who did not like it.

"Don't you have so much to say," he said to Sam.

"G'wan," cried Sam.

"I'll tip you out in a minute," said the Sergeant.

"Ken he?" Sam asked, appealing to Jack.

"He doesn't mean anything, Sergeant," explained Jack. "We are from the hills. The lads from there are a bit free."

"It's the want of discipline that's the curse of the Australian race," said the Sergeant dogmatically.

"Do you think so?" asked Jack.

"Course I do," replied the Sergeant, "they don't show any respect for their officers. I've

known an officer before going on parade to say to a squad, 'For Gawd's sake, boys, when the Colonel's here don't call me Alf!'"

The recruits laughed. There was no fear of them ever calling the Sergeant-Major by his christian name, for he was to them as a big drum is to a pill box.

"I don't see," said Danvers, "much harm in 'Alf.' Jack's as good as his master most times. When it comes to the point we're most anxious to discipline the other fellow. We're not smashing a fire alarm to call men up in a hurry to discipline ourselves."

"I've no time to argue," the Sergeant said to Jack, whom he regarded as the leader of the group. "Take your crowd into the next room to be examined."

"Right O, matey," replied Sam.

"Matey!" exploded the Sergeant in a way that showed his choleric disposition. "Learn, young man, to address your officers in a proper way. March! the lot of you!"

The recruits passed into the adjoining room where they stripped to the buff. Some of them, who gave their means of livelihood as factory operatives, had ill-nourished bodies, narrow chests, and a weedy look about their physique. The men from the hills stripped well. They appeared to be as hard as nails. Gustave Muller was a bit on the short side. In other respects he was not unlike a pocket edition of Hercules.

The medical examinations were made with great care. To the Ironbark contingent, in the state of nature, they seemed to occupy a long time. The doctor, a tall thin man who passed Jack, remarked "Typical Australian, hard and wiry."

Gustave Muller was turned down, with the remark, uttered by the doctor in a tone of regret, "Not suitable!" Instantly Gustave demanded to know why he was not suitable? He banged his fist on a table where the doctor's clerk was taking down the particulars of the volunteers. He shouted at the doctor: "Why not? Why not?" The doctor endeavoured to calm him, and gently referred to Gustave's lack of inches. Standing naked, and unashamed, Gustave declared furiously:

"I'll fight the whole —— lot of you! Is it because my name's Muller?" he asked as he glared a hundred challenges to the doctor. "I'm an Australian, I am!" he shouted, "I come from Ironbark. I was born and bred there, Ironbark—away in the hills."

"That may be so," replied the doctor, "but you are just too short."

"That be damned!" exclaimed Gustave. "I'll fight as well as any of yer. Call in the Sergeant-Major, and just see me take a fall out of him. Too short! What damn rot! You don't want men when you turn me down!"

"That will do! That will do!" said the

doctor nervously. "You really must go—I have much to do."

"Yer doing no good if yer turnin' men like him down," Sam snapped contemptuously.

The doctor looked at Sam in surprise.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"From Ironbark!" said Sam with a burst of pride.

"You five men are from Ironbark then?"

"Yes," replied Jack, "you might stretch a quarter of an inch for Muller. He's a good man."

"We'll try again? It's just possible a mistake was made. But he must really control himself. By Jove, he's a hot 'un! If it had been you," he said, turning to Sam, and looking at his red head meaningly, "I wouldn't have been so much surprised."

"The flies can't skate over it, ken they?" said Sam.

The recruits laughed. The doctor's head was free from hair except some at the sides and back. Obviously the flies could skate, if they chose, on its bald shining surface. He affected not to see Sam's thrust, being busily concerned about Muller, whom he passed, the group of recruits in the room clapping their hands when he made the announcement. They then dressed.

After the recruits had given the clerks particulars of their positions, whether married or single, next of kin, etc., they signed the forms, but they learnt, before they did so, that they were

liable to three months' imprisonment if there was anything false in their declarations.

Ted Debenham in the form described his condition as that of a married man. He made an allotment of his pay to Gretchen Debenham, his wife, whose address was given as care of Mrs. Muller, Ironbark.

Jack was set down as a farmer, Ted as a mill manager, Sam as a coach-driver, Hawley as a gentleman, Gustave as a farmer and millhand.

They were sent from the barracks to the drill-room in Sturt Street, where another Sergeant-Major, gorgeous in gold braid, and magnificently clothed in authority, formed them up in line. Their enlistment papers were examined and read out. Each man was asked, "Is that all true!" His answer was taken down by yet another Sergeant-Major. The examining Sergeant-Major then said, if the description tallied with the man, "I declare that this is the man."

Gustave was challenged by the Sergeant-Major. He said to him, "You are doubtful, stand aside; take off your boots and socks, and be remeasured."

"The doctor's passed him," said Jack.

"Yes," said the others, "the doctor's passed him."

The Sergeant-Major looked Gustave up and down. He thought for a moment, and then said "Right!" motioning Gustave into the line again. Then he informed the recruits that they "could 'have tucker' at the King's expense in the drill-

room, or, they could go up to the gay city in a taxi if they liked and have dinner in a swell restaurant—at their own expense. Anyway, they were to return sober if possible, but, drunk or sober, to the drill-room at two o'clock ! ”

Jack took the Ironbark contingent into the city where they had lunch. Afterwards they returned to the drill-room. They found a large number of recruits there waiting for orders to march into camp. At two o'clock they were marshalled in a line of four abreast; that, they learnt, was called a column of route.

The Sergeant-Major asked: “ Is there any man who is not prepared to undergo inoculation against small-pox or enteric fever? if so, let him now stand out.” As the invitation, if complied with, was understood by the recruits to mean three months in gaol, there was no response to the Sergeant-Major’s invitation.

“ Good,” he said. “ Now you are enlisted, and are soldiers, behave like soldiers. I’m going to take you to Broadmeadows. I want no buffoonery going along the road, such as singing, ‘ It’s a long way to Tipperary ’ ! ”

This remark was construed by the recruits as intended to be humorous, so they laughed to please the Sergeant-Major. The S.M. did not look displeased.

“ Act like soldiers,” he continued. “ When you reach the railway station I shall tell you to entrain. That does not mean you are to rush into

the carriages like a lot of wild bullocks bursting into a cattle truck. You will right turn and form files of four. Atten-shun ! Number off ! Form fours ! ” he bawled. “ Right turn ! March ! ”

Three hundred recruits ! Three hundred recruits marched into camp, the men from Ironbark amongst them. They were given a noisy welcome. Dozens of voices were heard calling from the various tents that the recruits passed on their way to the parade ground, “ Bread and jam for tea ! ” while others inquired, “ How do you like your eggs done ? ” to which question some of the recruits shouted back the rejoinder : “ Hard, like your faces ! ”

Subsequently the men were allotted tents. Twelve men to each tent. The men from Ironbark, hanging together, succeeded in their desires to share the same tent.

For six weeks they were drilled and trained. They took kindly to their work, except Ted, who made an attempt to obtain an appointment in the military police.

“ Do you know,” asked Jack with withering scorn, “ that the job you are after is a cold-footer’s job ? ”

“ Someone’s got to do it,” said Ted. “ I’m not a mad patriot like you are. Besides, I’ve got a wife to think of.”

“ Wonder you didn’t say a wife and child,” said Jack. “ You would have, if the child had lived. Your wife’s all right, now she’s gone back

to her mother, and you needn't worry. I'm not surprised that you want to put a red 'M.P.' on your arm."

"Why?" asked Ted innocently.

Jack laughed. "M.P.! That's it! They call the military police, 'M.P.'s,' 'Mothers' pets!' and that about describes you, does it not?"

The contempt that Jack felt towards Ted did not greatly disturb that individual. A job in the military police meant being paid a shilling a day more than a soldier gets, and a good chance of remaining, during the time of the war, in a zone of safety. His application, however, was turned down, and he was perforce to remain in the ranks.

Jack threw himself heartily into the business of a soldier. He went up for a N.C.O.'s examination, and succeeded in convincing the members of the military board that he knew the book of infantry training as well as the best of them. The result of his examination was that his appointment as a sergeant appeared the following week in Routine Orders.

Then came the day of final leave. Ted, Gustave, and Sam went to Ironbark to say their farewells.

Jack remained in Melbourne.

Marion sat in the parlour of the post office, sad, weary and sighing. How different it would have been had Jack been true to her! She had heard that Gretchen's baby was dead and that she was once more at home with her mother, but

the goings and comings of the Mullers were not discussed in the post office. The Debenhams held themselves too high to even lay themselves open to a suspicion that they took any interest whatsoever in the doings of such an abandoned hussy as Gretchen Muller ! Their pride, the pride of mother and daughter, lay in the manly way in which Ted had acted. He was a son and a brother to be proud of ! Had he not persuaded Jack Danvers to go to the war ? How reluctantly Ted had told them of the part he had played in stirring the men of Ironbark into an adequate sense of patriotism, and into a practical realisation of their duty.

Yes ! She had every reason to be proud of her hero brother ! Her mother had certainly tried to dissuade Ted from going on the plea that he was her only son, but he had placed duty to his King and Country before everything ! His mother had yielded, her heart almost broken at the sacrifice she was making.

Danvers, Marion said to herself, had always been more or less jealous of her brother. She had repeatedly noticed that, though he spoke no ill of him in her presence, she could not remember any time when he praised him, though he had always a good word for Nipper and Sam. That did not matter now. Jack Danvers was outside the pale ! He could never be anything to her. Yet, it was hard, very hard !

How she hated Gretchen Muller ! She must

have known that she was robbing her of the man she loved. Never! Never! Marion declared to herself, would she by a word, or sign, to Danvers, ever let him know that she still loved him. God help her!

Marion found herself constantly dwelling upon Jack's last kiss as a sweet memory. Jack was so tender! So manly! If he was a sinner! Then a revulsion of feeling would set in, and Marion would lash herself with bitter thoughts for her temporary weakness. Jack Danvers was anathema! He could go to the war or elsewhere for what she cared! Possibly even then he was saying a loving farewell to Gretchen . . . she was maddened with jealousy—she tortured herself—till there came a relieving flood of tears.

The day—Trafalgar Day—of embarkation came at last. Thousands were present at Port Melbourne to see the troops off to the war. Officialdom had made an attempt to secure a secret embarkation, but the great crowds, waving their farewells on the foreshore, showed how signally soulless officialdom failed when it tried to thwart humanity's intense yearnings, for final farewells, farewells that always well up, a divine spring in our hearts, when we are parting from those of our kin. Wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts, fathers, brothers, and friends pushed forward to the pier, determined to see the last of the boys in spite of the police and the military guards, who were swept before them, as leaves are borne on a surging torrent.

Martin and Nipper, with Nelly between them, battled with the strongest.

"I'll be crushed to death," cried Nelly, "and we'll never see them."

"Gum, won't we!" Nipper said determinedly, "I'll get on the pier somehow."

"I think we had better stay here," observed Martin. "Some clumsy wretch has trodden on my toe."

Martin's toe was a very small circumstance to the game afoot.

"Sam! Sam!" shouted Nelly, at the top of her voice. "There's Sam."

"He can't hear you," said Nipper. "By gum, don't they look fine!"

"It's a shame, a cruel shame, we can't say good-bye to our boys," shrieked a shrill female voice somewhere in the crowd.

"Down with the barriers," urged a male voice. Hundreds of voices repeated the order.

"Bog in!" shouted Nipper.

"Bog in!" cried Martin, who was full of the excitement of the scene.

"Bog in!" echoed the crowd in a hoarse threatening roar.

"Do be careful!" Nelly pleaded.

Martin and Nipper heard Nelly's pleadings, but they did not heed them.

"Bog in, boys!" Nipper yelled again.

The hurdles on the pier were pushed down. The crowd went forward along the pier to the

troopships with a hum of satisfaction. The police and soldiers met them with fixed bayonets. The police hurled men, women, and children back, while the soldiers presented their bayonets but only in a half-hearted manner. The women pushed the weapons aside.

The line of advance was stayed for a moment. One woman broke past the guards amidst a scene of the wildest excitement. She was cheered to the echo by the soldiers clustering like flies in the transports' riggings. Their cheers were answered by the crowd. The military guard tried to turn the woman back as Nipper had many a time headed a wild steer.

"Now's the time!" the boy shouted. "Mob through! mob through!"

The crowd not only "mobbed through," they raced through. The guard was swallowed up. Officialdom and khaki were for once lost; drowned in the living sea of civilandom.

In a few moments the crowd, composed of at least 7000 wildly impassioned men, women, and children, had possession of the pier on this typical Australian day of blue sky, pleasant sunshine, with a gentle sea breeze that fanned the cheeks of the crowd, as lightly as a mother's kiss falls on a sleeping babe.

Nipper led his party, with Nelly, panting, after him, Martin bringing up the rear.

"Come on!" he cried. "Hurrah! There they are at the top of that gangway! Can't yer see

'em, Nelly ? Jack, Gustave, yes, and there's Sam and Hawley ! By gum this is great ! Bog along, Nelly ! What O ? Martin, wot luck ! "

" She's moving off ! " said Martin.

" No ! no ! Don't say that, don't say that ! " cried Nelly.

" Too true ! Too true ! " replied Nipper.

Deafening cheers filled the air. The steam sirens were screaming. They almost failed to pierce the volume of human sound. Hundreds and hundreds of paper ribbons and strings of cotton streamed from the ship. They formed the last frail material links between troopships and shore connecting many loving, brave, and sorrowing hearts. Then came a burst of music, the National Anthem. Every khaki figure stood to attention on the deck of the transports. Every man in the crowd uncovered his head.

At that moment Nelly saw that Sam had seen them. He was calling the men of Ironbark's attention to them. He wafted a kiss to Nelly.

The space between the pier and the vessel grew greater. Nipper stepped to the edge of the pier and yelled, in a clear voice, that carried across the water, as it had often travelled in his native hills :

" Are we down-hearted ? "

A thunderous answer was given from the ship as in one voice the troops cried, " No ! "

" Who are we after ? " shouted a soldier.

The same giant voice of the soldiers replied, " The Kaiser ! "

“Gum!” remarked Nipper, “and they’ll get him.”

The band was playing “Auld Lang Syne.” The crowd sang the old song with an appreciation of its sentiment that broke up almost every woman on the pier. When the music changed to “Good-bye, little girl, good-bye,” it found Nelly sobbing.

Nipper, Nelly, and Martin went with the crowd to the end of the pier, where Nipper promptly climbed a lamp-post. Everybody endeavoured to be as close to the troopship as possible. Slowly she was drawn away by a little tug that strained and groaned with its great burden. The troopship sullenly responded to the pull of the tug’s hawsers as if reluctant to hasten the parting between the troops and their friends on shore.

Further, and further, away the transport crept until the rows of faces lining the rails grew indistinct. Distance blurred the khaki figures, seen in many cases, by eyes misty with coming tears. When the troopship was but as a speck on the waters, the tension of the heart-breaking farewells was suddenly replaced with a sense of desolation. It filled Nelly’s heart, in common with the hearts of many women. Their dear ones were gone, perhaps for ever! These boys of Australia had passed bravely forward with smiling faces on their desperate venture!

CHAPTER XVI

FAREWELL TO THE TROOPSHIP

NIPPER, on top of the pier lamp-post, was the last figure that the departing troops could distinguish. The units of the crowd, waving handkerchiefs, cheering and God-speeding the brigade, were but a blurred mass. To the troops gazing, some of them for the last time on the dingy port of Melbourne, the send-off was a wonderful and thrilling sight. Not one, but many of the brave boys, Jack noticed, looked upon the scene with humid eyes.

The first night on the troopship was a strange experience to the majority of the men. Some of the soldiers wore ribbons that told of war service in South Africa, China, and elsewhere. They were old troopship voyagers, but the bulk were, like the men from Ironbark, raw campaigners who were feeling that war, like adversity, made them acquainted with strange bedfellows.

The troopship was a floating town of 1400 souls ; numbers enough to populate Ironbark six times over. 'Tween-decks hummed with talk, laughter, and chaff. Fortunately, the troops were not asked to find their sea-legs at once, the night being a placid one with a calm sea.

Much work was done before the troops could

be put to bed. Blankets and hammocks were issued to each man. The quartermaster, assisted by Jack, started to make the distribution as the sun was sinking. By the time they had finished their task a crescent moon was showing in the midnight heavens.

The first night at sea ! The moon a Crescent in the heavens ! The troops were too tired to see any portents of war in the heavens ; too tired, many of them, to even find hooks on which to swing their hammocks. Dozens of worn-out soldiers put their blankets on the deck and fell quickly into a profound sleep, undisturbed by the sentries, marching to and fro, picking their way between the recumbent forms.

The daily routine of the troopship went on with unvarying precision. In the circumscribed space of the vessel, the men, clad in their blue dungarees, wearing white sand-shoes, prepared themselves for their future battles. From morning to evening the ceaseless tramp of men was heard on deck. Drill of one class, or of another, went on all day. "Physical jerks" as the troops called physical exercise, kept the soldiers' muscles in good fettle. The signallers were flag wagging ; the buglers, a dozen or more, sitting at the stern, blew their bugle calls, the "charge," the "mess," and others, away from the ship so as not to be a nuisance, summoning the spirits of the vasty deep to come, but who never came.

Jack, a keen observer of the phases of life about

him, as the days passed, was interested in watching how the minor individuality of the men was absorbed in the greater personality of the brigade. How, by degrees, the men drifted into the mental attitude of regarding themselves as units that were willing to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, to the welfare of the brigade.

In a sense the men lost their own identities. They had left behind them their homes, their personal belongings that indicated their tastes, that revealed the colours that flagged their existence. All that impedimenta of their peaceful past, of their suburban domesticity, of bush pastures, of station homestead, and outback hut were reduced to tabloid form, hidden away in their kit-bags. In Sam's case the most precious of his treasures was a photograph of Nelly. The most curious link with the past was in the kit of Ted. It was the scarab given to him for luck by Marion, since Jack had not deemed the charm worthy of cherishing as a love token.

If Marion had known more about scarabs she would not have set such store by it. Was it possible for her to coalesce the mysticism of the East with the plain downright common sense that permeates the Australian bush ? Did Death lie with the scarab, and was Jack lucky in not being the owner of it ?

How was a bush girl, like Marion, to know of the Book of the Dead and the weighing of the heart before Osiris ? Or of how the priests

silenced the heart from confessing its sins by burying the charm of a scarabæus with the corpse ?

Would the charm be successful ? Would the men she knew come back to their hills ? Did their return to Ironbark appear more unlikely than at one time Marion would have thought the return of the scarab was to Egypt ?

The charm had rested for years in Ironbark under the Southern Cross ; the sacred emblem of Christianity. Now the scarab was on its way to the land of its origin—the domain of Cheops and Cephron—once more to repose beneath the Crescent, the flaunted sign of Paganism. The scarab—the dung beetle—typical of immortality to the Egyptian, what was its significance to an Australian ? Was it life or death ?

The fleet had its rendezvous “ somewhere off Australia,” where it waited for the troopships, steering to the open roadstead, from several points of the compass. The troops were the virile expression of a young nation. They were the fruits of the harvests of sturdy endeavour, of unflinching courage, the seed of the Australasian pioneers. Worthy sons ! Worth their breeding, and full of the mettle of their pastures. Hereafter some Australian Homer will tell the story in an Iliad that will rival the tale of the siege of Troy, but now, with the wild waste of waters before them, is the time for deeds. The swift winged words, burning with the divine fire of poetical

inspiration, and of national genius, must halt while the men of the Expeditionary Forces sail on bravely to their glorious martyrdom on classic shores.

The Australian Armada steamed from the Occident into the Orient in a line, three ships abreast, like some great grey sea-birds winging their way to some far distant rookery. The ships were led, flanked, and rearguarded by men-of-war, the undisputed masters of the high seas.

As the voyage proceeded the officers made opportunities to become better acquainted with their men. In a large measure the social barriers were swept away. Australians of "high and low degree" stood on the troopship, man to man, naked for what they were. They knew, without hugging the fact, that Death, whether it lay subtle and hidden in a scarab, or noisily exposed itself in a burst of a shrapnel, levelled officer and private without any fuss being made in either case. Whether that inference is right or wrong, it was a fact that on the Australian troopship the "superior fellow" was not in snobbish evidence, for he died unregretted by the troops, a sudden death after leaving Broadmeadows camp to go on board.

Life on board a troopship soon becomes monotonous. The soldiers rose at six o'clock and rolled up their hammocks. At 7.45 a.m. Sam and Gustave went for their company's tucker. At eight o'clock they were eating it. Afterwards

they washed up, polished the plates like mirrors, and cleaned their mugs of white and blue enamel, scrubbed their bit of the deck, and were ready for the roll-call at 9.30 a.m.

Jack was in charge of the rifles on board. His time, with five soldiers, was constantly occupied in keeping the weapons in the finest condition for action.

Noon brought the call for dinner, "Come to the cookhouse door!" after which the troops had one of their several "smoke O's." At six o'clock the tea was served. At 9 p.m. came "Lights out!" Until next morning the troops slept, when the *revéillé* sounded, as all the calls did, in three different places of the ship, "Get up, you sleepy head!"

So their days passed without mishap. Sam, in common with many more of the troops afloat on the "deep waters" for the first time, marvelled at the blue skies and seas. He watched the flying-fish, skimming the ocean like miniature aeroplanes, and admired the albatrosses as they followed the ship. Young Australia was having its eyes opened on the way to the war!

Colombo! The troops were greatly disappointed to learn that they were not to land. The ships were anchored some distance from the shore, but not so far away as to prevent them seeing Adam's Peak, and a range of dark blue mountains standing out clear and sharp, sending the Ironbark men's thoughts to their hills. They were, however,

only memories. The men were not looking backwards, but forwards to the mysterious East ! The town showed white, as a crest of foam, above the cliffs of Galle Face. The Cingalese crowded in boats around the troopships : picturesque brown figures, with black hair and flowing red sarongs, offering to barter fruit and curios to the troops, as if the men of khaki were the tourists some wag described them to be at 6/6 a day.

During the troopships' voyage from Australia, H.M.S. *Sydney* left the convoy to go in search of the German raider *Emden*. At Colombo the *Sydney* rejoined the convoy, having in the interval destroyed the *Emden*, leaving her a tangled wreck of shattered iron on the reefs at Cocos Island.

The *Sydney* steamed through the lanes formed by the troopships. Caps in hands, the Australians, on the crowded decks of the troopships, watched the *Sydney* in silence. Enemy wounded were on board who had put up a gallant fight. They had "played the game." Australians, soldiers and sailors, were too chivalrous to "rub in" the bitterness of defeat by cheering in the presence of brave men vanquished.

The troops left Colombo, as a beautiful dream that was not realised, behind them at eight o'clock that night. The shore searchlights played upon the Armada, revealing sights of sea power that made the Australians' blood tingle in pride of their heritage with the British race.

Through the Red Sea, Suez Canal, past Port Said, the troops' port of disembarkation was Alexandria, the wicked old city of Alexandria. From the sea the troops had but a small view of the city of Alexandria, because it is situated on a coast that lies low. The first object Jack saw was the famous Pharos lighthouse, then Pompey's Pillar, various buildings and distant windmills. Most of the picture was blurred, however, as rain was falling when the Australian troops arrived.

The troopship Jack was on made fast to a quay near Gabbari Moles. Then the soldiers had their first sight of life in an Egyptian port. On the quays they saw representatives of almost every nation, people and tongues; a veritable babel of picturesque dirty humanity. The men from Ironbark were arrested at the appearance of the long narrow lorries, and the "donks," or donkeys, in them. They were a contrast indeed to the heavy timber-jinkers that still creaked along Ironbark valley road; the "donks" were "very small deer" to "Long Tom's" massive team of oxen.

Paper boys were selling Egyptian "Gazettes," "Mails," and "Times." The newspapers were bought up by the troops, anxious to learn the latest news of the war.

At noon, the troops were entrained on the narrow-gauge railway that runs to Cairo, which city of 400 mosques they reached at five o'clock, detraining in a spacious railway station. Outside

electric trams were running, with other modern signs of progress in the ancient land of the Pharaohs. The troops were pushed through Cairo on to Mena to pitch their camp there. The tent of the Ironbark party was within ten minutes' walk of the Pyramids.

The five men from Ironbark visited Cairo together. They gazed open-eyed at the magnificence of its boulevards, and they wondered at the dirt, flies, and stinks of its slums. Life in Cairo, Ted found out, began at 6 p.m. The inconsiderate military authorities put the city out of bounds by 9.30 p.m. as well as employing a town guard, that was beastly active in the Waza quarter. As the fun in Cairo continued until 3 and 4 a.m. there were not many points, in Ted's mind, in being in a sober and a virtuous tent at Mena Camp and thereby "missing all the fun." Ted saw in Cairo a vast, free and unrestricted harem; a city of houris, an earthly realisation of a Mohammedan paradise. So far as the unrestricted plurality of wives was concerned, he was on the way to make a good son of Islam.

To Jack, Cairo was a city of guides, dragomen, donkey drivers, bazaar vendors, and baksheesh. The place of the gamble for piastres, where soldiers who had too many said they met with "disasters!" The city of Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, Indians, Syrians, Copts, Arabs, Italians, Jews! The caravanserai of Nubians, Turks, and Negroes.

Cairo ! The home of tribes that had their birth in hoary antiquity, the Adams of the earth of sand and sin when the Pyramids were not ! A city of a vaporous furnace of colour, in which people were born, had their being, and died under blue skies the like of which Jack had never conceived. They were as blue as the cornflower, even as the gorgeous colouring of the East was likened by him unto that of a brilliant poppy. Had the East not, too, a seductive anodyne, like the drowsy flower, in its beauty ? Did not an Arab proverb say, " That he who had once drunk of the waters of the Nile would return to drink of them again " ?

Cairo, Jack thought of as a city of mosques and of minarets, where is heard the cry of the muezzin, five times a day, calling the faithful Moslems to prayer. What a gulf he felt was fixed between an Australian from his gum forests and the muezzin in his minaret !

As an Australian who had read a great deal of the East, but who was now faced with the concrete realisation of what he had read, Jack could hardly, to himself, translate his bewildering emotions into clear mental expressions. Everything was so strange, vague ; mysterious as the shadows cast by the Pyramids when moonlight floods the desert.

Half in jest, as Pilate asked, " What is truth ? " Jack asked himself, " Had he been here in prenatal days, since, though everything was so strange, yet it was all so strangely familiar ? Surely the

unbaked bricks he saw were the same as the children of Israel were ordered to make without straw ? ”

Awakened from his reveries, some of which carried him to the golden mellow days that “ she ” too must remember when

“ The sunset faded yellow through the notches of the hills,”

Jack realised, almost with a start, that he was an Australian soldier in Egypt, one of thousands of the crusaders of the Southern Cross, prepared to win, or to die, in the sacred cause of liberty, and the paramount claims of a Christian humanity over a German paganism of Moloch birth.

Before Jack’s eyes sporadic palm trees dotted the landscape. The camel and the Arab were not far away. The Nile was hard by. The winding river, glowing with opal fire, and the dahabiehs, that was the Egypt of his dreams—dreams which had come true.

There was more to know ; more to remain unknown. The great mosque Mahomet Ali, built of white stone, within the famous citadel, dominated Cairo. The citadel, placed on a spur of the reddish rocky slopes of the Mokattam hills, marked the beginning of the Arabian desert, over which flew, in the form of birds, the souls of long since departed Egyptian dead. Such things interested Jack intensely, born as he was in a country almost destitute of traditions ; a country that was only then coming into the limelight of

history. In its story, yet to be written, he was "doing his bit" in the true Australian way.

Sam and Jack, together, explored the native quarters. They wandered in the narrow dark lanes, speculating on what lay behind the barred and latticed windows of the upper stories of the tall overhanging houses? They were satisfied that there were slums in Cairo, the cleaning of which would make the task of cleansing the Augean stables look like a sanitary picnic. Lanes, about five feet in width, tapered down to passages. Along them they could only go sideways. In the alleys were goats and sheep. In the midst of the filth and dirt of such lanes the natives lived and slept in swinish contentment.

Jack told Sam he would describe Cairo as the rich man's table, with Lazarus picking up the crumbs that fell from it, and the mangy dogs of the city licking the sores of Lazarus.

From these dens of filth the natives came hawking tomatoes, onions, other eatables, and drinks.

Sam, more than once, said he hated the mongrel mixture of breeds. "Look at that cove over there!" he cried, pointing to a man with a brass ewer, "the black swine's selling sherbet. He never wipes the glass slobbered over by dozens of dirty nigs! Gosh, it's a good place to get out of!"

"It appears to me," said Jack, "that one half of Cairo bars itself in, the other half shows its nudity in the streets. We have seen veils drawn

half over the face very carelessly, and graceful elastic figures covered anyway by their loose flexible garments that were just . . .”

“ You ken take it from me,” said Sam, “ people who bar themselves in as this crowd does, have no morals to hide.”

“ There’s probably women behind the lattices,” remarked Jack.

“ That ain’t the same thing as saying there’s morals behind them. Morals in Cairo ! Gosh, I never heard tell of ’em, nor have I seen it stated so in the Camp Orders.”

“ Beware, Sam,” said Jack, laughing, “ of the strange woman ! ‘ Ye ken her ’ as Sandy Pilkins would say. She lieth in wait at every corner. She had on her bed the ‘ fine linen of Egypt,’ and her goodman had gone on a long journey. I think she lives behind one of those lattices.”

“ Which one ? ” asked Sam eagerly.

“ What ? ” replied Jack in affected astonishment. “ What ? Are you the ‘ youth void of understanding ’ ? ”

“ G’wan ! ” cried Sam, “ I’ve no time for these foreign women.”

“ Not for the black-eyed virgins of Paradise ? ” Jack softly insinuated.

“ No ! No ! ” cried Sam. “ Give me the little girl waiting for me by the slip rail to the best painted perfumed queen of the harem in Cairo ! I know women all right, but not the sort as sits behind the latticed window, and kids the poor

Australian soldier that she's the pearl of the joint, when she's——"

"Never mind, Sam," said Jack, "we can guess what she is!"

"I hate the East," exclaimed Sam. "I never saw such a dirty hole as Cairo. The way the flies are allowed to crawl over the naked kids and feast in their eyes, makes me sick. It would drive the coach horses just mad. Gosh! I'll be glad when we are through with our job and get home. I'd just kid meself to go going past Rattlebone corner, with the clump of wattle there ablaze, and give I dunno what, to just feel the breeze coming down from the hills! Egypt!" cried Sam with derision, "Egypt! Ironbark's good enough fer me."

"And for me too," replied Jack. "The novelty of this place may hold you for a time, but Australians want Australia. We men from the hills want the green lush of fern in the sassafras gullies. One minute's sight of the stream flowing under Sawpit hardwood bridge, pegged together anyhow, would do me more good than an hour spent on the Karz bridge, with its lion statues, looking at the Nile!"

Translated in various ways, that was the general sentiment of the Australian troops. At first Cairo was a great source of interest to them. Of the bazaars about the famous Mousky street, with their wonderful curios (all guaranteed "genuine goods, genuine antiques"), they thought

at first they could never become tired. They looked in wonder at the metal workers, the perfume vendors, the Damascene silks, the gold-threaded shawls, the Turkish, Tunisian, and Algerian colonnades, bringing to some of them memories of the story of the "Arabian Nights," but it was not long before the bazaars bored the casual Australians. The dirt disgusted them. The niggers clamouring for "baksheesh" annoyed them. When they left Cairo they swore they would not return to it again! Back at Mena Camp they thought they would give Cairo just one more try. Why they returned they could not fathom! Was there anything occult in the Arab proverb concerning the man who drank the waters of the Nile?

The camp training was very thorough, exercised as the troops were in military manœuvres every day, behind Mena. Sham fights took place between various brigades.

The way the platoons moved, seeking what cover was available, pleased the Army Staff Corps. The one hope of the troops was for the day to arrive when they could "tackle the job they'd enlisted for." Camp rumours indicated an early date, but time after time the troops' hopes of a quick move to the battle front wilted away. When the order came it arrived with dramatic suddenness. All leave was suddenly stopped. Officers and men who had made up their minds for a week end at Luxor, a city known as the

“City of Dreams,” situated about 450 miles south of Cairo, were suddenly recalled from the railway station. The Australian army was on the move!

At last! The Australians cheered and cheered as if they were going to a picnic. But to where? Time alone would show. Some of them had already been to Ismailia over an affair with the outposts, but this was war, war, they were going to, hurrah! hurrah! and hurrah again! How infectious Australian spirits are! Jack’s brigade marched into Cairo at eight o’clock and waited there till midnight to entrain for Alexandria.

There were hundreds of letters written that night in Cairo, while the troops waited for the train to Alexandria. Letters to fathers and mothers, letters to wives and sweethearts, letters to pals and brothers, letters full of hope, of love, of fear, of prayers! Letters such as the dying might send to the living, for there was not one man who did not realise that the brigade was on a desperate venture from which for many, alas! too many, there could be no return!

Letters went from Sam to Nelly, Gustave to his mother, Hawley to his people, Ted to his mother, and one to his wife addressed Miss Muller, c/o Mrs. Muller, Ironbark. Jack was perhaps the man who wrote the shortest letter. It was the only letter he did write. In it he said: “Dear Nipper,—We are going into action. If the worst happens to me look after ‘Tim.’ Good-bye to all. Your friend John Danvers.”

After Jack had written the letter he re-read the note. Then he gave a sigh. He recalled the Australian poet's lines :

“ Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone :
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own ! ”

'Twas the only sentiment he permitted himself.

“ On the ball ! On the ball ! ” He fancied he could hear his school mates shouting in the dear old playground.

“ Buck up, Danvers ! ” he muttered. “ Play the game ! ”

“ C Company ! Atten-shun ! Number off ! Form fours, right ! ” shouted his O.C.

C Company moved on to the platform, newly made, just a bank of gravel, for the use of troops.

War ! Its echoes had reached, in the beginning, the peaceful valleys of Ironbark in the same way as the echoes had reverberated in other places in Australia. The men of hill, and of plain, of city, and of hamlet, heard the call of the Motherland to the colours, and they were there in the Cairo station to answer it.

Jack's mind bridged the ocean with an Ariel-like flash. He recalled all that had passed before he left home, and of how Muller was found dead on the hill-top. Where would the men of Ironbark, who had left their homes with him, be when the first roll after going into action was called ?

The trains for Alexandria were in the station. Midnight! The troops in a glare of electric light were starting to entrain.

Kismet! At last! The train was moving out into the night.

* * * * *

Away under the Southern Cross, the boo-book owl in the old tree, by Jack's hut, was calling "Mopoke! Mopoke!" just as if the world was at peace, with Jack seated by the log fire in his open hearth dreaming pleasant dreams, as he was wont to do, of the days when he should call Marion "Wife."

CHAPTER XVII

TROOPS SAIL FOR THE FRONT—GALLIPOLI !

THE troop trains travelled through the night from Cairo to Alexandria with overflowing carriages of happy excited Australian soldiers. They were in the highest spirits imaginable, with little thought for anything but for the game that was ahead of them. It promised to be better fun than even a football final. Half-way to Alexandria they passed the city of Tantah, containing the tomb of a famous Moslem Saint, but what of it ? Months of strenuous training, life in Mena Camp, even though it was within sight of the Pyramids, had wiped out Egyptian saints, myths and legends from the Australian soldier's mind.

“ The mysterious East ! 'Struth ! Sand, sin, dirt, and niggers ! ” said one.

“ Take a long look at the Pyramids, boys,” a “ cornstalk ” had cried to the brigade, as the troops swung down the old half-finished road from the Mena Camp. The men from Ironbark heard him ; the units of the brigade heard him, but they did not look back. On they went, passing the well-known bookstall, and the tobacconist's shop. Would they see them again ? Or the tramway terminus ? The taxis, the gharries, the camels, the donks ? There the natives were waiting

just as usual to take the troops on leave into Cairo, but they waited in vain, for the troops went past them, down the long avenue of lebbakhs, on their way to the Front.

Forward ! Through the night the train clatters over the iron rails, past Kafz Dawar and its sleeping cotton fields, soon to be a blaze of colour, still onward for 150 miles. From darkness into the creeping lights of dawn that grow richer as time steals away until six o'clock, when the train with the company the men of Ironbark are attached to steams into Alexandria. There they are detrained and marched to a troopship on which they embark. In turn the whole force is bestowed in different troopships, the soldiers being crowded together as thickly as locusts swarm on a gum tree in the bush on a hot summer's day.

For four days the troopships remained moored at the piers. Impatient always, the Australians fretted under their enforced restraint. They were not allowed shore leave, but some of them, wild, reckless warragals, broke bounds, and later they were found by the military guards, with strange shes in the by-ways of Alexandria. Was it not written :

“ For she hath cast down many wounded : yea, many strong men have been slain by her.”

Why, the troopships were within a few days' steam of Troy, and what figure would Troy have cut in history without Helen, or Egypt, say, without Cleopatra ?

On the fourth day the troopships sailed out of Port Ouest, originally the ancient Eunostos, or "haven of happy return." Jack thought the exodus of troops from a haven of that name "a happy presage" to be associated with the Australian troops.

Behind them now the sandy shore, the palm groves, the bright white buildings of Alexandria as the city shows itself in the wake of steamers ! Onward, into the Ægean Sea. Dawn was breaking as they went into a bight in the land, with steep green hills 400 and 500 feet high on port and starboard. How the Australians rested their eyes ! The simple expression "Isn't it nice ?" showed how they were moved. Their eyes were tired of sand, of orientalism, of Mena Camp. The green hills of the Island of Lemnos, in Mudros Bay, were as gratifying to their sand-tired gaze as a flowing fountain is to a parched traveller in a desert. Though the hills were treeless, the grass, and the profusion of wild flowers, were, after Egypt, a glimpse of fairyland.

Mudros Bay was alive with troopships, warships and boats. Each troopship was moored stern and stern, two together. A step took a soldier from the deck of one ship to the deck of the next one. This enabled the troops to fraternise, to be hospitable, and they made the most of their comradeship again.

It was a great treat for the boys to go on land once again. The troopships were stifling with

humanity. Calculated to hold comfortably about 1400 men, they had on the ship the men of Ironbark travelled in, over 2000 men ! That number of soldiers had to dispose of themselves as best they could.

They slept anywhere since there were no hammocks, but they did not mind ; it was the business of a soldier to stand hardship. Every difficulty was met in rare holiday spirit, much in the same way as good-natured excursionists “ baa ! baa ! ” at the inconvenience felt in railway trucks on Australian holidays.

The troops were constantly drilled in embarking and disembarking, with their full kits on, into boats, in preparation for the assault on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Across the sea, in a grey haze, they could see the shores of the Dardanelles.

It was there, as Homer relates, “ The Trojans went with clanging and noise like birds, as when the clanging of the cranes rises in the face of heaven, who, after having escaped the winter, and the tremendous rain, fly with loud cries over the streams of ocean, bearing murder and destruction to the Pygmæan race.”

The Australians were in Mudros Bay ready to repeat the adventure on the land of the birth-place of the “ Tale of Troy Divine.” The distance from the Ægean island, lying nearly half-way between Mount Athos and the entrance of the Dardanelles, was only a few hours’ run for the transports. When the time came it was covered at half-speed.

The order to move forward found the Australians ready. It was magnificent to see what fine spirits pervaded the ranks. The camaraderie between the officers and the men was wonderful. No attempt had been made to minimise the difficulties or the dangers of the landing. The Brigadier, Colonel Sinclair MacLagan, had told the troops that the landing, at any cost, must be successful. There could be no going back. "Forward!" was the word, and "hang on!" Those two words meant death to hundreds of heroes, yet the Australians were not only in good heart, but they were straining at the leash in their eagerness to get to grips with the enemy. The troops were told, "Until broad daylight the bayonet is your weapon, and when you charge, do so in as good line as possible."

The Australians were there to "do the job": and there was not a flincher among them. When the flagship led the way out of Mudros harbour the cheers were deafening. Ships' crews cheered to ships' crews; men-of-war's men to soldiers; troops to bluejackets; French to British; British to Australian, and New Zealanders and Australians loudest of all! Such a wonderful burst of National and Allied emotion, such a spontaneous explosion of personal goodwill, such a colossal wave-borne and wind-carried "God speed!" was never heard on land or over sea before! The shouting still rent the air as the ships steamed onward for the bold sea-beaten cliffs which reared their beetling heights

across the sea in the enveloping mists, waiting to be scaled by these khaki figures, in a storm of bullets, if they dared !

If they dared ! They smiled. They were there on the troopships ! They were there to dare, to die, if necessary, and to smile. Had not the Brigadier told them : " You may get orders to do something which appears in your position to be the wrong thing to do, and perhaps a mad enterprise. Do not cavil at it, but carry it out with absolute faith in your leaders, because we are, after all, a very small piece on the board. Some pieces have often to be sacrificed to win the game, and after all it is to win the game that we are here."

Sergeant Danvers pointed out to the men of his platoon that particular clause in Colonel MacLagan's address : " Some of us will have to be sacrificed, but we'll win the game."

" We'll do our best," cried Hawley.

" They'll have to go under !" came floating softly on their ears from a neighbouring troopship.

Sam and Ted were playing cards, while Gustave Muller was humming, " Just before the battle, mother ! " No one, to look about the troopship, could have imagined that these fresh-complexioned hardy Australian boys were about to land upon an unknown coast, and to face they knew not what, so easy was their manner, so indifferent was their outward bearing as to what the fortune of war had in store for them.

Groups of them were laughing at jokes made, others were talking of Premiership matches, of theatres, one of music. It was astounding the apparent, perhaps real, indifference they showed to the dangers ahead of them. It was the Australian to the marrow when he was up against "it," he would act. Most of them had felt love, they would see war, they would meet death, but till then, "What do you think of Carlton's chance in the Final?"

They were trained athletes, in the pink of condition, and they thought no more of the weight of their kit, seventy odd pounds with ammunition, than a hardened swaggie, or a Murrumbidgee "whalér," did of "humping Matilda."

True, a keen observer saw that their eyes showed their minds were dancing with excitement, that their beings were thrilled with the greatness of the adventure, and that their whole soul echoed the words of Jack when he said, flushed and proud of his group, pleased beyond measure that the hour had come, "By God, boys, this is a man's game we're on!"

"I won't be sorry to get on the job," remarked Ted. "We've been cooped up now pretty well six weeks, and what with hot weather, men around yer as thick as bees about a hive, tobacco running out, and no grog, I'm ready to harpoon any —— Turk that comes along."

"So am I," replied Hawley. "We've been up and

down that bally wooden ladder, embarking and disembarking, swearing and cursing in the darkness, jumping into boats, going like hell for shore, charging up Mudros beach, digging trenches in the dark, and cutting back to the boats, till I'm fed up with full-dress rehearsals. Thank heaven the curtain's going up at last ! ”

The chaplains—fine examples of Christian muscularity—in each ship addressed the khaki groups on the deck, who stood silent, serious, and bareheaded. Beneath the shadows of the guns, ready to vomit death, these servants of the Prince of Peace sprinkled as manna, words of comfort and of strength. The soldiers listened to them with the attention of men about to carry their lives into the Valley of Death.

On April 24th the fleet sailed out of Mudros Bay. At 4 a.m. the troops were given a hot meal of bully beef. While they ate, the ships were creeping nearer and nearer to the shores whereon lay the grave of Ilium, and whereon was fated to be the graves of many of the fine fellows who cracked jokes over that notable meal.

The boys seemed to be without nerves, full of four-o'clock-in-the-morning courage, quietly confident, without a trace of swagger, content that they were fit “ to do the job they'd enlisted for.”

The ships' lights were out. The sea was calm. A half moon showed brightly in the beautiful peaceful night. Five miles from the shore the troopships stopped. The soldiers were marshalled

on deck. The order was given to embark in the boats lying alongside. The light of the moon was waning. The dark figures entered the boats in silence. Three boats, laden almost to the gunwale with khaki figures, drawn by a steam pinnace, constituted each tow. The moon's light was no more. In darkness the tows started across the intervening five miles of water to the shore.

The troops were timed to land just before dawn so as to give them the chance to make a surprise landing, and to take some sort of cover before the Turks could open fire.

Twelve lines of tows went forward at a distance of about 100 yards apart. After some miles had been travelled, an order came from a battleship for the boats to "carry on, on their own." The troops started to row for the shore. Behind them was the sense of security, the power and protection of great battleships. Each dip of the oars took them further away from the mothering guns of the fleet, and closer to those cruel cliffs that were already looming dark, threatening, frowning. . . .

The men from Ironbark were together. The boats' progress towards the shore was so slow that it seemed as if dawn would break before the boys could land. So far as the troops could judge there was no movement on shore. Apparently they were about to reach the shore unseen . . . but no . . . an alarm light! It flashed for five minutes on the cliffs. The enemy was awake.

"The cows have seen us," said Sam. "Can you see anything?" he asked Jack, who stood up in the bow of the boat, peering into the indistinct distance.

"I cannot," replied Jack. "We've got about thirty yards to go."

Bang! Bang! Bang! Three successive bursts of enemy shrapnel came from somewhere Jack could not locate. In a few minutes the boats grounded on the beach. The troops scrambled out helter-skelter. Turks were waiting for them. The beach was swept by machine gun, rifle and shrapnel fire. A tornado of flying lead filled the air. Bullets came down on the troops as rain upon mown grass! A bullet took the tip off Sam's left index finger. He hopped about for a moment, crying out: "Gosh! if this ain't murder!"

"Line up, boys!" shouted Jack to his section, "up that hill, take what cover you can! Come on!"

Sixty men started to follow Jack. In the hell, din and confusion of the landing, he appeared to that immediate section to be the only leader in sight. Jack made for the hill—it was really a nobby sort of wart on the side of a hill—and the men followed him, bayonets fixed, teeth set, going as hard as they could through black gritty sand, and then up sandstone ways.

Straight into the heart of some low scrub, growing on the wart, Jack plunged, to find himself

on the top of a Turk who was sniping. Hawley was close on his heels. The Turk fired at Jack, missing him, but the bullet hit Hawley in the forehead. He dropped dead. Jack's bayonet accounted for the Turk.

Up the hill he went, a hill that was spitting fire, smoke and death. He thought it was about time to dig in. He turned to give the order. Instead of seeing sixty men he only saw five about him. The balance lay scattered down the hillside, some dead, some dangerously wounded, but dead or wounded, all under a murderous sheet of fire that swept the hillside, cutting the Australians down, as it clipped away the boughs of the stunted scrub.

A company of troops rushed by Jack. He joined in the chase as if the Australians were a pack of harriers following a paper trail. So they were following a trail, but it was a red trail of fire from the first trench held by the Turks.

The soldiers swept into the trench with a cheer ! Some of the Turks remained to argue the point with the Australians, but the bulk of them ran squealing, for fear of being stuck, like pigs, to the second trench. Those Turks who stopped to argue, argue no more.

"Advance, Australia !" resounded through the bushes. "Into the cows ! Bog in, boys, bog in !"

The second trench was a nasty one to storm, hidden in thick shrubbery, somewhere ahead of

them, dug into a cliff of loose sandstone. The troops just paused to take breath, and then with a "Coo-ee!" they charged like fiends shot by a catapult from hell!

Swearing, tripping, slipping, sliding, and slithering on the sandstone, they literally smashed their way forward under a hail of bullets from concealed machine guns; pulling themselves up by the bushes, and yelling "Australia for ever!" even though they were dropping "plunk! plunk! like meat!" as Sam afterwards described the way the poor boys were bowled over by the machine guns. "Allah! Allah!" cried the Turks above the din. "Come on, you ——! We'll give you Allah!" the boys replied. Like the soldiers in Flanders, Uncle Toby spoke about, the Australians swore horribly at Anzac.

It was cruel the way our fellows were cut up, but they held on. They would have that sandstone trench!

"Now, lads!" cried someone, "another rush, and we'll be in amongst the ——!"

"Hurrah!" came from about nineteen men, for that was what was left of the company of about eighty men who started to storm that section of the Turk's second-line trench. Into the trench they went. Nothing could stop those mad Australians! Then the fight between Australian and Turk was hand to hand, foot to foot, thrust for stab and stab for thrust. Above the soldiers, in the heavens, was the volleying thunder of

great guns ; beneath them, in the trench, were dead and wounded men, trampled and sullied with blood and dirt ! In less than seven minutes that trench belonged to the Australians !

Flushed with success, out of breath with their heroic fighting, the Australians made every effort to consolidate in their hard-won position. Grim, determined, they intended to hang on like bulldogs, to hold the trench in a vice-like grip, to die in its shambles before they yielded one foot of earth that they had already paid so dearly for. Each man had fought his way through the shrubbery practically single-handed, for it was almost impossible in the thick undergrowth to see what progress any section of troops was making. The inspiring cheers, and the welcome "Coo-ees," told each soldier battling forward, that however many brave fellows were falling, the line itself, torn and agonised though it was in places, was not wavering, and that it was to each man, for the honour of Australia, to keep up his end of the stick.

Jack and Gustave Muller were in the trench together, but the balance of the men of Ironbark never saw that Turkish trench.

Ted Debenham lay on a ridge, with three dead Turks beside him. Evidently he had met them one after another as they came at him, killing each man. Apparently he had then rushed forward in continuation of the charge he was making, for the Turks lay behind him on the lower surface

of the hill. In the act of still going upward to the enemy trenches, a bullet had struck him, and killed him. He was shot through the heart. His face still showed a smile of satisfaction, that may have had its birth when he bayoneted the third Turk.

Sam was lying further down the hill, the upper portion of his right leg shattered by a bullet. A hot sun's rays beat down upon him in his sufferings; no greater than those endured by his brave comrades lying wounded in the hills and valleys waiting for help. The loss of blood gave them an unquenchable thirst. Hundreds like Sam had not a drop of water to drink. They just had to "stick" their agony. Most of them did so almost without a groan, to the eternal honour of the race.

Sam could not move nor raise his head above a small sand ridge that lay between him and some Turks with a machine gun. He could hear the bullets flying low and close, for he was in a direct line of fire to the beach. The enemy never ceased till dusk, from pumping that stream of stinging, singing lead over him.

How the other men from Ironbark had fared Sam did not know. He thought they must have caught it hotter as they went closer up to the trench, but he felt sure that the troops, as a body, had made good, for it had cheered him to listen to the Australian "Coo-ees" reverberating on the ridge of the hill. He could hear the war-

ships firing to silence the enemy guns that were sending shells on to the beach.

It looked only a space of time until one of the machine-gun bullets would "get him," but Sam did not lose hope. It was a long way to Ironbark but, he reckoned, with a bit of luck, that he would get back somehow to Nelly in the hills. Even if the Turks hit him again, it did not follow that they would wipe him out. He was worth an army of dead Turks, and he, the mail-man from Ironbark, would not cry "Hold, enough!" to any blighter of Islam !

For fifteen hellish hours the Australians held on to that ridge by virtue of their rifle fire, without the support of a single field-piece. They were shelled by the enemy and sniped at, but they sat tight. Shrapnel shells came over them with hoarse screeching, threatening sounds, followed by a bursting bang, distributing hundreds of ugly round bullets, that plunged into the ground with a dull thud, tiny clouds of dust showing just where each impact took place. When dusk fell, like a mantle of softness over the hills, the Turks redoubled their efforts to capture the trench. Night came, but it did not bring with it the darkness Australians know. The land was not blinded in the darkness of obliteration, but only washed in a dense sort of twilight, which outlined and falsified the vague shadowy hill-slopes about them.

These hills were full of Turks. They made the valley echo with the rattle of musketry. It sobbed

at times like some distraught soul, only to rise to a perfect crescendo of rapid fire, that in its turn died away to a crack ! crack ! and then, quite suddenly, it burst forth again in a perfect fury of death-dealing dances. The Turkish guns barked in vain—in vain so far as shifting the Australians off the ridge that they had won.

At midnight, Jack and Gustave took part in what the troops called a “fair dinkum demonstration.” The Turks opened with a torrent of screeching shells. Guns were banging on every side; rifles and machine guns blazing out their leaded messengers of death. In the midst of this din, this murderous hurly-burly, the Australians jumped up on to the trench parapets and blazed back at the enemy with a coolness that was sublime !

To Jack it seemed as if every shot was screaming for his blood, but it was “all part of the game” ; what some of the troops, when they compared notes together, after the assault, admitted with a grim smile, was the “job they’d enlisted for.” In spite of appalling losses the Australian spirit was not to be quenched. Every man of them was as keen and as full of fight as ever. Before the dawn arrived the Turks had ceased to press home their assault. They realised they were not going to drive the Australians into the sea ; indeed, they were not too sure that, man for man, the Australians had not given them a hammering.

During the night some Turks made a rush at one

section of the trench. A party of Australians poured into the oncoming troops a hail of lead that had the effect of arresting the line. Some of the Australians, including Gustave Muller, jumped out of the trench, and charged the disgruntled Turks, bayoneting some of them, though the greater number escaped.

In the morning Jack missed Gustave. On inquiry he found he had taken part in the charge, but he had not returned. Jack looked through a periscope on to the scene of the night's affray. He saw Muller lying motionless amongst some dead Turks. He watched him for some time, and he came to the conclusion that he was still alive, for he thought he saw Muller's hand move. Either Muller was badly hurt, or he was "shamming dead" to escape the attention of the sniping Turks. Jack made up his mind that at dusk he would crawl out from the trench, and bring Gustave in or perish in the attempt. Gustave was one of the Ironbark boys. Where were the others? Poor Hawley! There were reasons beyond that why he would like to save the life of Gustave Muller . . . yes, he could die in such an attempt as that.

The day through Muller lay among the dead Turks, apparently as dead as they. Some of Jack's mates swore he was dead, and sought to dissuade the Sergeant from his attempt.

"You are going to certain death," said Corporal Higgins, who came from the wheat lands.

"Don't do yerself in, Sergeant," a Port Mel-

bourne "rat" chipped in, and he was as brave a "little rat" as ever stepped jauntily along Bay Street.

"I'll risk it," replied Jack.

At dusk, with the utmost caution, Jack wriggled over the parapet, slowly pushing a sand-bag before him in the direction of Muller, who lay about twenty yards from the trench. He had crawled about five yards when he heard the bullets going "zip, zip" over the sand-bag.

"I told you so!" exclaimed Corporal Higgins to the "Rat." "I knew he'd draw their fire. Why the hell he couldn't stop in the trench I don't know. The man's dead anyhow. I haven't seen him move the whole bloody day."

"Well, I twigged him," said the "Rat," sharply. "Without kidding he did, he lifted up an arm of a 'stinker.' He kidded the Turks all right. They ain't fired over the 'stinkers' since. Some of them may do a break in the same place to-night."

For ten minutes Jack did not move the sand-bag. Then he pushed it forward again. With frequent stoppings he at last reached Muller, who was lying on his side apparently dead. Other Australians were beside him. Jack lay down for a while by the unconscious man. He judged that Muller was badly wounded by a large pancake of blood formed on his tunic at the right shoulder.

Muller had fallen with his head to the enemy, and with his feet pointing to the Australian trench. With infinite difficulty and by the exercise

of the utmost caution, Jack contrived to hook Gustave's left foot under his right armpit, and started to drag him to the trench. Gustave commenced to groan, but Jack crawled on. The pain of moving brought Muller back to consciousness. His senses, quickened with the instincts of self-preservation, made him take a grip of himself and suppress his groans lest he should attract the Turks' fire.

The Turks did, however, become aware of the attempt being made to rescue him. There had been no quarter given or taken that day, and therefore the Turks, quite devoid of any humane feelings, began firing in the direction of the two men. The Australians replied to the vindictive Turkish fire, and they were successful in smothering it to some extent.

Slowly Jack crawled towards his comrades, dragging Muller along with him. The men, covering him with their fire, were in a state of suppressed excitement, fearing every moment that the Turks would "get him." Still Jack came on, and he reached the trench with his burden, the bullets buzzing past him like angry wasps. Muller was pulled into the trench, and Jack was in the act of following him when a bullet smashed his ankle bone.

"They've got me on the tape!" he cried; "but I'm satisfied."

The troops in the trench gave Jack a cheer, while he smiled as if a shattered bone was a

mere bagatelle. His boot was full of blood, a red stream trickled from it.

"Look to Muller," he said, "I'm all right. Get him down to the beach as quickly as possible."

The cry of "Stretcher-bearers here!" brought a couple of those splendid fellows whose gallantry in the service of the Red Cross is the admiration of the army, who can appreciate, at its proper worth, the pluck and the devotion the members of the A.M.C. display under the most galling of fires.

The way to the beach was long, without road, over sandstone boulders, through prickly scrub, past a nest of snipers. It was punctuated with bursts of shrapnel, yet the stretcher-bearers went on with Muller as if they were well out of the range of the enemy's guns. Prior to taking Muller down to the beach where the Red Cross flag fluttered over some dug-outs in the side of the cliff, the stretcher-bearers had picked up Sam and carried him to the same temporary haven. In the shelters were rows of wounded men who had had their injuries temporarily dressed, waiting for the time to come when they were to be transferred to the hospital ships. Many of the soldiers were smoking cigarettes with the utmost nonchalance, and taking the stirring events most philosophically. They could hear the shells hurtling overhead, and the wash of the sea as its waves broke along the shore.

Later, Jack was brought down from the trench, and placed in the clearing station. He was pale

from loss of blood. The smile he still carried on his face was a wan one. One of the doctors came to his stretcher, and asked in a cheery manner :

“ Well, old fellow, where were you hit ? ”

Even as he said the words he was cutting away the blood-sodden boot.

“ They got me in the chest,” said Jack.

“ What ? Let me see ! ”

Jack had fainted.

Coming down Jack had been hit by a spent bullet, but he had not said anything to the stretcher-bearers. Bumped and jolted over the trackless path, in extreme pain, faint from loss of blood, he bit his lips and “ stuck it.” If the ambulance men could face the danger of these valleys to try to save his life, Jack felt it was up to him not to whimper.

The doctor dressed Jack’s wounds. He found the spent bullet had lodged in the chest wall, but as there was an absence of blood-spitting he diagnosed that Jack’s right lung had escaped.

“ Case of high tension. Like all Australians, full of nerve power, fight like furies, stick it as long as needed, then bloodless, broken, smashed to bits, try to smile, tell you they’re all right, and give the lie to their own words by fainting. A great race ! A great race ! ”

With those words the doctor passed on to the next case.

The wounded men were carried on stretchers to the barges. The barges were towed, by a

steam pinnace, to the hospital ships. A long shallow case to take a stretcher was swung out in the ship's crane, and lowered into the barge. The wounded men, one by one, were lifted with their stretchers, placed on the box, and hauled aloft. Then they were swung in on board the ship and the order was given to "Lower! Easy aft."

The box went slowly down to the deck, and rested there without the slightest jolt. The next thing the wounded men realised was that they were going down in the ship's elevator, past wards of white cots, till they reached the ward they were allotted to. There they were put to bed.

A feeling of comfort was everywhere : the sweet smell of antiseptics and chloroform permeated the ward. Jack fell into a deep slumber. He had had no sleep, nor had his mates, since they landed from the troopship to storm the supposed inaccessible and unconquerable heights of Gallipoli.

CHAPTER XVIII

LETTERS TO IRONBARK—THE CASUALTY LIST

TOWARDS the end of May the letters posted in Cairo by the men of Ironbark, on the eve of their departure for the Front, arrived at the post office in the hills. Mrs. Debenham opened the mail-bag. She was more than surprised to see in her son's handwriting, a letter marked, "On Active Service," addressed to Gretchen Muller. The discovery gave her a shock. Then she saw there was a letter from Ted to herself. She hastily tore it open and read :

"CAIRO,

"*April 3, 1915.*

"MY DEAR MOTHER,

"We have been ordered to the Front. I suppose that will be the end of us. I have had a rotten time in Egypt, and though enlisting for King and Country sounded a few months ago very fine and large, my opinion is that those who have any sense, keep out of this game. If I had known as much as I know now, I'd have stood all the cold-footin' barrack the crowd of high-bawlers could send. I'd rather hear the buzz of the saw on the hill-top than the best band in Cairo. However, as I am in with the fighters—real fire-eaters, some of them, I don't think!—I will do my best to keep my end up.

"I suppose you will see that I am writing to

Gretchen Muller. I am only doing so because I promised to let her know how her brother was getting on. Gustave is a decent little cove, and we are real good pals. Jack has had a week in the hospital, the Palace Hotel, a great place, suffering from dysentery. The doctor offered to sick-list him from the firing line, but he wouldn't chuck the job when he had the chance. Sam and Hawley are in great spirits and spoiling to get to work. They both kid themselves no end that they are good with the bayonet.

"You may get a surprise, but it will be all right when I get back. If I don't come back, well, I've done my 'blessed duty' for once in my life. I think it's up to Marion to go as a nurse to the soldiers—the nurses are simply great—no kid—and it will be to her credit to belong to such a fine body of women. Let her get a move on.

"If I go out I've paid my accounts in this world, and I'll get on the shady side of Peter, and book myself for a fair dinkum go in the next. What? Tell that old sausage, Martin, he can have one at my expense.

"I almost forgot to tell you about the scarab. What sort of game's Marion on in giving me a thing like that? You can't fool with dead Egyptians, you know. I know you're a bit superstitious, and I 'spect it's the drop of Irish in me that gets me in the same holts. I went down to a fortune-teller and she sized me up and down. Then took me into a room about as big as a match-box, lit some incense, and said after some hanky-panking, 'You are going to die.' I said, 'So are you, you old hag; if you think I'm going to give you six piastres for a croak like that, you can go and wash yourself.'

"'No! No! You will die!'

“ ‘ Will I ? ’ I said. ‘ So will you if you can’t chuck me a better bone than that.’ ”

“ ‘ Ah ! ’ said the old crone, ‘ you—you—have the scarab.’ ”

“ My oath, she did scare me ! ”

“ ‘ What if I have,’ I said, ‘ I didn’t steal it.’ ”

“ ‘ Your father did—you will die.’ ”

“ I’m still scared. How did she know I had a scarab ? Or that father stole it ? Did he ? I thought my dad was a respectable mariner—A 1 at Lloyd’s, but I was ever a child, a child of innocence. This scarab business is a bit over the fence though. What do you think ? It’s going with me to the Front, anyway. I send Marion my love ; it’s the right thing to do, and we boys of the Australian brigade always do the right thing, and always make necessity a great virtue.

“ Your affectionate son,

“ TED.”

When Mrs. Debenham had finished reading Ted’s letter, she called to Marion and handed the letter to her. Her daughter perused the letter with mixed feelings of displeasure and wonder.

“ When did Ted see Gretchen ? ”

“ I suppose he saw her before he went.”

“ How could he ? She was not in Ironbark when he left.”

“ Well, Marion, I don’t know. What’s it matter, dear, when he saw her ? ”

“ It does indeed, mother, a lot may turn on it. It’s all very well for Ted to write in the devil-me-eare style he affects to have, but I don’t like the tone.”

“ You’re very suspicious, Marion ? ”

“ Well, I can’t help it. Things do not seem right. I feel like a witch, and when I feel like that I’ve got second sight. There’s something—something, mother, I cannot understand.”

“ What a girl you are for alarming folk ! You make my heart go pit-a-pat ! ”

Mrs. Debenham looked as if she suffered from heart trouble. It was that probably which gave her the hectic flush on her cheeks.

“ I cannot understand why Ted writes to Gretchen Muller ? ” Marion said with emphasis.

“ Dear child, he tells you, doesn’t he ? ”

“ I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings, mother, but I cannot help thinking that Ted has not been quite straight with us. It doesn’t sound loyal to one’s own brother to say it, but you know you never can get to the bottom of Ted.”

“ I don’t think he means any harm, Marion—boys are often like that ; they don’t tell their mothers everything. I would be glad to share Ted’s confidences, but I’ll never ask him for them. If he does not come to me, and tell me what there is to know, it is worse than useless to try to make him.”

“ I think so of Ted, mother. I suppose women feel differently to men. I could not be happy if my innermost thoughts were not shared with you. It’s since Ted went to live at the mill that he seems to have grown away from us. At one time he could not rest without seeing you every day.”

"He was younger then," said Mrs. Debenham with a sigh. "It's only when children are young that mothers get any real happiness out of them. You try to train them in the way you desire them to go, but you only have partial successes. Ted is thoughtless. He does not know how easily a son may wound a mother's feeling. Sons cannot understand the abounding depths of a mother's love. They realise mothers love them, but what that love is no one but the woman who has carried and born children is privileged to know."

"It's very sad that it should be so, mother."

"More sad than you can yet realise, though you may some day. You watch your children growing up, you weave pleasant anticipations about them, and when the time comes for the realisation of your hopes, you find only disappointment."

"But that's the world over, mother. I suppose Ted is no worse than the rest of young men. They make their own friends. They have a sense that everything is all right at home, that mother does not mind if she sees less of them, and so they drift away. A daughter, married or single, is always a daughter."

"That's true enough, Marion, but even you do not know, you cannot know, what the first-born means to a mother. I cannot explain how it is myself. I can only tell you that it is so—it is just the mother in you."

"I think I understand a little, mother."

"It is not the love a woman bears to a man.

Women have two distinct loves: the love for a man and the love for her child. You, Marion, have been hurt by the bitterness that often lies hidden in the love of a man, but you have not felt how sometimes a son may hurt his mother's motherhood."

"I suppose it's human nature, mother. Don't we expect too much from it? Ted, no doubt, has his own reasons for writing to Gretchen, but why has Danvers not done so? Mother, my heart sinks when I think of Jack. At our last meeting I assumed everything, in truth I knew nothing. His silence alarmed me, more than if he stormed. This letter of Ted's renews my doubts . . ."

Mrs. Debenham despairingly wrung her hands.

"I don't know! I don't know!" she exclaimed. "You were so headstrong, Marion—but there, don't worry! Do you forget Jack's meeting with Gretchen?"

"I forget nothing, mother!" replied Marion, from the depths of her heart. "Is there any letter to anybody from him?"

"Yes, to Nipper!"

"Only to Nipper?"

"Only to Nipper. Did you expect a letter?"

"No! Why should Jack write to me? I don't want him to write to me . . . why should I? . . . I don't care . . . women never do care—everybody knows that . . . they just love a man, and live for him, and he goes out of their lives, leaving

their heart like an empty nest from which the bird has flown—yes, mother, my heart's just like that. . . . It would be silly to care. Wouldn't it? Oh, mother! Cannot you see? cannot you guess, that I never was so hungry for a word from Jack as I am now?"

"Well, perhaps there will be word of him in Nipper's letter," answered her mother soothingly; "and I see here is a letter with the Cairo stamp on it for Nelly. That's from Sam without a doubt. For all his chaff about women, his heart still sticks closer than glue to Nelly. There's one too for Mrs. Muller—what a budget of news! Here's a pareel too for Nelly, it feels like a silk scarf."

The eternal feminine was more than the post-mistress. Around the letters, and the parcels, that passed through Mrs. Debenham's hands she whetted her curiosity. It did not occur to her that Sam's letter, and present, to Nelly was a sharp reminder to Marion of "what might have been," the "might have beens" that Sam was fond of declaring were "mostly ain'ts."

Nipper drove up to the post office with Nelly just about this time. Mrs. Debenham called out to them that there were letters from Egypt. Nelly opened her letter and read:

"CAIRO,

"MY DEAR NELLIE,

"April 3, 1915.

"We're going up to the war; it's real great to see the boys. They are a treat, hard, hard as

Ironbark. You should see them, Nelly—we're going to hev' a great time. I should just smile sticking a Turk. Don't turn me down 'cause I've got the bloodthirsty habit. Yer get it out here—never knew such a thirsty place. Martin ought to take a pub here—the Palace Hotel would just suit him and 'Polly.' Just about hold 'em. How's Mrs. O'Callaghan? Tell her the gin's rotten here—everything's rotten. Jack and me fixed the fortune-teller up to bluff Ted on the scarab—told her all about him, and then kidded him on. You should have seen him when he came out. Gosh, he was scared! He's written home about it! I 'spect we'll tell him later. How's Nipper? How's everybody? We're all right. We'll get through, don't you fret, Nelly. We'll get through. I sent you a scarf, and yer kin just think when yer put it round yer neck that it's my arm. Good-bye, Nellie! I send you heaps of love. Don't worry, we're out to do our job. If yer see Sandy Pilkins, tell him the pigs here are the size of black fleas. I hope they ain't working the roan horse too hard in the coach. The row I'm going to will be a popgun to the row I'll make when I come back if 'Carbine' is ruined. Good-bye, Nellie! The hair's still red, and me heart's still true to you.

“Good-bye, old girl—there's a chance, girl—a chance! If I don't come back, then it has to be, and I must say for the last time, Good-bye!

“Your SAM.”

Nelly laughed as she read Sam's letter till she came to the last lines. Then she swallowed lumps in her choking throat.

Nipper opened Jack's letter and read its con-

tents. Turning to Marion he said, "I might have known as much !"

"Known what, Nipper ?" asked Marion, her eyes beaming on the lad with friendliness. Marion could be very winning and persuasive when she was moved to be so. She hoped Nipper would say what was in the letter.

"What's he say ?" she asked.

"Well, I just wouldn't like to tell you all he does say. Yer see it may be private."

"Tell me what you can, Nipper," Marion pleaded in a soft sweet voice. "You're not a hard boy, Nipper, now are you ?"

Nipper's broad smile illuminated his face.

"By gum," he said, "yer remind me of Jeanie ; when she wants anything she just purrs like that."

"Now, don't be a Turk, Nipper, tell me what's in the letter."

"It's private, I tell yer. Jack don't write to me, and 'spose I'll stick his letter up on the notice board in Martin's hotel."

Marion looked hurt.

"Say," Nipper said in a yielding tone, "did yer get a letter from Jack yerself ?"

"No ! I wish I had !"

"He wrote all right ! 'Spect it's gone astray ; they say these soldiers' mails are awful."

"How do you know he wrote to me ?" asked Marion. "Does he say so ?"

"No ! That's why I know he wrote to yer.

When a man writes to yer of the one he loves best in the world, what do you think ? ”

“ Does he ? ” said Marion, her eyes dancing with pleasurable expectation.

“ Yes, he trusts me, Jack does. I can’t tell yer more. I think yer ought to hev’ made it up with him afore he went. Jeanie and me don’t keep a row up longer than a day—just a day if it’s a real big row.”

“ Won’t you tell me any more, Nipper ? ”

“ Well, I just tell yer this. He might have thought his letter would go astray. You see he was going to the Front. Jack knew what he was up agin, so he just sent his ‘ good-bye ’ to yer.”

Marion went hurriedly inside the house.

“ If you give me the letters for the Mullers I will slip across with them after I have driven Nelly home,” Nipper said to Mrs. Debenham.

“ Thank you, Nipper ! And here are the papers.”

“ Right O ! Up you get, Nelly ! Be careful ! That step’s a bit high, and your skirt’s a bit short.”

“ Don’t you look then ! ” said Nelly, laughing.

“ That’s all right ! I’m looking straight up the valley road. It’s a fine view, but I’ll bet there’s a better one behind me ! ”

“ I’ll tell Jeanie when I see her ! ” said Mrs. Debenham.

“ That’s all right ! ” replied Nipper.

Nelly and Nipper got into the cart, and went on their way home. Nipper handed Jack’s letter to Nelly to read.

“He doesn’t say anything about Marion?” said Nelly.

“Doesn’t he tell me to say good-bye to them all?” asked Nipper.

“You’ve made Marion happy with a lie.”

“It ain’t no lie,” cried Nipper, “and if it is a lie, it’s a good lie. Wasn’t she askin’ for it? If he don’t come back she won’t know; if he does she won’t care. He’s not turned her down, she’s turned him down, and by gum! she’d like to turn him up now. Jeanie plays those games with me. Sam knows the mob of yer—yer can’t kid him.”

“Read Sam’s letter,” said Nelly, as she took the reins from Nipper.

“What do you think of it?” she asked as Nipper handed the letter back. . . .

“Get up, yer cow!” cried Nipper to his young horse who had fallen into a walk under Nelly’s relaxing grip of the reins.

“What’s come over you?” said Nelly in surprise, looking earnestly at Nipper.

“Oh, be quiet! Do yer want a man to break down? Do you know what it all means?”

From that out they drove home in silence.

* * * * *

Marion had not been in her room ten minutes when she heard her mother give a wailing cry between a shriek and a moan. Alarmed, she rushed into the post office to find her mother in a swoon, lying upon the floor with a newspaper in her hand. At once Marion jumped to the worst possible

conclusion, seeing in an instant that her mother had been reading the war casualty list of killed and wounded. She snatched the paper from her mother's limp fingers, and began, in feverish haste, to read the list. Her face was blanched, her breath came quickly. The first name she recognised was that of—

“Sergeant John Danvers, killed in action.”

Her senses reeled, but she went on to the bitter end.

“Private Edward Debenham, killed in action.”

“Private Hugh Hawley, killed in action.”

“Private Sam Harebrown, severely wounded.”

“Private Gustave Muller, dangerously wounded.”

For a few moments Marion's head swam in giddiness. The walls of the room rocked before her. With a great effort she steadied herself. Then she turned to her mother. She forgot herself entirely. It was for her mother that her heart welled in pity, the divine pity that only such a loving daughter at such a crisis could feel. Marion knew how Ted was idolised by his mother. She felt that now, or never, she must be strong. When her mother was better, when her mother was composed, then she could think of herself. She could try then, if she had the heart, to explain the great numbness that chilled her being.

Tenderly she lifted her mother's head. With inexpressible sadness, and love, she looked earnestly into her mother's face, no longer flushed with roses, but ashen grey.

“Poor mother !” she thought, “she’s had a hard time ! Husband drowned, son killed ! What’s my grief to hers, which is immeasurable ?” She got her mother on to her feet, and her mother then walked as a person walks in a trance, to her room, when Marion persuaded her to lie down. She took her mother’s hand and held it in silent sympathy.

* * * * *

Some hours later, Marion, sitting on the old sea-chest, tried to realise what Jack Danvers’ death meant to her. She could hardly believe that he was dead. It seemed so hard to believe that she would never again hear his rich musical voice, or never again feel the manly grasp of his strong hand. It was hard ! Hard that his young life should have gone out like that ! And he had sent her a last “Good-bye.” If he had been guilty he would never have done that in the face of death.

“Jack ! Jack !” she murmured to herself, as the Irish call to their dead, “come back to me. You’re not dead ! You wouldn’t die like that ; you wouldn’t leave me ? Your spirit would come back here to the old lilac tree ! Come back to me !”

She sobbed quietly. When the first bitter draught of grief was over, her face was set like stone. She heard her mother coming softly toward her.

“My poor darling !” her mother said. She stooped and kissed Marion on the forehead.

“ Oh, mother ! We must be brave ! ”

She put her arm around her mother, and the two women went into the house.

* * * * *

It was a cruel blow to Mrs. Debenham to receive news of the death of her son in the way she did. Under ordinary circumstances she would have been notified by the Australian Commonwealth military authorities fully forty-eight hours before the lists of killed and wounded were published. In Ted's case his wife was registered as the next-of-kin, and she was the one to whom the death notice was sent. Gretchen was not to blame. The news of her husband's death had prostrated her, and her mother would not leave her alone in the house. They had no means by which they could send the sad news to Mrs. Debenham, and so things had happened as they did. When Nipper went across with the letters to Gretchen she told him that she had been notified of the death of Ted Debenham, and she asked the boy to take a letter from her to Ted's mother.

Nipper was of the usual sunny obliging disposition of bush boys, who are keenly moved for the moment with sympathy for anyone's grief. The youngsters just as easily toss their own troubles aside. Their volatile spirits, a national possession, do not allow Australians to be down-hearted for long. After the first pangs, the Australian reckons he has work to do, and he is mighty glad to be quit of the mourning business.

At least, that is how the hill folk feel when a bush funeral with its horsemen, crape streamers hanging from their hats, is over, for the little procession resolves itself into a melancholy lonesome picture, as it moves at a snail's pace, along a deserted road to a desolate, unkempt, overgrown grass paddock, the bush folk call their God's acre. Over, the burial is a bad business, well done.

Nipper waited while Gretchen wrote the letter for Mrs. Debenham, and then he galloped at top speed into Ironbark. Martin, who had been across to the post office for his mail, saw the boy coming down the road. He had just finished reading the casualty list in the paper that came to him by post. He gave Nipper a "hoy!" and beckoned for him to come quickly. When Nipper pulled up at the hotel verandah Martin handed him the paper, and pointing to the casualty list he said :

"Read that ! My God ! It's awful !"

Nipper's face was bloodless when he had finished. The shock caused by reading of what had happened to the men of Ironbark, almost deprived him of speech. His mind refused to grasp the tragedy of his friends being blotted out, some for ever, in such a sudden manner. When he did speak, it was only to reiterate what Martin had said :

"My God ! It's awful !"

What more could he say ? At once an appeal to God, it was also, as said, a profound acknowledgment of man's horror at Fate's inscrutable decrees. It was awful !

Nipper went to the post office and knocked for a time. Marion at last answered the call, and he handed to her Gretchen's letter. She told him in low and hurried tones of what had taken place. Then she went with the note to her mother, who was sitting with her hands clasped before her in the parlour of the post office. The blinds were drawn, but the strong light of an Australian sun, though modified, lightened the room.

"Here's a letter, mother, from Gretchen Muller."

"Open it, dear, and read it to me. I'm feeling very, very tired."

"Shall I read it first myself?"

"No, read it to me. I can bear anything now."

Marion read in a soft low voice :

"DEAR MRS. DEBENHAM,

"I only write now, after the dreadful news, because I feel it is only right that you should know that before going to the war your son married me. As a woman and a mother you must feel that in doing so, Ted not only did the right thing under the painful circumstances, but that he did the only thing possible that could in the end give him happiness. I know this is true, for I have a letter he sent through Gustave to me, saying so.

"At his request my mother and myself kept the marriage a secret one, and in no other way have I wronged you. You were of course entitled to know at once of our marriage, but Ted was the one who should have told you.

"I feel that you will like to know that I loved

him dearly. News of Ted's death has made me ill, or I would have let you know of it sooner. In the letter Nipper has just given to me he says, 'You are the best mother in the world, and one to whom, if anything should happen to him, I could go and find full forgiveness, and abundant love.' You won't harden your heart against me ?

"Gustave and Ted, you will be glad to know, were the best of friends in Egypt. They let bygones be bygones. Surely, in the midst of our great grief, we can at least help each other by kind thoughts ?

"Your affectionate daughter,

"GRETCHEN DEBENHAM."

"Mother ?"

"Well, Marion ?"

"What will you say ?"

"I'm very ill, dear—but I think I would like to reply now. It may be too late otherwise——"

"Oh, mother !"

"Don't worry, dear ! Life's not worth it. Get me pen and paper, and like a good girl leave me alone."

"You look so awfully ill, mother, I don't like to leave you. I'll go and get Mrs. Hickford to run across. I must have someone in the house."

"Perhaps it would be as well."

Marion gave her mother the writing materials. Then she kissed her, and went out saying, "I will not be long."

Mrs. Debenham sat up to the table with an effort, and commenced to write :

“ MY DEAR GRETCHEN,

“ Come to me for the sake of my dear son. Forgive me for all the hard things I have thought of you. At such a time . . .”

The pen dropped from Mrs. Debenham's fingers.

“ I feel so tired !” she said wearily. “ I must rest.”

She left her seat, and lay down on the sofa.

A deep sigh escaped from her.

Mrs. Hickford and Marion entered the room.

“ She's gone to sleep,” Marion whispered.

Mrs. Hickford crept on her tiptoes, and looked into Mrs. Debenham's face. Then softly she went out with Marion, shutting the parlour door very quietly.

Mrs. Hickford, with her eyes full of pity, took Marion to her room, and said :

“ My poor child, your mother is dead !”

CHAPTER XIX

“DANVERS WAS AN AUSTRALIAN”—HAPPINESS IN
IRONBARK

FOR some time Nipper stood talking to Martin on the verandah of the hotel. Mrs. Hickford ran across the road from the post office and told them hurriedly how Mrs. Debenham had died. She had not a moment to spare. She was almost breathless. She was going back instantly, which she did.

Martin told Nipper that he had better ride home and see if he could bring Nelly down at once, as it was quite impossible that they could leave Marion alone. Mrs. Hickford would, of course, do what she could for the poor girl, but he thought that Nelly, being a great friend of Marion's, was the one who should be with her at such a time.

Nipper went with speed, his quiver full of mournful news. Was there ever such a budget delivered in a bush home before ?

* * * * *

Tippins's mind recurred to Jack Danvers' box. The time for breaking the seal had arrived. He would have Martin and Sandy Pilkins present when he did so, in case of any question arising hereafter as to what was Danvers' legacy to Ironbark.

Nelly said she would not stay away from Marion

when she was in such trouble, for anything in the world. Tippins himself thought that Nipper should go across to Mrs. Muller and take her down in the cart with Nelly so that she could prepare Mrs. Debenham for burial. Mrs. Tippins did not know how Marion would like Mrs. Muller to go to her, but Tippins said that the time for feeling, if there was any, between the Debenhams and the Mullers had passed. Mrs. Muller was not the woman to carry her resentments beyond the grave. Such vindictiveness was not in Mrs. Muller, who had suffered too much in her life not to have sympathy with others in their grief. Marion and her mother had not done Mrs. Muller any harm, and he felt sure that his wife was taking a wrong view of Marion's attitude to Mrs. Muller. Ironbark was suffering too much for anybody to show any uncharitable feelings towards those most nearly concerned in the suffering. Such a time softened all hearts. Their best men were killed; others of their boys were wounded; and now their respected post-mistress was dead, as a result of shock caused by the dreadful tidings that had reached her in such a short space of time. How could it be otherwise than they should feel the deepest sorrow in their hearts? There was a gloom over the whole place. He had never seen such a gloom in the hills, or elsewhere. He prayed to God the world would not see such happenings again.

If by any chance his wife did take a right view

of the attitude of Marion towards Mrs. Muller, or of Mrs. Muller's feelings towards Marion, it was clear to him that Marion need not see Mrs. Muller unless she wished. Nelly could see to that. Mrs. Muller, as they knew, had laid out most of the folks who had died in Ironbark—not many, still she was the woman the settlers had been in the habit of calling in for that purpose. Mrs. Muller was not the woman to obtrude herself where she was not wanted. Nevertheless he hoped that Marion would see her since Mrs. Muller was a good motherly woman; a kind-hearted woman who would be a comfort to Marion in the trial she was going through; if Marion would only let her.

Nipper listened attentively to what was said. On a word from his father he went for Mrs. Muller, Nelly in the meantime waiting for Nipper's return. Mrs. Muller and Gretchen were shocked when they heard of Mrs. Debenham's death. Both of them offered to do anything in their power to help Marion.

Nipper drove Nelly and Mrs. Muller down to the post office. After they had gone into the house he waited outside for some time to see if he was wanted. Mrs. Muller came out, and asked him if he would drive back, and bring Gretchen down as Marion wanted to see her. "Tell her," said Mrs. Muller, "that Mrs. Debenham died while she was writing a letter to her." Greatly puzzled, but without question, Nipper drove back to Muller's

house again. He told Gretchen her mother wanted her down at the post office. Gretchen asked Nipper if he knew "what was in the letter?"

The boy answered, "I dunno."

To Nipper, driving to Ironbark, Gretchen alongside him, both of them silent and full of their own thoughts, the world seemed to be out of joint. Ironbark could never be the same again to him with the best of the boys gone, with the post-mistress dead! The cloud over Nipper was the first real heavy sadness that had ever fallen on his young joyous life. He could not believe that Jack Danvers was dead. Ted Debenham dead! Trooper Hawley, "who was all right," dead! Who would have believed that such dreadful things could happen in the space of a few months? Well, he would look after "Tim." That he could do for Jack; that was the thing Jack had asked him to do.

"It was awful!" Nipper was driving along, the tears running down his cheeks, and he was scarcely conscious of them.

"You are a dear good boy, Nipper," said Gretchen.

"Don't!" replied Nipper. "Don't! It's all too much," and Nipper's voice broke. "Jack, the best fellow that ever lived! Who would have thought that this war would have brought sorrow to us here in the hills?"

"We are suffering, Nipper, but Marion is suffering perhaps more than any of us."

"I know she is ! Yer see, it was through—it don't matter now. It will hev' to sort itself out. I'll hev' to leave Ironbark. It would kill me to go over the same tracks as the boys did, to see Jack's hut on the hill, the thought of Jack not there, Jack lying somewhere in the Turk's land, it would be a stab every day in me heart.

"There's 'Tim,' how can I face that fellow ? He'll know sooner or later. He's been whining each night this last week. I tell true, I've seen tears in his eyes. He's frettin', frettin' for Jack. Will he never come back ? I might hev' known somethin' wrong when 'Tim' whined."

"But 'Tim' has not howled ?" asked Gretchen, more for the purpose of saying something to conceal her own sorrow and emotion, than to elicit anything.

"No ! He's not howled !" replied Nipper, clutching at a straw. "'Tim's' not howled—and they say a dog that loves his master howls when his master dies ! Don't they ?"

"I have heard so," said Gretchen in a quiet tone.

"What rot !" cried Nipper. "How's 'Tim' to know ?"

"He's supposed to know by instinct," suggested Gretchen.

"Gum ! there might be something in it. Perhaps Jack isn't dead ! Perhaps it's all a horrible mistake !"

They had arrived at the post office. As she

got out of the cart, Gretchen said to Nipper, "I hope so."

* * * * *

Nipper had waited for an hour in front of the post office when Mrs. Muller came out and told him he was to drive Marion, Gretchen and Nelly to her house. Marion was going to leave the post office at once to stay with them until such time as she felt strong. There was an official coming up to take charge of the postal business. Nipper was to ask his father to come to the post office to make arrangements about the funeral.

In a few moments the three young women, heavily veiled, came out of the post office, and Nipper drove them without a word to Mrs. Muller's. Nipper rightly thought that grief like Marion's was outside the range of intrusion by anybody.

* * * * *

Driving home by himself he was concerned about his colt, the animal being in a coat of lather. "He is not going to Ironbark again to-day. Mrs. Muller's all right, but she's too heavy. Gum! the springs won't stand her, when the others are there. Father can go off, but his mare's going into the cart if there's any more up and down to Ironbark. My horse is only a colt, off the grass, green, see him sweat, twenty miles, hill roads! He can't stand it! Father's mare goes into the cart row or no row, er else father will ride her to Ironbark."

* * * * *

" You can drive me down to Martin's after tea," said his father. " I'm taking Danvers' box with me. Martin and Sandy will see me open it."

" And me too ! " said Nipper.

" I suppose yer can," replied his father.

" I should just think so, seein' Jack's my friend ! I'll have to put the mare into the cart."

" What ? You'll do nothin' of the sort ! "

" The colt's not going in, anyhow."

" Going to put Jimmy in the cart ? Damn ye, the dray horse wouldn't go in the shafts of that cart. What ere yer chopping at ? "

" Why can't your mare go in ? " asked Nipper.

" Because I won't have her in. I don't forget the time yer nigh founded her at the creek."

" Yer mean," said Nipper laughing, " when Mrs. Muller was tossed out ? "

" Yer know when I mean, Nipper ! Yer like a bull ant the way yer stick to a thing. Yer want yer own way every time."

" Oh, let him put in the mare ! " interjected Mrs. Tippins.

" I won't ! " replied Tippins. " His colt's havin' a spell while we're havin' tea."

" I know about that," said Nipper. " I put him out in the scrub, and giv' him such a belt on his tailboard, as took him a few chains away."

" How do you expect to catch him ? " asked his father.

" I ain't going to try—it's getting dark already. It's the mare in the cart, or no Ironbark ! "

"I'll ride the mare down, and carry the box in front of me," said his father.

"I thought you would. That's very like the Tippinses to nark like that."

"How are you going down?" his father inquired.

"I think I'll just ride with yer, Dad!"

Nipper's face showed a faint smile.

Mrs. Tippins glanced through the window towards the stable.

She was too sad to smile herself, but she had translated the gleam of the grin on Nipper's face aright.

Tippins looked up suspiciously.

"What do yer mean?" he asked Nipper.

"Yer see, I thought yer like to giv' the mare a run. I've already harnessed her in the cart."

"Have yer?"

"Yes, and we ain't got too much time to get to Martin's."

Nipper drove the mare down to Ironbark, his father growling the whole way about her being in the cart. Tippins' grumbles secretly amused the boy, who thought his father "had a rat" about his mare.

* * * * *

The three men, and Nipper, sat in the parlour of the Ironbark Arms. Martin shut the door and bolted it. Sandy Pilkins looked curiously at the box. Tippins placed it on the table with as much ceremony as if the box contained a hidden treasure.

"I think Mr. Tippins should open the box," said Martin, handing a hammer to him.

"Weel, it is a solemn occasion—we stand between the dead and the living. I no saying, but what we will ken more when yon box is open."

"You're right, Sandy, mon, ye've a great head!" Tippins observed.

Tippins knocked the lid off the box; a small box that had once contained soap. In it they found a soft hat, one they recognised that Danvers often wore. There were two holes in it, back and front, through the crown. Inside the hat was a letter addressed to "Mr. James Tippins," and endorsed "To be opened when news of my death is received. John Danvers."

Tippins broke the seal, and found the following statement which he read out aloud to his intensely interested listeners :

"I, John Danvers, desire to tell the true story of how Franz Muller, the German settler, came by his death on the hill-top. It is necessary, having regard to the reputations of others, besides my own, that this should be made public in whatever way my friends think desirable. How they carry out my request in that direction will not trouble me, since this story is only to be made public in the event of my death, news that may go to Ironbark any day, since I will ere long be in the fighting line.

"In this box is the hat I was wearing on the day of Muller's death, which shows two holes made through its upper part. The holes were made by a revolver bullet fired by Franz Muller

when the hat was on my head. Had the bullet travelled a quarter of an inch lower, it would have killed me. I say now that Muller, without cause, or any semblance of justification, tried to murder me under the following circumstances, and in the presence of Edward Debenham.

“I had been out after some dingoes that made tracks past Sandy Pilkins’ but I lost trace of them in the scrub at the back of the rifle butts. Coming back I met Ted Debenham at the butts, and I had a discussion with him concerning his conduct towards a lady. I told him that having the feeling I had towards his sister, I had no wish to involve his people in a scandal, but at the same time I owed myself something, and I could not permit the unfounded rumours to continue, that had already been too busy flying about Ironbark, with my name. I urged him to marry and thereby make an end to a position which was intolerable to all parties. We proceeded on our way arguing rather warmly on the subject.

“When we reached the crown of the hill we saw Muller, who as soon as he caught sight of us rushed forward, and when a few yards off took deliberate aim with the revolver, at me. I felt the bullet go close to my head. Debenham and I then rushed forward, and we both seized Muller. A desperate struggle ensued. Muller was demented with drink, and he fought us furiously with the strength of a madman. We tried in vain to wrest the revolver from him. In the struggle the weapon went off, and how that happened I do not know, nor does Debenham. The weapon was still in Muller’s hand when he fell back dead.

“Both of us were aghast at the horror of the whole thing. It was all so sudden. We did not know what to do. I was of the opinion that if

we reported Muller's death to the police that the whole of the circumstances leading up to his death must come out in evidence at the inquest. I thought that if we left his body where it fell the settlers of Ironbark, knowing the condition Muller was in from drink, that a jury of them would return a verdict of suicide.

"I then noticed, for the first time, that the revolver the dead man had in his hand was my own weapon. I pointed this out to Debenham. He realised as quickly as I did how strong such a find would point circumstantially to murder against me. It then became a case not only of Debenham doing the right thing, and of saving Debenham's family, but of saving myself from standing, even a formal trial, for the murder of Muller.

"I guessed at once that Muller had been to my hut, and that he had stolen my revolver from the nail on which it hung over the fireplace. I knew Muller was obsessed with a desire to kill me, but I was not alarmed, as I thought that if Muller would only leave the drink alone, he must see that he had no grounds for taking my life.

"I think I should also state that my possession of Debenham's revolver on the night when Trooper Hawley called with Boder in custody for the murder, was a mere accident. Debenham lent the weapon to me a few days before to try its penetrative power, which he had said was extraordinary. I was then contemplating getting a revolver of the same make.

"I foresaw that it was possible that a search might be made among the settlers to find cartridges to match the bullet in Muller's body, if the police did not accept a verdict of suicide, and therefore I disposed of the cartridges, some half-dozen, that were in my hut.

“ With these explanations I resume my story.

“ I took the revolver from Muller, and tossed it into a hollow tree, and we both left the place as quickly as possible ; Debenham leaving me and going to the mill by the valley road, while I went to my hut through the paddocks.

“ Debenham asked me if I had heard a rifle discharged just as Muller came over the crest of the hill. I could not be clear in my mind that I had. Everything happened so quickly. Afterward, of course, I became aware of what Boder, the other German, said, and how he thought he had killed Muller with the shot he fired. He was mistaken. Franz Muller came by his death in the way I have described. That he died so with murder in his heart against me, an innocent man, was his own fault and his own doing.

“ When these lines are read I shall be beyond man’s censure, and therefore, as I have nothing to gain and nothing to fear, I hope those who read this will believe that I have written the whole truth as God, in His great mercy, has given me to see it.

“ JOHN DANVERS.”

“ *Ironbark*, 1914.”

“ I thought so ! ” Martin said.

“ Man, I can tell ye the truth,” cried Sandy excitedly. “ I ken it all.”

“ Tell us what you know ! ” exclaimed Tip-pins.

“ I was speerin’ th’ day up the glen with me stalking glasses. Awa’ on the hill I saw the dom’ German come out of the heather, and fire his revolver. Debenham was with Jack and the

two men rushed him. The gun went off, and I saw the German fall."

The men stayed in the parlour talking and re-talking over Danvers' statement and its corroboration by Sandy. Finally, they decided to forward the statement to the Crown Law authorities, and with it a properly drawn declaration of what Sandy knew. They felt that truth was stamped in every line of Jack's writing, and that the document only had to be read to clear his character. Eventually this was done. They had the satisfaction of receiving a letter from the authorities stating a formal inquiry would take place in view of the further evidence that had been found. Mr. Stabbs, P.M., with eyeglass as uneven as ever, came to Ironbark to open the third inquiry into the death of Franz Muller.

He greeted Martin as an old friend, and even condescended to notice "Jessie." The old dog good-naturedly "bow-wowed" a welcome to him. He told Martin that he still had a very pleasant memory of the great goose he had dined upon on the last occasion at the hotel. He inquired after the cook, and handed Martin a shilling for Mrs. O'Callaghan, whom he opined would like "just a wee taste of gin."

The inquiry lasted ten minutes. Sandy Pilkins gave his evidence. Evidence was also taken as to the statement from Martin and Tippins, and it was also proved that it was in John Dan-

vers' handwriting. The P.M. then returned a verdict :

" I find that Franz Muller came by his death through a gunshot wound accidentally inflicted, probably by himself in a struggle, when he was suffering from the horrors of drink. I further find that John Danvers and Edward Debenham (both of whom have since fallen honourably in the field of battle) who were engaged in that struggle with Muller, are entitled to the highest praise for the part they took to prevent this mad-man, Muller, from being a murderer."

This finding was exhibited on the notice board in the bar of the hotel.

Though the settlers of Ironbark wondered at the strange turn of things that the whirligig of time had brought, they were quite satisfied that they had at last the " whole truth and nothing but the truth " about the death of Muller. It was commented that Danvers had not mentioned the lady's name, but Martin laid the law down very emphatically from his stool one night, in the presence of a bar full of men.

" Look yer here," he shouted. " A man as plays the game ain't givin' ladies away—do you hear me ? It's up to yer to follow the late Mr. Danvers' example, and keep yer mouths shut. Ain't that right ? " he asked.

" Good iron, Martin ! " replied one man, followed by murmurs of approval throughout the bar.

" Martin's right ! " shouted " Polly."

“Men, yer’ve said fair by me advice, so I’ll ask yer to drink to the memory of a white man, a straight man, the late Sergeant Danvers. Yer knew him, and that’s enough ! We’ve been hit hard here in Ironbark. There’s men here who tell me they’re going forward to do their bit. Well, good-luck to ’em, say I. We’re Australians, and when I say that I say everything. Sergeant Danvers was an Australian, and he’ll stand as a sample against the best they can send. He was a fair fighter—he fought Hawley, and you fellows know it—he fought fair. When we learn how he died, I’ll bet we’ll be proud that he was a man from Ironbark. I ask yer to drink to his memory in silence. . . .”

* * * * *

During the next few days events in Ironbark moved swifter than a weaver’s shuttle. A strange official was in possession of the post office. Marion was staying with the Mullers. In her life’s work—nursing—Marion knew she would find the anodyne to soften her grief. By one stroke she had been robbed of her dear ones that made life worth living. She reproached herself bitterly for her conduct towards Jack. She knew the sterling worth of him when it was too late !

* * * * *

Thank God, however, it was not too late ! We rail at misfortune, we utter parrot cries that

“We are not lucky,” or “Never have any luck,” when the truth is the luck of our lives is always with us.

* * * * *

A cablegram came to the post office for Martin. The new post-master stepped across the road to the hotel, and delivered the cable to Martin, sitting in the bar. Martin called to his wife that he had a cable.

“Who’s it from?” Mrs. Hickford shouted along the hotel passage.

“I don’t know,” Martin replied.

Mrs. Hickford bustled into the bar.

“Haven’t you opened it yet?”

“No!” said Martin, “it’s took me all of a heap.”

“The war must be making you lose the little sense you ever had. Give it to me!”

Mrs. Hickford snatched the cablegram out of Martin’s hands and tore the envelope open.

She gave a cry of joy!

“Jack Danvers is alive! He’s coming home with Sam!”

Martin took the cablegram from his wife and read:

“Hickford, Ironbark. Wounded, progressing favourably. Sam and self coming home. Gustave recovering. Tell Marion. JOHN DANVERS.”

Martin hurried out to his stables, scattering the geese before him. In a trice he had his horse

in his buggy. Only a few minutes went by before he was through the hotel yard gate, and on his way, at a smart pace, to the Tippins and Mullers.

"Jack Danvers is coming back," he shouted to everyone as he passed them on the highway. He did not draw rein till he pulled up at Tippins's slip rail.

"What's up? What's up?" said Tippins, rushing down to meet Martin. It was so unusual to see Martin drive up to the slip rail. "It must be something important!"

"It is," said Martin. "Jack Danvers is not dead, he's coming back with Sam. Gustave is recovering. I just had a cable from him. Here it is, no it isn't! I must have left it behind me. I was in a bit of a hurry in getting off the mark."

Tippins shouted the good news up the paddock. Nipper gave a hurrah! as he went off to tell the good news to the Mullers and to Marion. It was the best tonic, the finest restorative that Marion had ever had in her life.

* * * * *

Marion went to the Base Hospital in Melbourne as a nurse. She was there when the hospital ship arrived from Egypt with the wounded. She saw Jack shortly after he entered the hospital. They could not say a great deal to each other, in the ward.

"Can you forgive me?" Marion asked.

"I never blamed you," replied Jack, with a

warm pressure on Marion's hand that was more eloquent than any words.

A few days later Nelly, Gretchen, Nipper and "Tim" came to the hospital. The hospital orderly pointed out to Nipper that no dogs could be taken into the ward.

"That's all right!" said Nipper.

"It's against the rules."

"I dunno nothink about yer rules—no more does he,—the dog can't read."

Nipper shoved "Tim's" hind-quarters with the sole of his boot, through the open door, and cried "Find!"

Before the hospital orderly could stop "Tim" he was in the ward, running, wagging his tail from bed to bed, searching for his master.

"Tim" saw Marion. He made a great rush to her. "At least," he thought, "here is someone who knows me." He jumped delightedly about her.

Very red in the face at this breach of the hospital rules, Marion moved down to the far end of the ward where Jack was lying.

"Tim" jumped on to the bed, and started to lick Jack's face in a frantic manner. For some time the dog was uncontrollable. Jack on his part was almost as bad.

The Sister was amused, but properly shocked.

"The dog must be put out," she said.

"Let him be with me a bit longer, sir!" said Jack to the doctor in charge.

The doctor shook his head. "It's not right, Danvers, but I'll give you five minutes for the dog since you seem to be so much to each other. I've got a dog myself, and I understand how you feel."

"Thank you, sir !" Jack said, with a salute.

"Well, I am surprised at doctor !" said the Sister to Marion.

"You need not be, Sister !" replied the doctor, who had overheard the remark. "Have you seen the 'Age' or the 'Argus' to-day ?"

"What do you refer to ?" asked the Sister.

"That soldier, Sergeant Danvers, lying there, is mentioned in the despatches, and I believe he is to be recommended for the Victoria Cross. He saved the life of a private named Muller under circumstances of thrilling gallantry. Do you not think that such a man should be allowed to have a handshake with his dog ?"

It was the first time that Marion had heard of Jack saving Gustave Muller's life. Later, letters, no doubt, would come from Gustave telling them about the affair. Jack, she knew, would make light of anything he had done.

Nelly, Gretchen, and Nipper had a great time at Jack's and Sam's beds. Two at Jack's, one at Sam's, but Sam was more than satisfied with the one. They learnt how Jack had been mistakenly reported "Killed in action" through his identification disc being picked up amongst the fallen soldiers. Jack said he thought he must have scraped the disc off his neck as he crawled in on

his chest from the Australian and Turkish dead, lying in front of the trench. He heard he had been reported "Killed in action" and that was why he sent the cable to Ironbark.

* * * * *

A year or so afterwards Marion, with little Jack in her arms, was standing at the door of the picturesque bush cottage her husband had built on some of his upland that commanded a beautiful view down the valley.

It was a mellow summer evening, and the sun was showing "golden through the notches of the hills." Against the glorious lights was the figure of Jack Danvers, the man of Marion's heart. He limped slightly from the old wound in his ankle, but he was still the same strong fellow who had "played the game" and won through his trials. How she loved him!

He came towards her, "Tim" running ahead of him.

"Hallo, sweetheart!" he said as she held up to him their little son to be kissed. Then he kissed Marion and took his boy from her.

"Who do you think was here to-day? Nelly with her baby, such a fine little fellow with a red head like its father's. Nelly is a happy girl, and laugh!—she laughs more than ever! She is going to christen her son 'Anzac,' and you are to be his godfather. Nipper and Jeanie are coming up next Sunday."

“I’m glad of that ! I’ve asked the Mullers across. It will be like old times. The Mullers are leaving Ironbark. It has no pleasant memories for them. I am glad to hear that Gretchen has become engaged to a good fellow in Melbourne.”

“Yes, Nelly said something of the sort, but we were talking this afternoon mostly of our babies.”

“I could have guessed as much.”

“Can you guess who is the proudest and happiest woman in Ironbark ? ”

“Yes, I can guess, just as I know who is the happiest man ! ”

* * * * *

So the two roads that the maid and the man were destined to travel ended in the hills of happiness, where, as of old, the owls called in the valleys, and the cattle bells tinkled in the hills deep in the shadows of night.

THE END