In the Roaring Fifties eBook

In the Roaring Fifties by Edward Dyson

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Contents

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Page 1

I

The night was bright and cool, and the old East Indiaman moved slowly on the heaving bosom of the ocean, under a strong full moon, like a wind-blown ghost to whose wanderings there had been no beginning and could be no end—so small, so helpless she seemed between the two infinities of sea and sky. There was no cloud to break the blue profundity of heaven, no line of horizon, no diversity in the long lazy roll of the green waters to dispel the illusion of an interminable ocean. The great crestless waves rose and fell with pulsing monotony, round, smooth and intolerably silent. It was as if the undulating sea had been stricken motionless, and the ship was damned to the Sisyphean task of surmounting one mysterious hill that eternally reappeared under her prow, and beyond which she might never pass. Suddenly the ghost faltered on the crest of a wave, fluttering her rags in the moonlight, possessed with a vague indecision. Shouting and the noise of hurrying feet broke the silence. There was a startling upheaval of men; they swarmed in the rigging, and faces were piled above the larboard bulwarks. A boat dropped from the ship's side, striking the sea with a muffled sound, and was instantly caught into the quaint lifting and falling motion of the Francis Cadman, as the oily-backed waves slid under. Four men in the boat bent smartly to the oars, a fifth stood erect in the prow, peering under his hand over the waste of waters; another at the tiller encouraged the rowers with cordial and well-meant abuse. A hundred people shouted futile directions from the ship. The gravity of the Indian Ocean was disturbed by the babble of dialects. One voice rose above all the rest, sonorous, masterful, cursing the ship into order with a deliberate flow of invective that had the dignity and force of a judgment.

The boat drew off rapidly. The men, squarely and firmly seated, bent their heavy shoulders with machine-like movements, and when they threw back their faces the rays of the moon glittered and flashed in their dilated eyes and on their bared teeth. The sailor at the tiller swayed in unison, and grunted encouragement, breaking every now and then into bitter speech, spoken as if in reverent accord with the night and their mission, in a low, pleading tone, much as a patient mother might address a wayward child.

'Lift her, lads—lift her, blast you! Oh, my blighted soul, Ellis! I'd get more square-pullin' out of a starved cat with ten kittens—I would, by thunder! Now, men, all together! Huh! Huh! hub!'

The boatswain strained as if tugging a stubborn oar. In the interval of silence that followed all bent attentive ears, but no call came from the sea. The sleek oars dipped into the waves without a sound, and swung noiselessly in the worn rowlocks. The man at the prow remained rigid as a statue, and Coleman resumed his whispered invocation.

Page 2

’Bend to it, you devils! One! two! three! Morton, don’t go to sleep, you swine! Ryan! Tadvers, you herrin’-gutted, boss-eyed son of a barber’s ape, are you rowin’ or spoonin’ up hot soup? Pull, men! Huh! That’s a clinker! Huh! Shift her! Huh! May the fiend singe you for a drowsy pack o’ sea-cows! Pull!’

The men threw every ounce of power into each stroke, the voice of the boatswain blending with their efforts like an intoned benediction, and the treacly sea foamed under the prow into drifted snow which ran merrily in their wake. For a tense moment the boat hung poised upon a high roller, as if about to be projected into the air, and the man in the prow, electrified, threw out an arm with a dramatic gesture. The instincts of the ex-whaler triumphed in that moment of excitement.

‘There she blows!’

Instantly Coleman fell into a condition of profound agitation; he poured out a lava-flow of vituperation upon the heads of his men; he cursed them for weaklings and waster and hissed phrases shameful to them and discreditable to their parents. The crew increased their stroke. Already the perspiration was streaming from their indurated hides; their wet faces and breasts glistened in the night. Every now and again the look-out, discovering a black spot where the moon’s rays splashed a smooth-backed wave with silver, uttered an inarticulate cry that struck the men like a spur, and all the time his pointing hand was a finger-post to the steersman.

Meanwhile the object of this chase, a fragile, white-faced girl, had fought with the mammoth waves as with inveterate beasts seeking to stifle her in icy embraces. A mere atom plunged in their depths as in cavernous and boundless darkness, she had struggled with an ocean the whole of the focus of which were leagued against her, possessed all the time with a foolish and trivial remembrance of child hood, the vision of a little gray kitten, with a weight about its neck, striving to beat its way up through clear waters, sending out tiny bubbles of crystal that danced in mockery of its dying.

On the surface she was swung across seeming great distances, till a strong arm out of the night and the vastness of things seized her, and the tension of the struggle passed from her limbs, leaving a sense of appeasement as sweet as sleep. She heard a man’s voice directing her, and obeyed without understanding. Now the sea supported her like a soft and pleasant bed, she had no fear and little consciousness. A few stern words buzzed in her head like bees—’Sink your arms! Don’t try to breathe when we’re under! Keep your mouth shut!’ They were very absurd: they could have nothing to do with her; but she had heard them somewhere, and she obeyed.

The man lay well back in the water, with little more than his chin and lips above the surface, his left hand, twisted in the woman’s hair, rested in the nape of her neck, sustaining her with scarcely an effort. An ocean swimmer from his early boyhood, great

waters had no terrors for him, and when he found the drowning girl he knew that all would be well, provided the ship's boats were successful in their search.

Page 3

The girl was very tractable: she lay perfectly still. He looked into her pale face; her eyes were wide open, staring straight up at the feeble stars. Every minute or so he cried aloud, or whistled a shrill call between his teeth, but the action did not disturb the flow of his thoughts. Despite the peculiarity of his position, he had drifted into a strange mood of introspection. Why had he done this thing? What was the girl to him that at the first sight of her danger he should have forgotten his philosophy of self, his pride in his contempt for his kind, and his fine aloofness? She was no more in his life than any other of the four hundred strangers on board. The act of leaping into the sea had been a mere impulse, the prompting of an unsuspected instinct. She might hate his race, but he was still its slave. All his life he had been an Ishmael, feared and disliked; humankind had given him only cause to hate and despise it, and yet blood remained stronger than belief when a human life was in peril. The young man laughed, and the boat's from the Francis Cadman, drawing near, heard the mocking laughter and ceased rowing, chilled with a superstitious terror.

'Good God!' cried the look-out, 'there's two of 'em.'

The sailors turned in their seats, staring in stupid awe at two heads clearly visible in the moonlight that lay like silver gossamer on the dark green sea—two heads where they had expected to find but one. The boatswain, frozen in the forward movement of his swing, glared open-mouthed, speechless; he felt his stiff hair stirring strangely under his hat, a pronounced uneasiness moved in the boat. Only one woman had fallen from the ship, and here, out in the deep trough of the lone sea, they found two creatures, and one laughed eerily. Sailormen believed in many awesome mysteries: ghosts and goblins peopled the ocean like a vast graveyard. The boat held off, and no man spoke, but Ryan shivered under his skin, and fumbled his memory for the name of a potent saint.

'Ahoy, there!' cried the young man impatiently; but winning no response, he swam slowly to meet the boat as she drifted. He raised the girl, and one of the men seized her mechanically, and drew her limp form from the water. No hand was offered to the rescuer, but as the boat lifted he seized her prow, and drew himself aboard. All eyes were upon him, staring dubiously.

'Divil take me if it ain't the Hermit!' gasped Ryan, with an expiration of intense relief.

Coleman's stony expression instantly relaxed, he recovered himself with a jerk of the bead.

'Well,' he murmured bitterly, 'of all the stuck pigs! What the blue fury 're ye all sittin' garpin' at like a lot o' demented damn kelpies? Give way there! How's the young lady, Smith?'

‘She don’ seem perticler bad,’ answered Smith doubtfully. He was struggling to wrap his charge in a length of stiff, crackling sailcloth, puzzled by the white face of the girl.

Page 4

Coleman looked sharply at the young man, who was seated on the gunwale, but, discovering no encouragement in his set face and careless eyes, repressed his curiosity, and devoted himself to the task of overhauling the Francis Cadman. It was a long and trying job, but he accomplished it without having exhausted his eloquence. Indeed, his terms of endearment had been cautiously selected throughout, out of a heroic respect for the lady passenger. The boatswain's idea of language becoming in the presence of the gentler sex was rather liberal, perhaps; but in any case his nice consideration was wasted upon the girl, who heard never a word. She lay as if in the grip of fever, her distorted mind pursuing quaint visions and trifling and irrelevant ideas. As they drew near, the rescue-party sent out a breathless cheer, which was answered from the ship with a wild yell of exultation, and then a broadside of questions burst from the deck of the Francis Cadman, where every creature on board excitedly awaited the boat's return. The sonorous and masterful voice enforced silence again with a sentence.

'How is it, bo's'n?' called the same voice a moment later.

'Got 'em both, sir,' answered Coleman.

'Both!'

'Ay, ay, sir!'

A tumult of voices surged over the ship again; the heads piled themselves afresh, craning one above the other. Two had gone overboard! Only one had been reported, and one only was missed. Interest was doubled. For four weeks the Francis Cadman had been pottering about the Indian Ocean without discovering a single adventure to break the stupid monotony of sky and sea, and restore the faith of the passengers in their favourite maritime authors; but here, at last, was a sensation and a mystery.

Perhaps, after all, it was no mere accident, but a tragedy. Men and women thronged the deck, thrilling with sympathy, and yet secretly hoping for a complete drama, even though someone must suffer.

The girl was first passed up. When the young man followed she had been carried below. He was barefooted, and clad only in singlet and trousers; his coat and shirt had been discarded in the sea.

Ryan's expression sprang from every tongue.

'The Hermit!'

The young man stood with his shoulders to the gunwale, facing the crowd. There was something resentful in his attitude. His face was that of a man about twenty-two, beardless and boyish, but the firm, straight mouth, with its compressed, slightly

protuberant lips, and the thick line of dark brows, throwing the eyes into shadows, imparted an appearance of sullen reserve that belonged to an older face. His scrutiny condemned men and repelled them. His figure, about three inches above middle height, was that of a labourer whose strength was diffused through the limbs by swift and subtle exercise. There was nothing rugged in his powerful outline, and every attitude had an architectural suggestion of strength.

Page 5

Captain Evan peered at the youth closely, and not without a hint of suspicion. 'Your name's Done, isn't it?' he said.

The Hermit nodded shortly.

'How did all this happen, my man?'

'I was leaning on the gunnel by the main-chains when I heard a cry and a splash, and saw the girl's body past. I dropped in after her.'

'You saved her life, then?'

'I helped her to keep afloat till the boat reached us.'

'Good boy!' Captain Evan put out his hand as if with the intention of giving Done an approving pat on the shoulder, but the young man turned away abruptly, thrusting himself through the men, who had clustered around him muttering diffident compliments, and endeavouring to shake him by the hand.

'Blast it all, don't maul a man about!' said the hero sulkily, and the crowd made way for him.

Below Jim Done stripped hastily, wrung out his wet clothes upon the littered floors and climbed into his bunk, threatening to tear down a whole terrace of the crazy structures as he did so.

The Francis Cadman was not ordinarily a passenger boat: she was commissioned to carry two hundred and fifty sailors to the ships left helpless in Corio Bay and Hobson's Bay, deserted by their crews, who, in spite of official strategies, had fled to the diggings immediately after anchors were dropped in Victorian waters.

The accommodation for the men was the roughest imaginable. Bunks of unplaned timber were strung up in tiers under the forecastle, and wherever space could be found for them in the dark and musty depths of the ship. A few second-class male passengers shared these delectable quarters with the sailors, and the Francis Cadman had secured a complement of first-class patrons willing to pay exorbitant prices for the dubious comforts and plain fare of the 'cabin' passage.

The gold lust was burning in the blood of Europe. Fabulous stories of Australian treasures were flying about the nations; greedy ears drank them in, and the wildest yarns were never doubted. In their frantic eagerness to share in the golden harvests being reaped at Buninyong, Clunes, Bendigo, and Ballarat, the people wasted no thought on the hardships of the journey; there was not a ship too crazy or a doghole too dark to carry the desperate adventurers.

Jim Done's bunk was in a third story. The den it was built in was like a steam-warm pest-house in the hot latitudes, and in the cold a clammy tomb; but he had no thought of complaints. A new country and a new life lay before him; he cared little for the troubles and privations by the way. To-night his mind was given over to reflections arising out of the incidents of the last few hours. They were not pleasant reflections. The adventure loomed like a misfortune. He hated the idea of the notoriety it would bring him; and, picturing himself the object of the sentimental admiration of a score of simpering busybodies of both sexes, fumed fiercely, and framed biting invectives. A voice close to his ear startled him. Turning sharply, he saw the head of Phil Ryan on a level with his own. Phil was standing on the lowermost bunk, offering the first tribute, a pint pannikin of steaming hot grog.

Page 6

‘’Tis the thing the docthor orthered,’ said Ryan, with timorous humour, fearing an ungenerous response.

It was Jim’s first impulse to refuse the offer with out compliments, but at that moment the greasy ship’s lantern swinging above them on a rope’s end illumined the Irishman’s face, and Done saw his mark upon it—a long purple wheal under the left eye, a week old yesterday, but still conspicuous. For a reason he could not have explained even to himself, that changed the young man’s mind. He drank the liquor, and returned the pannikin with a ‘Thank you!’ not over-cordial.

‘Yer a proper man, Done,’ said Ryan, ‘an’ I’m proud I fought wid ye, an’ mighty glad ye bate me. Good-night!’

‘Good-night,’ answered Done coldly. He had been too long at variance with men to take kindly to popularity now.

II

Next morning Done lingered below till the day was well advanced, but the darkness and the heavy atmosphere ’tween decks drove him into the open. It was a fair day, a big placid sun was shining, and the breeze followed them with a crisp suggestion of glittering ice-fields far down in the south. The sailors and passengers were grouped in small parties of six or seven, lounging about the deck in lazy abandonment, leaning over the side, smoking comfortably, and spitting with a certain dreamy satisfaction into the sweet, clean sea, or sitting in rings on improvised seats, alert, and loud in argument.

Jim’s youthful face was even more than usually forbidding that morning as he stepped amongst the men to his favourite position on one of the guns. He feared an attempt to break through his reserve, some demonstration arising out of last night’s adventure, that might be taken advantage of by the men to force their society and friendship upon him. He looked at none of the faces turned curiously in his direction, and his expression of stubborn enmity killed the cheer that sprang from a few of the forecastle passengers, and it tailed into a feeble absurdity. Leaning upon the old wooden gun-carriage, with his arms supporting his chin; he stared at the cleavage of the green sea and the swelling foam, feeling at his back all the time the cackle of criticism, like an irritation of the spinal marrow, chafing fretfully at this further proof of the failure of his long endeavour to school himself into complete indifference.

Absolute serenity in the teeth of public opinion—good, bad, or indifferent—that was an ideal frame of mind, to the attainment of which he had set himself when still a mere boy; but men and women remained powerful to hurt and to auger him. He had acquired from his long moral exercise a certain power of restraint up to the point at which his fierce temper blazed; he reached the stage of ignition without those displays of sparks and

smoke that are usual preliminaries to a ‘flare-up.’ He had learned, too, in the course of his schooling, to simulate an imposing unconcern under commonplace trials and tribulations, when it so pleased him, and between the satisfaction to be felt in being able successfully to assume a given virtue and in having actual possession of that virtue the distinction is too delicate for unregenerate minds.

Page 7

The young man did not envelop himself in his spare skin of imperturbability at this crisis, because he felt that some show of active resentment was necessary to repel effusive admirers and maintain the barrier he had set up between himself and his fellow-travellers. When Jim Done set foot on board the Francis Cadman he was flying from an intolerable life, seeking to escape from despair. This he did not admit to himself, for he had the indomitable pride of a lonely man who gave to thought the time that should have been gloriously wasted on boon companions and young love.

Done was a sensitive man, who had been some thing of a pariah since his knickerbocker period, and was first the butt and later the bane of the narrow, convention-governed public of a small English village. A fierce defiance of the people amongst whom he had lived his life kept him in his native place till after his twenty-first birthday. He rebelled with all his soul against the animal unreason of these men, women, and children, puzzling over the fanatical stupidity of their prejudice, and, striving to beat it down, intensified it and kept it active long years after all might have been forgotten had he bowed meekly to 'the workings of Providence,' as manifested in the thinkings and doings of the Godfearing people of Chisley.

When James Done was five years old the only murder that had been committed in Chisley district within the memory of the oldest inhabitant was done by a member of little Jim's family. The murderer was tried, found guilty, and sentenced accordingly.

The murder had a romantic plot and melodramatic tableaux, and was incorporated in the history of Chisley—in fact, it was the history of Chisley.

The murderer passed out, but his family remained, and upon them fell the horror of his deed, the disgrace of his punishment. They became creatures apart. With all Chisley understood of the terror in those dread words, 'Thou shalt not kill,' it invested the unhappy family, and they bowed as if to the will of God.

Jim's mother, a thin, sensitive woman, with a patient face, put on a black veil, and was never afterwards seen abroad without it. She helped her boy a few weary miles along the road of life, and then one evening went quietly to her room and died. Jim's sister, ten years older than himself, took up the struggle where the mother dropped it, and sustained it until the boy could go into the fields and earn a mean living for himself, at which point she drowned herself, leaving a quaint note in which she stated that life was too dreadful, but she hoped 'God and Jimmy would forgive her—especially Jimmy.'

At this stage Chisley might have forgiven Jimmy, and condescended to forget, and even indulge itself in some sentimental compassion for the poor orphan, had the boy shown any disposition to accept these advances kindly and with proper gratitude; but for years Jim had been reasoning things out in a direct, childish way, and in his loneliness he was filled with an inveterate hatred. He chose to live on as he had lived, accepting no concessions, disguising nothing, and Chisley quite conscientiously discovered in his

sullen exclusiveness and his vicious dislike of worthy men the workings of homicidal blood, and accepted him as an enemy of society.

Page 8

Early in his teens Jim recognised the value of brute strength and human guile in his dealings with the youth of Chisley, and set himself to work to cultivate his physical qualities. All that the pugilists and wrestlers could teach him he picked up with extraordinary quickness, and to the arts thus acquired he added cunning tricks of offence and defence of his own contriving. He had a peculiar aptitude for wrestling and pugilism, delighted secretly in his strength and swiftness, and would walk five miles to plunge like a porpoise in the stormy sea.

He had submitted to much in his joyless youth, but now, conscious of his strength and expertness in battle, he set himself deliberately to defy his enemies and resent with force of arms every encroachment upon his liberty, every insolence. There was a sudden epidemic of black eyes amongst the youth of the village; cut faces, broken ribs, and noses of abnormal size served the heirs of Chisley as stinging reminders of the old shame and the new courage and power of Jim o' Mill End, that being the name given to the boy in accordance with an awkward provincial custom of identifying a man with his property, the situation of his residence, or some peculiarity of manner.

On one occasion the lad fell upon a hobbledehoy who had just given a highly diverting pantomime representing the hanging of a man, with realistic details, and, having beaten him in fair fight, broke his collar-bone with an atrocious fall. For this outrage Jim o' Mill End was called upon to answer to the law, and, the answer he had to give being considered wholly unsatisfactory, Jim was sent to gaol for a term of days.

Chisley, if Slow to discover its mistakes, was not wholly imbecile; it learned in time to respect the fists of Jim o' Mill End, and now hated him quite heartily for the restraint imposed. But Jim derives little satisfaction from his triumph; Chisley conquered him by stupid submission. His physical superiority won him nothing but immunity from open insult; the young men and their elders were careful to give him no reasonable opportunity of asserting the rights of man in their teeth with a dexterous left, and Jim was now beyond disputing with children. The unhappy boy was not deceived by the new attitude his neighbours had assumed towards him. He saw an increased dislike behind the stolid, animal-like faces that met him everywhere, and felt that silence was worse than insult, more galling than blows. He detected jeers under the mask of dogged respect, and had passionate impulses to beat and tear, finding himself still powerless against the brutal injustice that had poisoned his life.

Page 9

Baffled here, Jim o' Mill End turned greedily to the fount of wisdom seeking justification for his deep contempt for his fellows, corroboration of his opinions as to the stupidity, ignorance, and vileness of mankind, He read greedily, finding justification everywhere. Poets, philosophers, novelists, historians—they had all found man out, just as he had done. Discovering an echo of his beliefs, he thrilled with hot delight. He met allies amongst the poets, and adored them. It is strange how sympathetic books drift to the hand of a reader possessed with a consuming idea; how they gather around him, fall open to his eye, and give up the thing he yearns to feed on. Without the knowledge necessary to selection, Jim had an affinity for books of pessimistic doctrine, and though both means and opportunities were limited, he gathered together, in the course of two years, quite a library of precious volumes, and he came forth from these an intellectual giant refreshed. He saw Chisley on a plane far below him, a sink of ignorance, and judged it like a god—or a boy. Whatever Chisley respected he found excellent occasion to despise; whatever it revered he discovered to be false and contemptible. His sense of superiority was magnificent; it gave him a glorious exultation. A few hot words with the clerical caretaker of the Chisley conscience over the question of Sabbath observance exposed the young man—the gaol-bird—as an infidel and a scoffer. Jim was no infidel, but communities like Chisley do not under stand subtle distinctions in theology. Here was fresh occasion to fear and abhor Jim o' Mill End; here was justification for many evil prophecies.

For a time Jim revelled in his great moral superiority and dreamed dreams. But the gnawing impatience returned—the unrest, the craving for something he could not define, but which always merged itself into his great grievance. He lived alone. At his work—which he obtained readily, for he was strong and efficient, and gave double value for his wages—he had no mates. Girls he had seen grow up from babyhood developed into beautiful creatures, with miraculous eyes, round limbs, and cheeks so red, so tender, that their soft ripeness haunted his dreams. Under cover and in secret he would watch them pass or at play with a throbbing heart and a passionate hunger for companionship, and discover himself doing this with something of a shock, ashamed of his interest in his enemies, resentful of all emotions that ran counter to his cherished antipathies.

When the news of the discovery of fabulous gold deposits in far Australia reached Chisley, Jim had thoughts of a new life in a new land: he craved for a wide field and a wild life; nothing withheld him but pride, the egotism that would not permit of his abandoning a struggle even with men so contemptible as these ignorant villagers. But the hunger for humanity filled him with visions of a new society in which he would be one with his fellow-men, and then his enemies seemed so pitiful that he knew himself for fool and blind to waste a care upon them. So he sold the small property at Mill End, took up his few belongings, and left Chisley quietly by night, eager to leave all the old life behind him, anxious for the new.

Page 10

Standing thus, looking out along the pathway of the Francis Cadman, Done had reviewed his life almost daily, sometimes broadly and briefly, as given here—sometimes going into excruciating details of suffering, shame, terror, and hate; but his eyes were always turned forward.

Done meditated uninterruptedly for nearly an hour. Gradually the conversation of the group behind him had drifted from his business and the affair of the previous night to the great absorbing topic of the past four months—Australia, the land of mad dreams, where the hills were powdered with precious ‘dust,’ and the rivers purled over nuggets of pure gold.

A hand fell upon the young man’s shoulder; he turned sharply, angrily, and beheld the bland face and trim figure of Captain Evan. With the Captain was a handsome lady in black, who had already created in Jim’s mind a confused impression of massed raven hair and big, innocent dark eyes that had a trick of floating up from under heavy lids and thick, long lashes to their greatest magnitude, and then disappearing again like revolving lights.

‘All right after your plunge, my lad?’ inquired the Captain heartily.

Done gave the expected reply, conscious of the eyes signalling appreciation, and there was a pause.

‘You do not inquire after the young lady, Done!’

‘I’ve heard the men speaking of her, Captain. I understand she’ pretty well?’

‘Still, a little gentlemanly attention, you know. She is most grateful.’

Done stiffened a trifle, and the line of brows asserted itself.

‘I don’t ape gentility,’ he said quietly. ’I’m glad the young lady’s well again, but genteel formal ain’t much in my line, I think.’

‘Hem!’ The Captain’s eyes narrowed, his air of patronage lifted. He was as gentlemanly an old sea-dog as ever bully-damned a ship from the gates of hell on a blind night, and was proud of his first-cabin accomplishments. ‘This lady is Mrs. Donald Macdougal,’ he said. ’Miss Lucy Woodrow is Mrs. Macdougal’s companion.’

Jim gathered his soft cap in a handful and bowed moderately; but the lady held out dainty gloved fingers, and flashed her bright eyes upon him.

‘We all think you quite a hero, Mr. Done,’ she lisped—’ quite!’

‘Fact is,’ said the Captain, ’the ladies and gentle men greatly admire your noble conduct.’

‘Most noble and brave,’ added Mrs. Macdougal softly.

The young man had a presentiment of mischief, and fortified himself.

‘And,’ the Captain continued, ’they have held a little meeting to consider the idea of—ah, expressing their appreciation in a—er——hem!—an adequate and proper manner.’

The Captain was quoting the chief orator—himself. He paused with an expectant air, but Done was apparently quite impassive; evidently the fact that the ladies and gentlemen of the first class wished to put on record their very proper respect for British pluck and the positive virtues by giving the hero of the moment an inscribed watch or a gold locket did not appeal to this young man.

Page 11

The pause became uneasy. If Jim had betrayed some confusion—blushed stammered, protested—all would have been well; but he waited calmly. Captain Evan had only two manners—his polished, first-class maimer and his ship manner, the manner with which he worked the Francis Cadman—and it was a mere step from one to the other. For a moment he was perilously near assuming his natural and most successful manner, blasting Done to the depths for a high-stomached, adjectival swab, and commanding him out of hand to accept the proposed honours and emoluments with proper respect and gratitude, and be hanged to him.

‘Of course,’ said Mrs. Macdougal gracefully, ’only if you approve, Mr. Done.’ But the inference was that he could do nothing less with such eyes openly beseeching him.

‘I can’t agree to this,’ said Jim decisively, addressing himself to the Captain.

‘Oh, come, you must not be shy!’ murmured the lady.

‘I cannot agree to any demonstration or accept any gifts,’ persisted Jim. ‘You’re very kind, I believe; but I’m reserved—I detest display.’

’Still, you know, my man, brave actions like yours cannot be totally disregarded by feeling people.’

‘To be sure!’ from the lady.

‘Captain Evan,’ said the young man firmly, ’ever since I came on board the Francis Cadman I’ve endeavoured to keep myself to myself. I asked nothing from anybody on this ship, but simply to be left alone. That’s all I ask now. Perhaps I appear boorish to the lady, but the instincts of a lifetime must be respected.’ Jim spoke like an old man. The lady found him very impressive.

‘Very well, Done,’ said the Captain, looking searchingly into Jim’s strong young face, ‘we’ll say no more about the matter.’ He moved away, but the lady extended the slim gloved fingers again, lowering her eyes for an effective unveiling.

‘I respect your feelings,’ she said, as if making great concession.

Really, the boy was most interesting, so handsome, so unusual. She smiled upon him like a guardian angel with exquisite teeth, and the scamp turned again to the sea, apostrophizing in fo’c’sle idiom all interfering fools and sentimental humbugs.

III

Lucy Woodrow did not appear on the deck until after nightfall. Jim understood that she would insist upon expressing lifelong gratitude with the usual effusion and the usual

tears. He feared the ordeal, and prepared himself for it. He had seen the girl often during the voyage, sometimes accompanied by a blonde youth, whose beautiful clothes and exquisite manners afforded unfailing material for primitive satire in the forecastle, but, as a rule, quite alone, muffled in a dark, hooded cloak, watching the sea, always with her face turned yearningly back, as if England and home lay straight out along the vessel's wake. She was middling tall, eighteen perhaps, with a thin but supple and pleasing figure, and a quiet, smileless face, that wanted only happiness to make it beautiful.

Page 12

Done's misanthropy was not a quality of his nature, it was thrust upon him, and did not prevent his being a close observer of men and things; but that he had the smallest interest in any person on board was not believed by one of his shipmates, since he was instinctively careful to betray no concern. He had been struck by the girl's apparent loneliness. The attentions of the blonde youth were borne meekly, as part of the contiguous discomforts—that much was obvious to the forecastle and all under. It never occurred to Jim that she was probably placed like himself, and had good reason to stand aloof.

When he had been on board the Francis Cadman a month or so, Jim was amazed to find that the attitude of the passengers and the crew towards himself was almost analogous to that of the people of Chisley. Nearly every phase of feeling that was manifested amongst the villagers presented itself here, and he was troubled. His first suspicion was that his identity had become known. He had small knowledge of men, and a sick fear gripped him at the thought that all communities were alike, and would reflect the suspicions and animosities of his little village if it were known among them that one of his blood had done murder, and had suffered as a murderer. But no whisper of his story reached his ears, and he remained perplexed. He had yet to learn that society in all its phases is ever intensely suspicious of the man apart. His one desire had been that he might be lost amongst the passengers, that he might efface himself in the crowd by keeping carefully out of every man's way and concerning himself with the interests of none. By doing this he hoped to land in Australia unknown, unheeded, and start his life again, cut off from the past completely. He had only succeeded in making himself notorious. He was silent, reserved, but he was different to the others, and to hide amongst sheep one must be a sheep. Jim's very anxiety to escape notice made him conspicuous. His aloofness was resented as 'dirty pride,' and, being strange to all, he became the butt of many.

Jim Done was not of the type that rough-living men select as the victims of their small jokes; but in the forecastle the disposition to play upon the Hermit developed from small and secret things into open harassment, and Jim's stoicism was wholly misconstrued. He did not seem to see things that would have caused others in the company to fill the ship with bad language and dread of death; he was impervious to rhymed jibes and broad sarcasms that were supposed to have peculiar powers of irritation if repeated constantly, day after day and night after night, without any apparent feeling, or motive, or reason under the sun.

Fire was struck one evening with a particularly good joke played upon Done in his bunk. Jim stepped down amongst the laughing men in his shirt, and selecting the one whose laugh was loudest and most hearty, he struck him an open-handed blow that drove him like a log along the floor. There was little noise. A narrow 'ring' was improvised, two or three bits of candle were found to help the sooty ship's lantern, and the men fought as they stood.

Page 13

Jim's opponent was Phil Ryan, a smart young sailor, six or seven years his senior. The fight was short but lively, and the onlookers had not one word of comment to offer after the first round. The men gazed at Done with a ludicrous expression of stupid reproach. He had deceived, betrayed them; he had posed as a quiet, harmless man, with the manners of an aristocrat, when he might have been ship's champion at any moment by merely putting up his hands.

Phil went down five times. The fifth time he remained seated, gazing straight before him, with one sad, meditative eye, and another that looked as if it could never be of any use as an eye again.

'Get up, Ryan!' urged Phil's second.

Phil did not move; he gave no indication of having heard.

'Ryan, get up, man!' The second prompted him with his toe.

'Meanin' me?' said the vanquished.

'To be sure. Be a man! Get up and face him.'

'Divil a fear o' me!' said Ryan. 'I'm never goin' to get up agin till you put that wild man to bed.' He pointed at Jim.

'Are you licked, then, Ryan?'

'Licked it is. Any man is li'ble to wander into error, maybe, but there's wan thing about Phil Ryan, he's open to conviction, an' he's had all the conviction he wants this blessed night.'

'Then we've had enough?' said the second, with an uneasy eye on Jim.

'We have that,' continued Ryan, 'onless some other gintleman would like to resoom th' argumint where I dthropped it.' The fallen hero ran his good eye eagerly from face to face.

But Done had already returned to his bunk, and the others seemed indisposed to put him to further trouble. No more jokes were played upon the Hermit. The cynics and the wits developed a pronouncedly serious vein, and it was resolved that for the future Jim Done should take his own road, and behave in his own peculiar way, without provoking objection from the company.

'Tis a curtyis an' gintlemanly risolution,' said Ryan, tenderly caressing his inflated eye, 'an' a great pity it is we forgot to think iv it sooner.'

The respect the forecastle had acquired for Done was vastly increased by his rescue of Lucy Woodrow. Conduct that had previously been ascribed to mere conceit was now accounted for by most romantic imaginings, for it is a cardinal belief amongst men of their class that the true fighter is superior to all little weaknesses and small motives. When the girl crossed the moonlit deck to Done's side, the sailors drifted away out of earshot, and inquisitive eyes could not turn in Jim's direction without provoking a profane reproof.

Done's heart beat heavily as the slim, dark figure faced him, extending a trembling hand.

'I am Lucy Woodrow,' she said in a voice little above a whisper.

'Yes,' he answered simply.

Her hand closed upon his fingers, and she was silent for a moment, evidently deeply agitated. Her head was bent, hiding her face from his eyes; and he noticed curiously the moonlight glimmering like tiny sparks in her red-brown hair.

Page 14

‘You saved my life,’ she continued; ’you risked your own. I thank you with all my heart.’

There was something in her voice that made the simple, formal words quite eloquent, but Jim scarcely heeded them; he was terrified lest she should kiss his hand, and withdrew it abruptly.

’I can only say thank you—thank you! And one says that in gratitude for a mere politeness. But you understand, don’t you? My heart is full.’

‘Yes, I understand,’ he said. ’Now, please, try to say no more about it. I’m glad to have helped you; but the risk I took was very small after all. I’ve almost lived in the sea.’

She raised her face and looked into his eyes.

‘It is very easy for you to speak like that,’ she said; ’but I know that if it were not for you at this moment my poor body—’ She sobbed and turned to the sea, with something of its terror and desolation in her face, and Done understood the grim idea that possessed her.

‘Thank God, it was not to be!’ he said; and he felt more deeply at that moment than he had done for many years.

Lucy Woodrow remained silent, leaning upon the gunwale with her face to the sea, and he noticed presently that she was weeping, and was silent too. When she spoke again the new feeling in her voice startled him.

‘Why did you save me?’ she asked in a passionate whisper.

‘Why?’ He was full of wonder, and repeated the interrogation vaguely.

‘Yes, why—why? You had no right!’

‘Is it a matter of right?’ he asked, stunned. ’I saw you fall. I don’t know why I jumped over. My next conscious action was of striking out in the water. The act was quite involuntary.’

‘You had no right!’ Her voice was very low, but instinct with a grief that was tragic.

‘Tell me what you mean.’ Unconsciously, he spoke in the soothing tone one adopts towards an injured child.

‘I did not fall overboard.’

‘Then, what happened?’

‘I threw myself into the sea!’

‘You—you wished to drown?’

‘Yes, I wanted to die—to be rid of my wretched, empty life.’

Done was thrilled. He gazed earnestly upon the frail young figure; he had a dawning sense of the possibilities of life and emotion in others. He, too, had often thought of self-slaughter in an abstract way as the final defiance; but here was a mere girl for whom life held so little that she craved for and dared death. A remembrance of his own sister came back to him, softening his heart to pity. He touched Lucy’s arm gently.

‘And when you were thanking me just now,’ he said, ‘you—’

‘I lied? No, no, no!’ she cried, with a revulsion of feeling; ’I meant it! I am grateful—-indeed I am grateful! I longed to die; but the thought of washing about in these terrible waters makes me ill with fear. When the waves took hold of me and swept me under I wished to live—I had a wild yearning for life. Many times since last night I have felt the water sucking me down and the mighty waves piling above me, and have felt again the utter helplessness and terror.’ Shuddering, she covered her face with her hands, but continued speaking after a moment’s pause. ’It was horrible to die; but I am wretched—wretched! and I shall never be brave enough to venture again—never!’

Page 15

She threw the hood back from her abundant hair and stood a little apart, her hands pressed upon her eyes, struggling with her tears, already wondering at the sudden, overwhelming emotion that had swept her into this betrayal. He mused in a troubled way, perplexed by her contradictions avowal, feeling that, after all, he might have done this girl a great wrong.

‘Has your life been so unhappy, then?’ he asked.

‘It has been too happy,’ she replied in a constrained voice.

‘Too happy?’

’If I had learned to know sorrow sooner I could have borne it better, perhaps; but until a year ago my life was all happiness. Before that I had those who loved me, and neither fears nor cares. My father died, and mother followed him within seven months. I was their only child; I found myself alone, beset with anxieties and terrors, utterly desolate. I am going to be Mrs. Macdougal’s companion at her husband’s sheep-run, deep in the Australian Bush, and to teach their children. Since coming aboard I have been too much alone; I have had too much time to think of my hopelessness, my loneliness. There were moments when I seemed to be cut off from the world. It was in one of these moments that I—I—’ She made a significant gesture. Her voice had grown faint, and her limbs trembled.

‘Stay,’ he said gently, ‘I’ll get you a seat.’

His concern about this stranger, his curiosity, occasioned no self-questionings, no probing into motives. For the time being his customary attitude of mind—that of the pessimist sceptically weighing every emotion—deserted him. He had been, in his small circle in Chisley, the one person with a tangible grievance against life, but here he found another at more bitter variance with Fate, and weaker by far for the fight. A mutual grievance is a strong bond. He was lifted out of himself. When he returned he found Lucy Woodrow much more composed. She thanked him, and seated herself in the shadow.

‘Mr. Done,’ she said, ’I owe you an apology. You did me a great service, and I have made that an excuse for inflicting my troubles upon you.’ Jim noted the conventional phrases with a feeling of uneasiness. ’You are very kind, but something I have confessed I want you to forget. I lost control of myself.’

‘You may trust me to say nothing.’

Yes, yes; I am sure of that,’ she added hastily, ’but I want you to forget. I should not like to see it in your face if we meet again.’

‘Why fear that? For what you did you have to answer to yourself alone.’

‘I did not confess the truth even to Mrs. Macdougal,’ the girl went on in a low voice. ’I have been a little hysterical, and it is very good of you to bear with me.’

’I’m glad you told me; it gives me an interest, and I’ve never been interested in the fate of another human creature since I was a mere boy.’

‘I did wrong in the sight of God. You have saved me from a great crime.’

Page 16

’No! If life had become unbearable you were justified. When you said I had no right to interfere, you spoke the truth. No man has the right to insist upon a fellow-creature continuing to live when life has become intolerable.’ Jim was most emphatic on this point.

’Hush! Oh, hush! I know I said it, and I have thought it too; but the thought was born of weakness and cowardice.’

Done, who thought he understood himself clearly, and believed he had a plan of life as precise and logical as the multiplication table, was puzzled by a nature almost wholly emotional, and she continued:

’I mean to be brave, to meet the future with hope. It was my loneliness that terrified me. I thought it might be always so, but perhaps real happiness awaits me out there. I may make true friends.’

She spoke eagerly, anxiously, seeking corroboration, looking to him for encouragement with touching wistfulness, as if he had been a graybeard and an old and trusted friend, rather than a mere youth in years, and an acquaintance of only a few hours.

He felt the appeal, and tried to respond.

‘Yes yes,’ he said. ’Then, at least, one can always fight the world. If we can’t be loved, we can make ourselves feared. There’s a great deal in that.’

The girl was surprised at his warmth, and a little startled by his philosophy.

‘I could not think that,’ she said softly. ’It must be terrible to be feared—to meet always with doubt and shrinking where you look for confidence and affection.’

’But when the world refuses to accept us, when it uses all our fine emotions as scourges to torture us, then we must fight.’

‘I—I fight the world!’ The girl rose in some agitation, and raised two tremulous hands, as if in evidence of her weakness.

The gesture staggered him a little. He had been not so much defining her position as defending his own, and although he could see the futility of his principle of resentment as applied to her case, it was not in his nature to preach the pleasing gospel of sentimental optimism. He had no words of comfort to offer her; the gentle platitudes of encouragement and consolation she needed, and which would have fallen so glibly from the lips of an average man, were impossible to him. He was silent.

‘One had better die,’ continued Lucy Woodrow, ’than live at enmity with one’s fellow-creatures. Ah! the world is good and kind, under its seeming cruelties. People are

more generous than we know, but we should meet them with open hearts, and give a warm welcome to their affection and confidence. There must be something evil in the nature that is shut out from human sympathy, human fellowship—something wanting in the heart that is lonely, where there are scores of men and women eager to give friendship and love. We repel those who are drawn to us by their goodness of heart; we refuse what we most long for, and then blame others because we are unhappy.'

Page 17

The girl was speaking the thoughts in which she had vainly sought comfort. She ceased abruptly, and, moving to the side, stood with her eyes turned yearningly back over the sea, oppressed by her loneliness and the home-sickness that had not left her since the shores of England faded from her sight.

Jim felt a stir of something like resentment at his heart. He found in the girl's words a reflection of the beliefs of his native village, and perhaps justification of them, and saw her for the moment as the embodiment of the respectability, the piety, and all the narrowness of Chisley. The thought revived his habitual reserve. He meditated an escape, already regretting that he had permitted himself to drift into this extraordinary position.

IV

MRs. *Macdougal* came to Done's rescue a moment later. She sauntered languidly up to the young couple in her character of the interesting invalid, careful to make a charming picture in the moonlight.

'It is a delightful night, Mr. Done, is it not?' she said.

Jim admitted as much, without any display of interest, and the lady continued:

'You know our dear girl is not strong. You must not keep her in the night air. Why, Lucy, how foolish you are! not a single wrap, and the wind so chilly! You'll certainly have a sickness.'

'I shall not be ill, Mrs. Macdougal,' said Lucy. 'But you are very good.'

Mrs. Macdougal's plump figure was covered with furs, and a handsome shawl trailed from her arm; but it was characteristic of Mrs. Macdougal to profess the sweetest solicitude for other people, whilst appropriating for her own use and pleasure all the comfortable, pleasant, and pretty things. She was not more than thirty-three, and looked like a gipsy spoiled by refinements. Her social schooling had been confined to a long course of that delectable literature devoted to the amours of a strictly honourable aristocracy with superior milkmaids, nursery governesses, and other respectable young persons in lowly walks. Indeed, Mrs. Macdougal, having had no early training worth speaking of, had successfully modelled her manners upon those of a few favourite heroines. She fancied the expression, 'It is, is it not?' lent an air of exquisite refinement to ordinary conversation. She was naturally artificial. Artifice would have been her certain resort in whatever path it had pleased Fate to plant her small feet. Her temper was excellent so far as it went, and her manner tender and clinging. She would have preferred to have been tragic with such eyes and such hair, but with her plump figure it was not possible. She loved attention, particularly the attentions of men, and employed

many artifices to secure them, usually with success. She had engaged Captain Evan on the deck during every afternoon for a whole week, fanning away a purely hypothetical headache. Altogether Mrs. Macdougal was a delightful fool; almost everybody liked her.

Page 18

’Really, for your own sake, my dear! It will not do for two of us to be invalids.’ Mrs. Macdougal pressed a firm white hand upon her ample bosom, and coughed a melancholy little cough, hinting at a deep-seated complaint, the seriousness of which she could not long hope to disguise from her friends.

Lucy retired dutifully, and her mistress composed herself in an effective attitude for a long chat with the young man.

‘Darling girl!’ she said, gazing affectionately after the retreating figure. It suddenly occurred to her that she was very fond of Lucy Woodrow, although up to the time of the accident she had not given her a second thought.

The young man did not feel called upon to make a demonstration; he merely inclined his head and watched Lucy along the deck as a manifestation of some little interest in the subject.

‘If anything had happened to her that awful time!’ Mrs. Macdougal’s eyes waxed to their greatest dimensions to express terror, distress, all the excitement of the accident, and were veiled under their white lids and heavy lashes to convey some idea of the grief that would have lacerated that gentle breast had Lucy Woodrow perished in the cruel sea. ’Ah, Mr. Done, I, too, owe you a debt of gratitude!’ she continued. ’The poor girl is in my care. I should never have forgiven myself.’

‘I can’t accept your gratitude, ma’am,’ said Jim brusquely.

‘So gallant, so noble!’ murmured the lady. She was not succeeding, and she felt it. The boy was too ridiculous. She assumed a new pose, gazing dreamily over the side into the scudding sea.

‘If I were to fall in, Mr. Done,’ she said, after a telling pause, ’you would save me too?’ She smiled coquettishly.

‘I should not, Mrs. Macdougal; the responsibility is too great.’

She did not fully understand him, and was quite shocked, but answered brightly:

‘Oh yes, it is, is it not?’

Jim now resented the woman’s intrusion upon him with a cublike sullenness. He even longed to be avenged upon her for his uneasiness, and would have liked to have said quite coolly, ’In the devil’s name, madam, leave me to myself!’ It piqued him that, after all, he had not the moral courage to do this, so he turned a forbidding shoulder, pretending interest in the scud of sea.

‘Really, Mr. Done, you are foolish to hide yourself here,’ continued Mrs. Macdougal. ’It is so much pleasanter in our part, and you have the freedom of the ship, you know. Dear, kind Captain Evan could not deny me. Do come! Our little entertainments will delight you, and everybody will be so pleased.’

‘I’m very well where I am, thanks.’ The lad’s tone was not at all gracious.

’But you are so much above these men, and there are several nice cabin passengers—-quite superior people, who are anxious to know you.’

’You’re mistaken, ma’am. I’m a farm labourer going out there to earn my living. I’m at home here with common men, and I hate superior people!’

Page 19

‘They are trying, are they not?’ This with a gush of confidence and a little air of being weary of the great ones of the earth.

Mrs. Macdougal made several further efforts to induce Done to allow himself to be lionized by the first-class passengers, who, to escape for a time the boredom of a long, dull voyage, were eager to make a pet of the interesting and mysterious hero; but Jim’s moroseness deepened under the attacks, and at length he escaped with only a glance of almost maidenly coyness whenever circumstances threw him in the lady’s way.

But Lucy Woodrow was not to be denied; she had been forced into the current of his life, and he would make no effective fight against her. After a few days her pale face, animated with an expression of pathetic appeal, obtruded itself upon his meditations. He surprised himself mapping out a pleasant and beautiful future for her, or dwelling upon her misfortunes with a tender regret, and at such times took refuge from his thoughts in sudden action, shaking this folly off with fierce impatience, heaping abusive epithets upon his own head, arraigning himself as a drivelling sentimentalist; and what shame could equal that of a puling sentimentality?

After all, this girl stood for everything he had learned to despise and hate. To her the conventions behind which society shields itself, its shams and its bunkum, were sacred. He was convinced that had she known the whole truth as Chisley knew it, she must have ranged herself with his enemies. He admitted that he had been guilty of an impertinent interference in her private affairs when he plucked her from the sea, but did it follow that he need worry himself further about the young woman? Certainly not! That point being settled, he could return to his dreams of the Promised Land, the land of liberty, only to find the fair face obscuring his fine visions, or to be interrupted by the girl herself, who sometimes took refuge near him from the importunities of the male blonde, but more often sought him out to satisfy the new interest his morbid and peculiar character and, it must be admitted, his cold, good looks had created in her breast.

At her approach Done felt the stir of a novel exultation in his traitorous flesh. To be sure, he had woven romances for himself, but his heroines were always of a type totally different to Lucy Woodrow. They were strong, dark-eyed, imperious creatures, who espoused all his beliefs and echoed his defiance of the world. What sense of humour had as yet found place in his nature was exercised to the full at the expense of the lackadaisical lover in life and in fiction, and now he felt there was something absurdly pensive in this phenomenon of his own. He satisfied himself that he was not in love with Lucy, but here were the marked characteristics of the fond and fatuous hero—the obtruding face of the beloved, idealized and transfused with a sickly pathos; the premonitory tremblings; the recurrence of thoughts of the fair. It was all in defiance of his philosophy—an insult to his manhood. Like many very young men, Done was extremely jealous of the honour of his manhood. It is the pride of a new possession.

Page 20

Certainly Lucy Woodrow was quite honest to her nature in her attitude towards the young stranger. She did not dissect her emotions: she did not even question them. In becoming her hero Done had levelled all the conventional barriers, and her friendship and concern were sincere. She had never recurred to the incident of the rescue, feeling that the subject was painful to him, and glad to dwell no further upon an act of her own that of late had become quite inexplicable to her. Lucy no longer turned her eyes to the wake of the Francis Cadman: she no longer yearned backward to the land where she had left only a grave. Her mind was employed with a most serious duty: she had adopted a mission, and that mission was the regeneration of James Done. The regeneration was not to be so much religious as moral. The poor boy's life was disordered; he had suffered some great wrong; his naturally beautiful, brave, generous disposition was soured; he had lost faith in God and in woman, and it remained for her to restore his belief, to teach him that his fellow-creatures were in the main animated with the most excellent motives, and to drive away all those strange, wild opinions of his, and generally brighten and sweeten his life and turn him out a new man. She could not have explained how she was going to accomplish all this, but every maiden is at heart a missionary of some sort, and Lucy had a vague idea that the influence of a good woman was always effective in such cases. She never imagined that the youth would test her pretty, heartfelt opinions and her glowing faith in the rightness of things in the cold, sceptical light of his logic.

'Women don't bother themselves much to know if things are true,' he said. 'They're content with thinking they ought to be true.'

'Well,' she answered, 'why not try to be true to the things that ought to be true?'

'If I wanted to, the world wouldn't let me.'

'You cannot believe that. The really good man is always obeyed and reverenced.'

'And has always a fat billet. Yes; that kind of goodness is an excellent thing as a speculation.'

She thought him wilfully paradoxical, and it came about, when their acquaintanceship was about three weeks old, that while Jim Done, the small and early philosopher, held Lucy in fine disdain as a born fool, his vital humanity discovered strange allurements in her, and her proximity fired a craving in his blood that sometimes tempted him to crush her in his arms and bruise her lips with kisses. He grew less brusque with her, and showed on occasions a sort of diffident gentleness, and then Lucy was satisfied that her work was progressing.

'You never talk of your life there in England,' she said one night as they stood by the mizzen-chains overlooking the sea. Since the use of the forepart of the ship had been offered him as a privilege, Done religiously abstained from encroaching a foot beyond

the steerage limit, although he had previously invaded the sacred reserve on occasion in defiance of authority.

Page 21

‘No,’ he said; ‘I am running away from that.’

He gave little thought to the conversation, but he was thinking much of the girl. She looked strangely beautiful and unreal in the dim light—curiously visionary—and yet he felt that she radiated warmth and life. Something stirred hotly within him: he was drawn to her as with many hands.

‘It would interest me,’ she said—’it would interest me deeply.’ She turned her face up to him, and her eyes caught the light, and burned with curious lustre in the shadowy face.

He did not misjudge her; he knew her concern for him to be the outcome of gratitude and the kindliness of a simple nature, but it conveyed a sweet flattery. Her hand rested upon his arm, and from its soft pressure flowed currents of emotion. At his heart was a savage hunger. The faint scent her hair exhaled seemed to cloud his brain and his vision.

’I feel that it is some sorrow, some wrong done you in your early life, that makes you so bitter against the world,’ she said. ’You think ill of all because one or two have been unkind and unjust, perhaps. Because someone has been false or unfair to you at home there, you are cold and contemptuous and distrustful of the people around you here, who are eager to be your friends.’ Her tone was almost caressing.

For answer he caught her up in his arms, using his strength roughly, cruelly, clasping her to his breast, and kissing her mouth twice, thrice, with a fierce rapture. A moment he held her thus, gazing into her face, and the girl’s hands seemed to flutter up to his neck. Suddenly she experienced an awakening. On the heels of the new joy came a new terror. Setting her palms against his breast, she pushed herself from his relaxed arms. A few feet of deck, a space of cold moonlight, divided them, and they stood thus, facing each other in silence. Lucy had an intuitive expectancy; the situation called for an avowal. It became awkward. A boyish shamefacedness had followed Done’s outburst of passion, and he spoke never a word. The two were victims of a painful anti-climax. A girl has but one resource in such an emergency. The tears came, and Lucy Woodrow turned and stole away, leaving Jim stunned, abashed, with unseeing eyes bent upon the sea. Done’s right hand was striking at the woodwork mechanically; his mind was in a turmoil. The blows increased in force till blood ran from his knuckles, and then through his clenched teeth came the bitter words. His rage against himself had a biting vindictiveness. He cursed in whispers.

What a fool he had been! What a fatuous, blundering ass! What had he done? Why had he done it? Was he in love, with Lucy Woodrow? This latter question recurred again and again through the night, and the answer came vehemently—no, no, and no again! He had nothing in common with the girl. He recited a score of her simple, silly opinions in self-defence, and, having strenuously reasserted his freedom, turned over to sleep, and slept never a wink all night. What disturbed him most was the fear of

meeting Lucy Woodrow again. Perhaps she would avoid him now. There was no comfort in the thought. He knew that what had happened must alter their relations towards each other, but could neither admit that Lucy was necessary to him nor summon up a comfortable indifference.

Page 22

V

Done caught a fleeting glimpse of Lucy Woodrow next day, Tuesday. She was certainly avoiding him. The conviction made him bitter. How well Schopenhauer knew these women! Lucy's squeamishness was further proof of a narrow and commonplace mind. Had he suffered so much all his life at the hands of people of this class, and learned to measure them so well and hate them so sincerely, only to be won over by the prettiness of a simple girl? He brooded over the matter for some hours, when it was driven from his mind by an important happening. Early on the following morning the first mate reported that land had been sighted. The news stirred the ship as an intruding foot stirs an anthill. The people swarmed upon the decks, and strained their eyes in the direction pointed by Captain Evan's glass, which was in eager demand amongst the cabin passengers all the forenoon.

One sailor, a canny Scot, produced a battered old telescope, and did a very profitable business with the excited emigrants, whom he charged 'saxpence' for their first peep at the land where fortune and glory waited them. The telescope was quite unequal to the occasion, but its owner had carefully drawn a mark on the lens to represent the desired object, and there were no complaints, although the Australian coast-line sometimes sloped at acute angles, and often appeared to be quite perpendicular.

Jim awoke to new sensations, and all his hopes and ambitions surged back upon him with redoubled force. A childish rapture possessed him; he had an impulse to run and jump, to act foolishly, and to yell like a boy at play. It required some self-restraint to keep from throwing wide his arms to the warm sun, that seemed to instil delight into his very veins.

Meanwhile Lucy Woodrow had experienced another shock, and had been afforded some idea of the cheerful readiness with which a censorious world misconstrues our amiable intentions, and imputes selfish motives to the most disinterested missioner. She found herself quite unable to work up a proper feeling of indignation against Done. Her training impelled her to stigmatize his conduct as ungentlemanly, ungenerous, and absolutely shocking. The words of condemnation came readily enough, but there was no proper spirit of maidenly pride behind them. On the contrary, deep down in her breast there glowed a sense of triumph, an abiding joy, of which she made some effort to be ashamed. Her avoidance of the young man on the day following his misdemeanour was a pathetic bit of dissimulation, an effort on Lucy's part to deceive herself with a show of coldness and dignity.

During the Tuesday afternoon and evening Mrs. Donald Macdougal had assumed towards Lucy the touching airs of an injured innocent. Her cough required more than usual attention, and her head was extremely bad, but she bore it all with conspicuous

resignation. She could not contain herself long, however, and gave utterance to her grievance in the evening.

Page 23

‘I do think you ought to give me a little more of your confidence, Lucy,’ she said, with an aggrieved air.

‘In what way, Mrs. Macdougal?’ asked Lucy, surprised at the words and the tone.

’Well, my dear, I have treated you almost like a sister. I am in a manner your guardian; and it’s nice to feel one is trusted, is it not?’

‘But I do trust you; and I am grateful too—most grateful.’

’It isn’t that. You don’t tell me things. For instance, about young Done.’

’Really, Mrs. Macdougal, there is nothing of interest that you do not know.

’Oh, nonsense, Lucy! Why are you blushing, then? You have been a great deal together since the accident, and I permitted it because he is so brave and handsome, and he is quite a gentleman, in spite of his position. But ’—and here the voice grew petulant—’I thought you would give me your confidence. You ought to have had more consideration for me, seeing how dull I was, and how stupid it is here, with nothing to do and nothing to talk about.’

’My meetings with Mr. Done have been merely friendly. It would not amuse you in the least to hear our conversation repeated.’ Lucy felt that her face was scarlet. She was angry and combative.

‘Come, now, is that fair?’ continued Mrs. Macdougal, patiently sad.

’You know you are the heroine of the ship’s romance. We’re just aching with curiosity about it.’

‘Mrs. Macdougal, you amaze me!’

’We have scarcely talked of anything else for weeks, and I did think you’d put your trust in me.’

The girl was standing with squared shoulders and erect head, a patch of colour on either cheek, a courageous spark in either eye, and wrath in every gesture and in every line of her slim figure.

‘Is this true?’ she said. ’Do you mean to tell me that my friendship with Mr. Done has been the subject of the usual idle chatter here, day and night?’

‘What could you expect, my dear?’

‘That I have been criticised and scandalized and spied upon?’

’But with the nicest feelings and the best wishes. What else was there to interest anyone? I thought you understood. It was so romantic and delightful, and we were all so pleased to find him taking a real interest in you. The people quite expect you to become engaged, you know. It would be a most delightful ending, would it not?’

‘It is a shame—a great shame!’ cried Lucy. These people have no decency. I will tell you this, Mrs. Macdougal that no word of what you speak of has passed between Mr. Done and me.’

Mrs. Macdougal was quite grieved. ’The passengers will be disappointed she said. ’I’m afraid they won’t think it quite nice of you. You see, these things are expected to end prettily. It’s customary.’

It’s very absurd and very mean.’

Mrs. Macdougal shook her head ominously. The thought of the chagrin of the cabins, deprived of a satisfactory climax to their little romance, filled her with gravest apprehension. Her strong belief was that Done and Lucy owed it as a sacred duty to the eternal verities, as set forth in popular fiction, to marry. If they failed to conform, they gave people good grounds for a grievance.

Page 24

Lucy Woodrow's spirit was up in arms. The girl who had feared nothing so much as to find herself at variance with her fellows, and had believed the affection and the goodwill of those about her to be the first essentials to happiness, felt no weakness, no lack of self-reliance, now that she was in some measure pitted against the many. She resented the conduct of the passengers in making her the subject of their tittle-tattle with a bitterness she had never felt before. In overlooking her actions and assuming a right to influence her in a purely personal matter, these people were guilty of an insolence to which she would not submit. She thought she discovered a certain antagonism amongst those with whom she presently came into contact, and the opposition developed character. Pride came to her aid. No doubt some peeping Tom or prying woman had been witness to the theft of kisses. In that case the incident would now be a theme of conversation in the cabins. She could not trust Mrs. Macdougal to withhold from the gossips a single word of their conversation. Lucy's determination was to show herself superior to the ship's opinion; she would not have it thought she was influenced one way or the other, and for that reason it was necessary that there should be no appearance of a quarrel between herself and Done.

She found him sitting on a gun-carriage, and seated herself by his side, having offered her hand in token of amity.

Jim's heart had never been so light; his cherished animosities were fled for the time being. But conversation was difficult. He detected a difference in the girl that was not explicable to him, and imagined that she was still angry. He realized, too, that she was at a disadvantage, because of the service he had rendered her, and presently blurted something like an apology.

'I suppose I oughtn't to have done that the other night?' he said.

'No,' she murmured. Her head was bowed, and her foot tapped tremulously on the deck.

'It's the sort of thing the respectables pretend to be shocked at, isn't it? Well, I regretted it immediately.' His voice had grown softer. 'I did, upon my word!'

'Please don't speak of it,' she pleaded. In truth, the apology troubled her deeply where the offence had left no pain. She wished it had never been spoken The thought of it had power to provoke tears long after.

The Francis Cadman sailed majestically through the Heads into Port Phillip on a beautiful Sunday morning in November, when the beneficent spring was merging into a fiery Southern summer. The sun blazed with tropic splendour in a sky of unspotted sapphire; the blue, translucent waters danced in unison with the hearts on deck, rippling into gold and silver and the sparkle of a myriad diamonds. Eager eyes saw the symbols

of wealth in all things, and a fever of exultation and expectancy burned in the ship. Done was like a man drunken. It was as if sunshine

Page 25

were a strange, new thing to him, as if he had never breathed deeply and truly the good air of God till now. He had big affectionate impulses; he felt that the sailors were fine fellows, his shipmates cheerful souls. He would have liked to shake hands all round and assure them of his friendship, but sailors and passengers were full of their own affairs, and took no notice of him. For two days past there had been much whispering amongst the crew and the men under contract to work the ship that had been left crewless in Australian waters. Done detected an undercurrent of excitement, and noticed many guarded consultations. That there was some conspiracy afloat he was convinced, but the plotting was conducted in so cheerful—even hilarious—a spirit that he suspected no evil.

The ship was anchored off Queenscliff to bide the coming of the noisy, grimy, paddle-tug engaged to tow her wearily into Hobson's Bay, and up to her berth by the primitive river wharf. And now speculation and curiosity were awakened in the cabins by the peculiar conduct of Captain Evan in stationing armed sailors along the ship, larboard and starboard.

Shortly after, Done, who was watching developments with keen interest, saw a Scandinavian seaman named Jorgensen steal over the side, and slip into the sea like a porpoise. Jorgensen struck out for the shore, swimming under water for the most part, till he had covered a distance of about two hundred yards from the ship. Others, including the armed sailors, had witnessed Jorgensen's escape, but no one spoke.

Nearly an hour passed, and then Jim saw that two boats were coming towards them from a distant point. At the sight of these there was a rush of sailors. No orders had been given, but a score of men busied themselves lowering the Francis Cadman's boats, laughing at their work and joking uproariously. Others came singing and yelling from the forecastle and up through the hatchways, with bundles which they piled on the deck. All order was abolished; the jubilant cries of the sailors were echoed back from the shores over the placid sea.

Captain Evan stood upon the deck, pale with passion, gesticulating furiously, shouting orders that no one heard. Every time he opened his lips the sailors responded with louder yells of cheerful derision. Evan rushed at one of the armed sailors, cursing heroically.

'Fire on them! Fire, I tell you!' he cried.

The man paid not the slightest heed, and Captain Evan, snatching the gun from his hands, levelled it at the boatswain.

'Down on your knees, you mutinous dog!' he thundered.

The boatswain grinned amiably, and thrust his finger into the barrel of the piece.

‘By the holy, we’ve spiked your gun, Captain!’ he said.

Page 26

Evan pulled the trigger. The cap snapped and nothing more, and now, worked into an ungovernable passion, he clubbed his gun, and bringing the stock down upon the boatswain's head, stretched him upon the deck with a cracked skull. Swinging his weapon, the Captain dashed at the men, but a dozen pair of hands were on him, and he was dragged down. Bently, the first mate, who went to his assistance, was served similarly. In a few moments they lay helpless, trussed like turkeys ready for the roasting. The cabin passengers gathered about, white-faced, full of terror, thinking of piracy and all its attendant horrors. Some of the women were screaming. The sailors lifted Evan and Bently; and Done, who was watching the turn of events, greatly agitated, was startled into a new train of thought by a woman who had thrown herself at his feet, clinging to his knees, crying:

'Help him! help him! They are going to do murder!'

It was Mrs. Macdougal. Done started forward, and half a dozen sailors moved to intercept him.

'You don't mean mischief?' he said.

'Devil a bit!' replied a big Irishman. 'We'll stow them out of harm's way till we're safe on shore, an' never a mischief will be done to annywon at all. Come along, Captain darlin',' he added. 'Ye'll rist aisier in yer cabin. We're goin' diggin' fer the gould, an' not all the fiends out iv Connaught could shtop us.'

Captain and mate were bestowed under lock and key, and, like a band of schoolboys at breaking-up, the men continued their mutinous work. One section had started a quaint chanty; the rest caught it up presently, and with the rhythm of the song came something like order among the mutineers. Singing lustily, they piled their baggage into the boats, and Done, who had recovered the feeling of annoyance his impulsive interference had occasioned him, watched them, rejoicing in sympathy. He had brought no particular respect for law and order from the Old Land, and this happy revolt delighted him. He would have loved to join the merry adventurers in their defiance of authority. It was grand! Lustily he sang the chanty, and as the boats, loaded down with sailors and their traps, and towing astern in the warm sea strings of deserters for whom there was no room aboard, moved off, he leaned over the bulwarks waving his hat, and shouted with all the power of his lungs:

'Good luck to you, boys!'

They answered with a cheer, forgetting all differences in their present robust animal spirits. Ryan sprang up in one of the boats.

'Come wid us, man; why don't you?' he cried.

Jim had a strong impulse to follow, but a small hand seized his.

‘No, no—please, no!’ whispered Lucy at his side.

He shook his head at the men. After all, there was no occasion for him to run away; he was bound to no man.

Page 27

The sailors had taken the key of the Captain's cabin with them, and by the time Evan and the mate were liberated the crew of the Francis Cadman and all the sailors under contract to the distracted owners of vessels riding idle and helpless on Corio Bay and Hobson's Bay had disappeared amongst the ti-tree fringing the shore, leaving the ship's boats afloat. Five sailors remained aboard—one, the boatswain, was temporarily disabled; two of the others were sick and bedridden. Captain Evan stood on the main hatchway and reviewed the situation, and in his manner of expressing himself there remained no trace whatever of the suave autocrat of the cabins. In less than an hour his voyage had been converted into an utter and ignominious failure.

The journey from the Heads to the river mouth in the wake of the tug-boat Platypus, slow and toil some, set Jim in an itch of impatience. He was longing to feel land under his feet once more, and was leaning over the side, his awkwardly-packed canvas bag of belongings at his feet, watching the line of Liardit Beach, with its few dingy buildings standing back from the sea, apprehensive lest this, after all, should prove to be Melbourne, his brave city of refuge, when Lucy Woodrow approached him to say farewell.

'They tell me we are very near our journey's end,' she said. 'I wish to ask you a favour before you go.'

She looked strong and confident, and he was grateful there were to be no tears, having anticipated something like a scene. She had prepared to land, too, and wore a dark dress he had not seen before, and a quaint little hat that became her well. He thought her beautiful. The idea of parting with her hurt now, and his pulse stirred impatiently. The admiration in his eyes caused a flush to relieve the pale olive of her cheeks.

'I'll do anything you ask,' he said,

'It is a very little thing. This is Mrs. Macdougal's address. I want you to promise to write to me.'

'I will.'

'Your life in this new land will be active and adventurous, I'm sure, but some day, in one month, or two, or perhaps a year, you will find time to send me a letter to say how you are, and how the strange country pleases you?'

'You are the only human creature I have met in friendship,' he said, betrayed into warmth by her unaffected concern. 'I can never forget you, Lucy.' He used her Christian name for the first time.

'Thank you, James,' she answered simply.

‘No, no—Jim! Jim!’ He had been called James only by the parson and the magistrates of Chisley, and he despised the unctuousness that seemed to cling to the name.

‘Thank you, Jim,’ she said, smiling. ‘You see,’ she continued gravely, ’what you have done for me makes it impossible that I can ever be careless about your welfare. I shall always want to know where you are, and if you are well and happy.’

‘I’m not used to this sort of thing,’ he stammered.

Page 28

I bear it badly.’ And, indeed, he had a most amazing disposition to lapse into tears The disposition was never near to mastering him, but there it was.

She saw his agitation, and it warmed the mothering feeling which, though still a child in heart and years his junior, she had long felt for the big, strong, friendless youngster.

‘You will take this, won’t you? I intend it as a little keepsake.’

She proffered a small gold locket somewhat shyly, and blushed deeply when he opened it and discovered a tiny miniature of herself. He was pleased to have it, and told her so in a graceless way.

‘Do you mean to go ashore at once?’ she asked presently.

‘Yes; just as soon as I can.’

‘Mrs. Macdougal is ready, and I suppose we leave the ship immediately.’

He took her small hand in his. ‘Good-bye,’ he said. He longed to hold her in his arms again.

‘Good-bye,’ she whispered.

’I hope you’ll find things easy for you out there, and that you will be happy.’

’I think I shall. I am going to try hard for happiness—to be as happy as I once was. Say you will try too.’

He looked at the wide sweep of blue sky, and the new land swathed in a golden atmosphere of glorious sunshine and more glorious hopes, and did not smile at her idea of happiness recoverable by distraint.

Mrs. Macdougal bustled up. She had brought dresses from Europe with the object of prostrating what little feminine society there was in the neighbourhood of Boobyalla, and wore one of them now. If her colour was not all natural, it was a very excellent imitation. She looked charming.

‘Sure you are quite ready, my dear?’ she said. ’Macdougal will be waiting. Macdougal of Boobyalla, you know.’ This to Jim: ’And he’s a most impatient wretch. Saying au revoir?’ she queried archly, after a pause.

‘I was bidding Mr. Done good-bye,’ said Lucy.

‘It is very sad, parting with old friends,’ murmured Mrs. Macdougal, with veiled eyes.

‘Sadder parting with new ones,’ replied Jim, glancing towards Lucy.

’Oh yes, it is, is it not? But you will come and visit us some time at Boobyalla. We are shipmates, and that’s a sort of relationship in Australia.’

Done thanked her, but equivocated. He could not see himself as the guest of the great Donald Macdougal, J.P., of Boobyalla. The lady experienced a glow of impatience. Only a hobbledehoy could prefer Lucy Woodrow’s immature charms to the ripe perfections of a woman of her years.

VI

Page 29

Jim was the first off the Francis Cadman on the Monday afternoon when she drew alongside the rough Yarra wharf just under Bateman's Hill, and when he set his foot on Australian soil he planted one tendril of his heart there. He let fall his bag, and looked about him. The arrival of the ship had occasioned no interest that he could discover. Perhaps the news was not yet common property. A dusty road along the banks of the river on his right led to the town; there were a few scattered houses of dark stone and primitive design on the hill before him, beside which the lawless gum-trees flourished. The day was intensely hot; a wind that might have breathed o'er the infernal regions whipped up clouds of dust, and spun them into fantastic shapes, filling eyes and lungs, but no discomfort could dull the joy he felt on coming into his kingdom. He had turned his back to the wind to wait the passing of a sirocco of sand, when a double-seated American waggon, drawn by two steaming horses, flashed on him out of the storm, driving him headlong to the ground, and coming to a standstill within a few feet. The bag had served as a buffer, and the deeply-ploughed roadway made a soft bed, so that no bones were broken; but Done arose with all his fighting instincts aflame, and turned upon the driver.

'You murderous ruffian!' he cried. 'I've a mind to break—'

He stopped short, one foot upon the step, one hand grasping the ironwork of the seat, staring at the driver, suddenly disarmed. The man on the seat was a grizzled, malformed creature of about fifty, with a deeply-wrinkled small face, burnt a dark tan, and almost covered with a tangle of short, crisp, iron-gray whiskers. The suggestion of a rough-haired terrier was so strong that Done expected the brute to bark at him. The small eyes in the protecting shade of tufted brows, like miniature overhanging horns, were keen and shrewd This extraordinary head was supported by a small and shapeless body, the legs of which were much too long and extremely thin, as were the arms also; but the wrists and hands, strained to hold the restive horses, were hard, corded, and hairy, suggesting a gorilla-like vitality in the curious man. Done let himself down to the roadway again. One could not fight with so miserable a cripple.

'You drive like a madman, mister,' he said in a milder tone.

'Maybe yer off the ship just now?' said the ape like driver, quite ignoring Done's grievance and his words. 'So bein', you can tell we if there's a Mistress Macdougal aboard her.'

The man kept his eyes on his horses; his heels were firmly set on the footboard. It. needed all the strength of his iron wrists to restrain the beasts—tall, lean bays, with a certain piratical rakishness about them, long-maned and long-tailed, effective weapons against the voracious flies that swarmed over their rumps. Their powerful frames showed through clean, healthy hides, and their blood in the proud carriage

Page 30

of their heads and their hot impatience under restraint. A half-caste aboriginal boy, dressed apparently in his master's old clothes—and the master's own clothes were none too new—sprawled on the bottom of the vehicle, and grinned at Done in a friendly way over the tailboard. Jim resented the cripple's contempt for his wrongs, and ignored the question put to him. He was taking up his belongings again, when Mrs. Macdougal herself fluttered by.

'Why, Mack!' she cried.

The driver's eyes left his horses' ears for a moment, and rested on the lady. They displayed no particular feeling.

'Hello, missus!' he said casually, adding, after a pause: 'Best jump up. Nags a bit fresh.'

Jim walked on. So this was Donald Macdougal, J.P., of Boobyalla. The young man's annoyance fell from him. He thought of the devoted husband's greeting after their long parting, and laughed aloud. Macdougal of Boobyalla was no demonstrative lover. A few minutes later the waggon dashed past Done; the bays were being driven at a gallop, and the vehicle fairly jumped on the broken road. The young man caught a glimpse of Lucy clinging desperately to her seat, and then waggon and horses were buried in a dust-cloud of their own making, which was whirled away at a terrific pace, and spun out of his view round a distant corner.

Done plodded along with his bag upon his shoulder. He had no definite plan of action. He thought now of looking about him for a day or two before leaving for the fields. No doubt it would be an easy matter to get accommodation at some hotel or lodging-house. After that he would move with the throng, and his future actions would depend upon such knowledge as he might be able to gather from the experienced people with whom he came in contact. He presently had ample proof that the driving of Macdougal of Boobyalla was nothing extraordinary here. Three horsemen passed him at a racing speed, and with much shouting and cracking of whips, and a wild, bewhiskered Bushman, driving two horses in a light, giglike vehicle, charged through the dust at a pace implying some business of life or death; but a little further on Jim came upon the steaming pair tethered to a post outside a rough structure labelled the 'Miner's Rest,' and at the bar stood the driver toying lazily with a nobbler of brandy. He passed groups of men lounging against the building and sitting in the street, all smoking, none showing particular concern about anything. Their lethargy surprised him. He had expected to find the town mad with excitement, to behold here the gold fever blazing without restraint; but wherever there was a post to lean against a man was leaning against it, exactly as if there were nothing doing, and the world had not just run demented over the richness of their Victorian fields. It remained for him to learn that this very excitement

provoked a corresponding lassitude, and that when the Australian diggers were not indulging in the extreme of frenzied exertion or boisterous recreation their inertia surpassed that of their own koala, the native sloth.

Page 31

Ere he reached the busier part of the town, Jim made the disconcerting discovery that he was a marked man, an object of public contumely. He had heard calls of derision at various points along the road, and was convinced now that for some reason or another he was exciting the laughter and badinage of the men. This was a painful shock to Done's happiness. The situation recalled Chisley, and something of the old Ishmael stirred within him. He set his teeth and hurried on. 'Pea-souper!' was the epithet most in favour amongst his tormentors. Why 'Pea-souper!' Jim could not understand. He could see no aptness in its application to him, and yet it was certainly a term of mockery. 'Pea-souper!' The taunt had an ignominious flavour. It hurt because it recalled so much of what he had travelled halfway round the world to escape.

He plunged into Elizabeth Street as if seeking cover. Here the crowd was thick, and one man might pass unheeded. Elizabeth Street was the busiest thoroughfare of Melbourne—a miserable, unformed street, the buildings of which were perched on either side of a gully. Pedestrians who were not sober ran serious risks of falling from the footpaths into the roadway below, a rather serious fall in places. Plunged is the right word; the road was churned into a dust-pit, on the footpath the dust lay ankle-deep, and people on foot had the appearance of wading through shallow water. Occasional gusts of the hot north wind seemed to lift the Street like a blanket, and shake its yellow, insinuating dust in the faces of the people.

Here Done found the characteristic lassitude of the unemployed digger and the surging life of a town suddenly thronged with the adventurous men of the earth blended in a strange medley. Men were lounging everywhere, talking and smoking, or merely sunk in a state of abstraction. The talk was all of digging. The miners were exchanging news, rumour and opinions, and lying about their past takings, or the fabulous patches they had just missed—lying patiently and pertinaciously. Many faces were marked and discoloured from recent debauches. Lowly inebriates slept peacefully in the dust, one with his head affectionately pillowed on a dog that snarled and snapped at anyone coming within three feet of its master.

There was little variety in the dress worn. Even the man who had not been two miles from Melbourne affected the manner of the digger, and donned his uniform. Cabbage-tree hats or billycocks were on every head, and for the rest a gray or blue jumper tucked into Clay-stained trousers and Wellington boots satisfied the majority. A few swells and 'flash' diggers exhibited a lively fancy in puggaries and silk sashes and velvet corduroys and natty patent-leather leggings, but anything more pretentious was received with unmistakable manifestations of popular disfavour. A large bullock-team hauling a waggon load of bales blundered slowly along the road, the weary cattle

Page 32

swinging from side to side under the lash of the bullocky, who yelled hoarse profanity with the volubility of an auctioneer and the vocabulary of a Yankee skipper unchecked by authority. A little further on another team, drawn up before a hotel, lay sprawling, half buried, the patient bullocks twisted into painful angles by reason of their yokes, quietly chewing the cud. Riders and drivers conformed to no rule of the road, and maintained a headlong pace implying a great contempt for horseflesh, and no more respect for their own limbs than for the neck of the merest stranger. From the bars, which were frequent, came a babel of laughter and shouting. To the 'Pea-souper' every thing was new and wonderful.

A squalid aboriginal swathed in an old tablecloth fresh from some breakfast started from a corner, pointing a long, dirty finger at Done, and grinning a wide grin.

'Yah! dam new chum!' he said. Then he laughed as only an Australian black can, with a glitter of seemingly endless white teeth, and a strident roar that might have been heard a mile off.

'New chum!' This appellation had been thrown at Done a dozen times.

'Pea-souper!' trumpeted a horseman through his hands. There were sarcastic references to 'limejuice,' and Jim was asked by several strangers, with a show of much concern, if his mother knew he was out. 'Does your mother know you're out?' was then a new and popular street gag, and the query implied a childlike incapability of taking care of himself on the part of the person addressed, and was generally accepted as a choice piece of humour. Jim heard so many references to the 'new chum's bundle' that he was presently satisfied he owed all these unpleasant little attentions to the burden he carried, and he determined to rid himself of it at the first opportunity. Turning into Bourke Street, he eventually found a hotel where there was comparative peace. Entering, he called for a drink.

'New chum?' queried the barman, after serving him.

'I suppose I am,' replied Jim. 'Look here, would you mind telling me what in the devil's name a new chum is?'

'A new chum is a man fresh from home.'

'From England?'

'Scotland, Ireland, anywhere else, if he's green and inexperienced. Miners from the Californian fields don't rank as new chums.'

'And how am I known as a new chum?'

The barman grinned. ‘That’ll tell on you all over the place,’ he said, indicating the bag. ’That’s a true new chum’s bundle. No Australian would expatriate himself by carrying his goods in that fashion. He makes them up in a roll, straps them, and carries them in a sling on his back. His bundle is then a swag. The swag is the Australian’s national badge.’

’Well, I’m hanged if that isn’t a little thing to make a row about. Do you reckon it shameful to be a new chum, then?’

’Not exactly. No offence is intended; the men jeer out of mere harmless devilment. The new churn’s got so much to learn here, he can’t help looking a born fool as a general thing.’

Page 33

‘And pea-souper and lime-juicer?’

’They’ve been hazing you properly, mate. Pea-soupers and lime-juicers are strangers off shipboard. They’d never have spotted you, though, without the bundle. There’s no raw-meat tint about you; you’re tanned like a native. Buy a blue jumper and get a cabbage-tree up in place of that cap, and you’d pass muster as a Sydney-sider born and bred.’

‘A cabbage-tree?’

’Hat—straw. Get a second-hand one if you can: they’re more appreciated. Usually a man likes to colour his own hat as he colours his own pipe; but you’re eager to meet the Australian prejudice against newness. Another bit of advice,’ continued the bar-man, who was glad of the chance to turn his vast antipodean experience to some account. ’If you happen to be anybody in particular, as you love your peace of mind and your bodily comfort, don’t speak of it.’

‘Luckily, I’m nobody in particular.’

’That’s all right. I was idiot enough to let it be known that I was afflicted with an aristocratic name, and I had to hold this job against banter enough to drive a cow daft. Now my name’s Smith.’

‘Are you a new chum, then?’

‘Lord no! I’ve been out seven weeks.’

It was Jim’s turn to laugh. ‘Well,’ he said, ’if a man can qualify as a representative Australian in seven weeks, I’m not going to complain.’

The barman provided much more valuable information. Bed and board could not be had at that establishment for love or money, and, furthermore, it was unlikely Jim would be able to find lodgings anywhere in Melbourne.

‘I suppose you can take care of yourself—you look a likely man,’ he said. ’Well, the nights are so warm no man needs a dwelling. When you’re tired of knocking round to-night, take your traps down by the river, roll yourself in your blanket in the lee of a gum-tree, and sleep there. Did it myself for a week, and only had to put up one fight all the time. Sleeping out’s no hardship here. Meanwhile, in exchange for the latest news from down under, I’ll dump your swag, and keep an eye on her till you call again.’

The young fellow’s ready friendship was most grateful to Done, and he remained in the bar till a run of business rendered further conversation impossible, picking up useful knowledge by the way, and presently discovering the barman to be a gentleman with an expensive polish, whose most earnest desire was to hide his gentility and disguise the

contingent gloss under a brave assumption of the manners and speech peculiar to the people of the rough young democracy.

Page 34

Tea that evening was the most expensive meal Jim Done had ever eaten, and far from being the best; but his appetite was equal to anything, and the fare on the Francis Cadman had not been so dainty as to give him any epicurean prejudices. It was night when Jim came from the primitive restaurant, darkness having come down with a suddenness surprising to a new chum accustomed to long twilights. Jim had taken tea in a tent near Paddy's Market. Here scores of tents of all sorts and sizes were huddled together. All cooking was done out of doors. Fires were everywhere, their glow, reflected brightly on the canvas of the 'flies,' giving a fantastic brilliance to the scene. Life stirred around him, jubilant, bounteous, pulsing life. The levity of the people was without limit. Their childishness astonished Done, but he lived to find this a characteristic of the diggers in all parts; even the roughest men in the roughest camps exhibited a schoolboy's love of horseplay and a great capacity for primitive happiness. It was as if the people, having thrown off the more galling restraints of civilization and order, felt their limbs and spirits free for the first time, and exercised both with the freedom and, the austere critic may say, the foolishness of mountain goats.

Jim's whole being was infected with the spirit of the place, his blood danced. He had discarded his cap for a well-seasoned cabbage-tree, and wore a blue jumper under his coat, and now passed unheeded, excepting when a jovial digger, flown with brandy and success, roared a 'Good luck, mate!' or commanded him in to drink. Social restraints were gone; equality ruled the road; all men were brothers, and friendships of ten minutes' standing were as sacred as the ties of kinship.

The night was young, but already turbulent. The hot wind had passed, and the air was sweet and free from dust. As he moved along the street, Done's ear caught the squeak and the twang of fiddle and banjo coming through the confusion of voices. Step-dancing and singing were the most popular delights. The ability to sing a comic song badly was passport enough in digger society. The streets were lit with kerosene. Here and there a slush lamp or a torch blazed before an establishment seeking notoriety, shedding a note of lurid colour upon the faces of the bearded men thronging the footpath. If there were laws controlling all these elements, Jim failed to discover a sign of them; neither did he see sign of the flagrant lawlessness he had been led to expect. The absence of arms surprised him most of all. He looked to find knives and revolvers in every belt, but saw no display of weapons, and noting the bluff, lumbering kindliness animating the crowd, he thought of his own small but carefully selected arsenal with some contempt.

Jim Done walked about the streets for two hours, interested in everything, disappointed with nothing. All this satisfied the craving that had driven him from home. Here he was one of the people, a man amongst men, accepted at his face and physical value by fellow-creatures who respected most the fearless eye and the strong arm. Moreover, there were no signs of those hated forces, respectability, piety, conventionality, all of which had seemed to range themselves automatically on the side of his enemies.

Page 35

He came to a large wooden hall with a row of lamps blazing along its front and a foreign sign over the door. From within floated strains of music and the beating of many feet. Jim entered. The place was crowded with hairy diggers—mostly successful, he learned presently. The atmosphere was heavy with smoke. A wild dance was going on, and several sets held the floor. Half a dozen of the most fortunate of the men had female partners, the others danced 'bucks,' man and man, and the pounding of their heavy boots and the yells of laughter provoked by their clumsy movements quite drowned the music of the feeble orchestra, crowded away in the far corner of the room. Along one end ran an unplaned wooden counter, where two or three barmen were kept busy serving gin, brandy, and rum to the parched dancers. When the dance was ended there was a rush for the bar, and Jim found now that dancing did not go by favour, the hands of the fair being bestowed upon the highest bidders. One tall, lack-haired, laughing girl, with the figure and face of a Bacchante, sprang upon a chair, shaking aloft a yellow scarf, and was auctioned for the next dance amidst a storm of bidding and a hurricane of merriment. She was borne down the room in the arms of the triumphant digger, who had paid thirty 'weights' for his bouncing partner—six pounds for ten minutes' dancing, and the proud purchaser couldn't dance a step!

Jim watched the women curiously; they were a new type to him—young, virile, red-lipped, flushed with wine, shameless in the face of the crowd, their faces kindled with laughter. They led the men in their wild revel—pagans absolute. One in particular attracted Done; she was tall, dark-eyed, and black-haired. This, in conjunction with the bold combination of red and black in her costume, gave him the belief that she was Spanish. There was about her some suggestion of character and strength that pleased him. She romped like a child; her merriment was clean and unforced. He saw nothing of the corruption that Vice is supposed to stamp upon the faces of her votaries. These women, despite the feeble kerosene lights, the tobacco-smoke, and the bare, ugly walls, might have been participants in the revels of Dionysus.

Several times, passing him in the dance, the eyes of the Spaniard flashed into his own, and she smiled. When the dance was ended she confronted him.

'Sure, you're goin' to dance wid me, ain't ye now?' she said in the most mellifluous brogue.

Done shook his head and laughed with diffidence.

'No, thanks,' he said. 'I'm not a rich digger. Only a poor new chum,' he added, hoping to carry conviction.

'Straight from the Ould Country, is it?' asked the girl eagerly. 'Have ye the word of ould Ireland, an' how does she stand? The dance is yours for the shmallest token.'

'I'm sorry I don't know Ireland,' said Jim.

‘Then I’ll give you the dance fer natural love an’ affection.’

Page 36

Done protested that he could not dance, but the laughing girl dragged him into the thick of it.

‘Come along!’ she cried, dropping the brogue. ’I’m a patriot, and I love you for the green in your eye.’

Jim danced. He was literally forced into it, and presently found himself getting along quite decently in a barbaric sort of polka. When the music ceased he followed the custom of the country, and shouted for his partner. She drank sherry. He left the hall a few minutes later, with the girl’s kiss, lightly given, tingling on his lips, and walked away quickly, treading on air. Presently he began to question himself. Why this growing exuberance? Was it drink? Never before had he felt its influence. He pulled himself together. He was crowding his sensation: it was time to cry a halt.

The young man returned to the hotel where he had left his belongings. The long bar was crowded with men. The hotel was little more than a large tent with a pretentious wooden front. It was illumined by a single lamp suspended above the counter. This lamp lit up the faces of the men gathered under it, but beyond the countenances of the customers faded into a mist of tobacco-smoke, deepening into darkness in the corners.

Done leant against the bar, watching the scene, still curious, content to wait till the busy barman had leisure to attend to him. After a few moments he found himself an object of most marked interest to a tall, thin digger, perched on an up-ended barrel, drinking porter. The man was watching him narrowly, and at length, as if to leave no doubt of his attentions, he stepped down, and, standing squarely in front of Done, looked him closely in the face. Jim returned the stare, finding curiosity deepen into surprise, and surprise into conviction, in the countenance confronting him.

‘Solo!’ cried the man. ‘Solo, by all that’s holy!’ As he spoke he sprang between Jim and the door way, as if to cut off escape. ‘Bail up!’ he said; ‘we’ve got you tight this trip.’

‘You’re making a mistake, I think, mate,’ said Jim. ’Anyhow, my name is not Solo.’

‘That’s a bluff! I know you too damn well! Boys,’ continued the miner, addressing the crowd, ’it’s Solo. I’ll wager my soul on it. Get at him! There’s five hundred cold guineas on his head!’

‘I tell you you’re wrong!’ blurted Done.

The tall man waited for no further argument, but jumped at Done, and they closed. There was a short struggle, and Jim put his opponent down with an old Cousin-Jack trick that he had often tried on better men.

‘The man’s drunk!’ said Jim, as the crowd narrowed in on him. He set his back against the counter, prepared to make a good fight.

A raw-boned, brown-faced native of about twenty-six grappled with him, but only as a pretence, as Done speedily found.

‘Bolt, or you’re a done man!’ whispered the Australian at his ear. ’When I smash the lamp, over the counter and under the tent, and skedaddle for your life!’

Page 37

This young fellow allowed himself to be thrown off, and backed into the crowd. The long man, who had recovered his wind, turned to address the men.

‘It’s Solo, mates,’ he said, ’and there’s five hundred waiting for us if we take him.’

The men moved forward in a body, but just then a pewter crashed into the lamp, and there was darkness. Acting on his new friend’s advice, Done cleared the counter at a bound, and dived under the canvas. Picking himself up, he ran into the darkness. He heard footsteps following him, and increased his pace, stumbling on the strange ground. But a voice assured him.

‘Keep to the right! Make for cover!’ panted his pursuer.

VII

Finding only one man following, Jim Done ceased running on reaching a clump of trees, and presently he was joined by the young Australian who had aided him.

‘My colonial, you sprint like an emu!’ gasped the latter. ’All the same, that was a mad sort o’ thing to do.’

‘What was?’

‘Why, showin’ yourself ’bout here with the cheek of a dashed commissioner, while there’s five hundred on your head, hot or cold, live or dead, an’ every trooper in the country whim’ to give his long ears to pot you.’

‘But you are quite wrong; I’m not this Solo.’

’Not Solo! That won’t wash. Wasn’t I there with Long Aleck when you got away with the gold Hoban hid in our nosebag other side o’ Geelong?’

’You’re on the wrong scent. My name is Done. I’m a new chum, landed only this morning off the Francis Cadman.’

‘Here, let’s look you over again.’ The stranger struck a match, and, shielding it with his hands, examined Jim’s face. ‘Dunno,’ he said, ’but p’r’aps you are a bit young. Still, rig a beard around that chiv of yours, and it’s Solo to the life.’

’If it’s worth while, walk down to the ship with me, and I’ll satisfy you in two minutes.’

Your word’s good enough for me. Solo or no, taint my deal.’

’Well, you’ve gone to some trouble to help me out of a hole, and I’m obliged.’ Done offered his hand, and the other shook it heartily. ’You might tell me who and what this Solo is,’ continued Jim.

‘Smartest, coolest, most darin’ gold-thief in Australia. Outlawed for robbery under arms, wanted by all the police ’tween here and the Murray, and his head’s worth five hundred to you ’r me, ’r any yob that can rob him of it. He works alone. What his right name is no one knows.’

‘That’s all a bright look-out for me!’ laughed Jim. ’But if he’s such an infernal scoundrel, and he’s robbed you among the rest, why come to his rescue?’

‘’Pon my soul, I dunno I’ replied the Australian, scratching his head dubiously, ’’less it’s ’cause of his pluck ‘n’ the dashed pleasant, gentlemanly way he has o’ doin’ things. By the way, what ’re you out for? Goin’ diggin’? Got a mate? Where ‘re you makin’?’

Page 38

’I’m going digging. I have no mate. I can’t say what field I’m making for till I know more about them.’

‘Look here, take in my points.’ The native struck another match, and held it that Done might make an inventory of his perfections. ’Five foot ten high, strong as a horse, sound in wind and limb, know the country, know the game, been on three fields, want a mate. Name’s Micah Wentworth Burton—Mike for short. Got all traps, pans, shovels, picks, cradle, tub, windlass, barrow. Long Aleck—chap that attacked you—was my mate; he’s turning teamster. Take me on, an’ here’s my hand. We’re made for a pair.’

Burton stopped for lack of wind. He jerked his words with a slight nasal intonation, and his manner and his action indicated a characteristic impetuosity. Done was astounded at his own seeming good fortune and the other’s rash confidence.

‘Come,’ he said doubtingly, ’do you mean to say you’ll go into partnership in this desperate way with a man you don’t know, but whom you suspect of being a notorious rogue, and give him all the advantages of your property and your knowledge?’

’Will I? My oath! Is it a deal? All that about Solo is off. I might ‘a’ known he had too much horse-sense to mooch about Melbourne disguised only in a daily shave. As for the rest, blast it! we’re men. I take you on chance, you take me on spec. We can look after ourselves, I s’pose. Well, what say?’

’I couldn’t ask for anything better. The only objection to the arrangement is that I take all and give nothing.’

’Done, then! But don’t you run away with a wrong idea. There ‘re heaps o’ decent men an’ good miners in Melbourne who’d jump at a mate of your stamp. Come along to my tent up Canvas Town to-night. There’s a spare bunk. Aleck started on a jamboree that won’t mature for a week. We can talk things into order.’

Jim Done awoke next morning with a fear in his heart that he had made a fool of himself. His mate was sitting just without the tent, grilling chops on a piece of hoop-iron twisted into a grid. Jim’s head felt new to him, and ached badly; old doubts, old prejudices, possessed him. Why should all the regard this stranger expressed have developed in an acquaintanceship of minutes? Why should Burton be so eager to bestow benefits upon him? That was not the customary way of men. He got up, dressed and washed, and took breakfast with his mate, and the sullen suspicion lingered; but Mike talked volubly, questioning nothing, and as the morning wore on his obvious sincerity won on Done, and ere they turned their backs upon Melbourne the Australian’s spontaneous, careless confidence in him and his open-hearted cordiality planted in Done the seeds of one of those strong, lasting friendships which are never half expressed in words, although they may sometimes be attested in eloquent and heroic actions.

Page 39

On the afternoon of his second day in Melbourne Jim saw Lucy Woodrow once more. She passed in Macdougal's trap as Done and his mate were walking along Swanston Street. She looked very pretty, and was laughing gaily at something her companion had said. The sight of that companion affected Jim in a peculiar way. He looked a man of about forty, strongly but sparely built; his face, clean-shaven but for the triangle of hair coming just below the ears, had a cameo-like correctness of outline; the lips were firm and full, the eyes deep. He wore one of the flat-brimmed bell-toppers fashionable at the time, a skirted coat, and a high collar. In a flash the whole man was photographed on Jim's mind—why he could not understand. The sensations given him by the sight of that face were quite apart from the pang he experienced on noting Lucy's apparent interest in the man. Jim felt for the miniature in his pocket. It was hard to believe that only about twenty-four hours had sped since their parting. Looking back now over so much that was strange, he thought as many weeks might have gone in the interval.

'Monkey Mack,' said Mike, following the direction of Jim's eyes.

'Do you know him?'

'Everybody knows of him. Owns the best-stocked station out of New South. Made a pile through the rushes, selling stock at famine prices. Richest squatter in Vic, an' that dirty mean he won't wash 'cause o' the ruinous wear and tear on soap. Used to go round collecting the wool the sheep scraped off on his fences an' trees, an' for years cadged his toby, (tobacco, you know) off passing teamsters; then, when the teamsters shied at him, gave up smokin'. Owns thousands of acres an' hundreds o' thousands o' pounds, an' wears toe-rags, an' yet lets his wife have what she likes, an' spend what she pleases. That was his wife 'long side him.'

'Yes, she came over in our ship.'

'Shipmates, eh? That's as good as first-cousins.'

'Who was the other man?'

'Donno. Looked like something just blown ashore. Very superior, likely. Mrs Mack's got a weakness for gentility. She was a neighbourin' squatter's milkmaid, they say.'

'Well, Macdougal's not mean in the matter of horseflesh.'

'Right. That's his other great extravagance. See, he gets about badly on those spider-legs of his, and makes up for his misfortune when he splits across a horse. He breeds the best, drives like a fiend, an' can ride anythin' lapped in hide.'

A week later Done and Burton were on their way to Forest Creek diggings. Everything worth working on Ballarat was pegged out, Mike said. Forest Creek was the new Eldorado. Their tools and stores were four days ahead, in the care of an experienced

teamster whom Mike knew well, and whom he could trust to pull through, despite the abominable roads and the misfortunes that had knocked up many a well-found team and marked the track with crippled horses and stranded

Page 40

wagons. For two days Jim had carried his swag through the Australian Bush, and one night he had slept on the brown grass, using his folded blanket for a pillow, the camp-fire flickering palely at a distance, the wide-branching, dreamy gum-trees spreading their limbs above him, the warmth of summer in the scented air Already the instincts of the Bushman were developing in him. He began to feel a friendship for the towering gums in their flaunting independence; their proud individuality pleased him. To his mind they reflected the spirit of the people—it must be the spirit of the land. Nowhere in their feathery elegance did he find a law of conformity; each tree was a law unto itself, tall and strong and slender, youthful and buoyant, opening fond arms to the blue sky. The absence of the sap-greens of England conveyed at first an impression of barrenness, but that wore off, and the artistic side of his nature fed upon the soft harmonies of faded grass and subdued green foliage nursing misty purples in its shade. The ground was his bed and chair and table; never had he been so intimate with Mother Earth. Here she was uncontaminated, the soil was sweet, and it gave no hint of untold generations of dead fattening the grass upon which he couched as in sweet hay. From the earth he drew an ardent patriotism. He was already a more enthusiastic Australian than the loose-limbed native with whom he fraternized.

They camped five miles beyond Miner's Rest on the second night, preferring the comparative solitude of the Bush to the scant accommodation and some what boisterous company at the shanty lately established to cater for the fortune-hunters streaming to the new rushes. Mike selected the spot and dropped his swag.

'We've tramped far enough to-day,' he said. 'You'll find water just over that rise there. I'll light the fire.'

'So you've been over this part before,' said Jim, unstrapping the billy from his mate's swag.

'No; this is new country to me.'

'Then, how do you know I shall find water beyond that hillock?'

''Pon my soul, I don't know why I know,' Mike answered; 'but I'll wager my share of our first tub it's there.'

Jim found the water. There was a water-hole in a small creek at the spot indicated. His mate's knowledge of things about him in the Bush, things unseen and unheard, had seemed uncanny at first; he was getting used to it now. Mike was born in the Bush, and the greater part of his life had been spent in it. He knew it as thoroughly as its familiar animals did, and much in the same way, without being aware of his knowledge, which was mainly instinctive. The billy was on the blazing fire, and Done sat watching Mike

smartly mixing a damper in the lid. To Jim this, too, was a wonderful accomplishment. Water and flour were deftly manipulated until a ball of dough that quite filled the small lid resulted. It was done with the cleanness and quickness of a conjuring trick. The dough was divided into two pats, to be cooked under the hot ashes. Then Mike improvised his wire grid again, and in a few minutes the steak he had carried in a dilly-bag from Miner's Rest was sizzling and spitting over the embers.

Page 41

Done's admiration for his mate was growing rapidly. Mike looked like a model in new copper, kneeling by the fire, his face thrown back, reflecting the glow of the flame in the surrounding dusk. Jim realized what had gone to the making of that hard, lean frame, and, proud as he was of his own strength, envied the other his endurance. He knew that Burton had been making concessions to him throughout their journey, that he could have walked miles further in the time without fatigue, carrying his swag as jauntily as if it were a butterfly poised on his back. His boyish exuberance of manner when stirred was in direct contrast to the quiet assurance with which he went about ordinary affairs. He was never in difficulties, never at a loss; the Bush was his living-room, bedroom, and larder. He had already shown himself independent of what the stores could provide when a meal was wanted. Mike might have been a pink Adonis in another climate and under other conditions; his gray eyes and fair moustache were in almost ludicrous contrast with his tanned hide—he appeared to be bound in morocco.

After their meal Jim spread himself upon the ground, his head pillowed on the swag, stretching his tired limbs. Mike sat smoking, and there was silence over and about them. One of those brief hushes, when all the night voices are stilled and the trees merge into black, motionless masses, was upon the Bush, and it infected the men. All day they had marched with the throng; their tramp had never been lonely, thousands of men were moving upon Forest Creek, and every now and again they passed a toiling party burdened with tools and utensils, or were passed in turn by more enthusiastic spirits pushing on, eager for a share in the treasure of Red Gully, Diamond Gully, and Castlemaine. The shouts of the joyous travellers were still echoing in Done's ears.

He had seen diggers on the track under varying fortunes, cursing dreadfully by broken-down teams, urging on their dull bullocks—slow, but very sure—singing exuberantly as they paced by, carrying heavy swags with light hearts, shouting as they went, under the impulse of a common hope that begot friendliness in all; and yet each man was armed now—there was a revolver or a pistol in every belt. They came out of the Bush, and the Bush swallowed them again—strange groups. Two Jim passed he recognised as sailors off the Francis Cadman: one was in the shafts of a loaded wheel barrow, the other, with a rope over his shoulder, trudged ahead, towing manfully, both as merry as boys at play, despite the ten days' journey ahead of them.

Page 42

‘Good luck, mate!’ ‘Good luck!’ The trees showered kindly wishes, and hearty compliments danced from lip to lip. A spirit of irrepressible jollity laughed in the land. Drays, waggons, buggies, cabs, vehicles of all kinds, were pressed into the service of the adventurers. Four diggers went roaring by in a dilapidated landau that had seen vice-regal service in Hobart Town, driven by a fifth blackguard dressed in an old livery, and they brandished champagne bottles, and scattered the liquid gold like emperors—-lucky pioneers from Buninyong. A ragged, bare-footed, hatless urchin, a stowaway fresh from the streets of London, whipped behind, as he might have done a few weeks earlier on a Bishop’s carriage in Rotten Row. The mates next encountered a band of Chinamen carrying their burdens on bamboos, covering the ground smartly with their springing trot and cackling gaily as they went; then a ‘hatter,’ drunk as a lord rolling heavily, his hands in his pockets, his hat jauntily set on the back of his head, bellowing the latest comic song, a lonely soul; then a dray, piled high with cradles, pans, picks, shovels, swags, and a miscellaneous cargo, on the top of which perched a bulky Irishwoman, going to the diggings to make her fortune as the proprietress of the Forest Creek Laundry. This and much more in the depths of a pathless forest, the grave solitude of which was disturbed only for the moment as each jocund company hastened on into the mysterious vastness ahead, or fell back into the dense Bush that lay behind. That anybody could have a definite idea whither he was going in this ocean of trees, that engulfed them all like stones dropped into the sea, Done found it hard to believe.

‘You’re a curious kind of devil, Jim,’ said Mike, who had been watching Done closely during the last few minutes.

‘How’s that?’

‘You don’t talk. Worse still, you don’t smoke.’

’No; in England I had neither mates nor friends, and smoking’s a convivial disease—a kid catches it from his companions.’

’I might have guessed you were bred a “hatter”; you’re as dumb as a mute.’

’Same reason, Mike; but I’m getting over it. I’m getting over a good many things rather too suddenly. I’m sort of mentally breathless. A year ago I’d have sworn that friendship and good-fellowship were impossible to me.’

‘Go on!’

‘And just now I’m feeling things too keenly to talk much about them.’

‘’Nough said, Jimmy; I ain’t complaining.’ Mike knocked the ashes from his pipe on his boot. ‘I s’pose I’d best get somethin’ for breakfast,’ he said, rising and stretching himself.

‘What, here?’ Jim looked about him into the darkness.

’Here or hereabouts. Keep an eye on the swags. I won’t be gone more’n an hour at the outside.’

Micah Burton went off into the dense Bush, that to Jim looked grimly unpromising, and the latter lay back upon the grass again, with quite a luxurious sensation. The hard day’s walking made this rest peculiarly agreeable: he had eaten well, his mind was at peace—he no longer concerned himself with psychological theories—he was content to live and feel.

Page 43

Sharply out of the silence came a ringing report. Jim was jerked to a sitting posture, listening with all his ears. The report was repeated several times, a fusillade of shots, followed by faint echoes of a voice raised in anger. There was an interval of quiet, and when the sound broke in again Done sighed contentedly, and relapsed into his former position. He recognised the crack of a cattle-whip. In a minute or two he heard the voice of the bullocky admonishing Bally and Spot with a burst of alliterative invective, and presently the leaders came labouring out of the darkness, the great red bullocks, with bowed heads, moving slowly and with that suggestion of impassive invincibility that goes always with a big team of good working bullocks in action.

‘Hello, mate!’ cried someone beyond in the shadows.

‘Hello, there!’

‘Plenty o’ water ‘bout?’

‘A creek down to the left.’

’Right-o! We’ll camp here, Stony. Woa, Strawberry! Woa, there, Spot! Bally! Blackboy!’

The cattle came to a standstill, and while the others busied themselves unyoking the team, one man went off through the trees, and presently returned, carrying a billy he had just filled. He kicked the fire together, threw on a few pieces of wood, and began to prepare a meal, paying no attention to Jim, who lay watching him. It was not customary to say ‘By your leave!’ in little matters of this kind. On the track every man’s company was supposed to be welcome. Following a habit of observation, Jim examined the man without curiosity. He was thin, sandy-haired, and wiry, about forty-five, with restless hands, and a cowed, half-sullen expression—a drinker of strong drinks of the kind manufactured at the shanties, corrosive liquids that ate the souls out of men in quick order.

Having disposed of the bullocks, the tinkling of whose bells was a foreign note in the night, two others came to the fire, carrying the tucker-box. They were brothers, long, bearded, brown-faced Australians of the runs, going up to the rush with stores for Coolan and Smith, or Aberdeen, the universal providers of the Roaring Fifties.

‘Hurry up that blasted quart-pot, Stony!’ ejaculated the elder of the two. ‘I feel as if I’d done a three days’ perish-me!’

The men ate hungrily, sitting about in the light of the fire, drinking the hot tea from pannikins and from the billy lid, and as they ate they talked. Done was beginning to find himself at home in the society of men. The humanities were finding place in his soul. Everything about these people interested him—their work, their pleasures, their ideas.

They were so closely in touch with vital things, so tolerant. They cherished no political, social, and religious convictions to the exclusion of their fellow-men.

Burton returned, swinging four featherless birds. The invasion of their camp did not surprise him. He greeted the strangers cheerfully, and held the birds up for Jim's inspection.

Page 44

‘Our breakfast,’ he said. ’Fat ‘n young.’

‘Where did they come from?’

‘A lagoon half a mile up the creek. Four shots, four duck.’ He touched his revolver.

‘But Nature doesn’t provide plucked birds for our benefit.’

‘Skinned an’ cleaned ’em at the water.’

The teamsters were not averse to boiled duck and broth for breakfast, and the two billies were soon steaming on the camp-fire, while the company yarned and smoked. It was nearly ten o’clock, and all hands were thinking of taking to their blankets for the night, when a sixth man came quietly through the trees, unobserved until his greeting disturbed them. Done had to turn on his side to look at the newcomer, a handsome, beardless man in the garb of a digger, but much more scrupulous in the matter of cleanliness and fit than the majority.

‘I did not like the society at the Rest,’ he said, ’and walked on, looking for quieter company.’

‘Make yourself at home,’ answered Mike. ‘There’s tea in the pannikin, an’ there’s grub in the dilly-bag. You’re not carryin’ traps.’

’No. Sent everything ahead but this ‘possum rug. Thanks for—’

He ceased speaking. His face had been composed, almost colourless; into it there sprang an expression of amazement, which deepened into an animal ferocity shocking to see. The mouth twitched spasmodically, the eyes caught the glare of the flame, and glowed with a catlike lustre. Surprised, Done turned in the direction of his glance, and discovered the man Stony crouching on the other side of the fire, his weak, tremulous hands stretched out before him, his face gray as ashes and convulsed with horror. Glaring at the stranger, he lifted his hands, thrusting the vision from him, and a cry of terror burst in his throat, as the man sprang at him, bearing him to the ground as a tiger might have done, groping fiercely at his throat with iron fingers. Stony lay on his back; his enemy, kneeling on his body, choking him, bent his face down, and cried fiercely:

’It is you, then? I am not mistaken! You know me, you dog, and you know that I mean to tear the heart out of you!’

Releasing his grip on the flesh, he wrenched at Stony’s shirt, ripping it at the neck.

‘Help!’ gasped the prostrate wretch. ‘For the love of God, help!’

‘There’s your brand—your brand, Peter!’ He thrust his face into Stony’s again, and all the hate that a face can carry and that a voice can convey was betrayed in his expression and his words. ’Do you know what I have endured, Peter? Do you know what I have suffered?’

Clutching at Stony’s throat again, he bored his knee into the body under him, his arms became rigid with the power of his grip, and Stony lay choking, clawing feebly at the other’s sleeves, his face distorted into a hideous caricature.

The other men stood about, watching, the Australians reluctant to interfere in a quarrel they did not understand. It was Done who seized the stranger, tearing him off his victim, and then Mike and a teamster laid hands upon him, while Stony was writhing and panting on the ground. The digger offered no resistance; he seemed unconscious of everything but his hatred and his vengeance, and his eyes never moved from Stony.

Page 45

‘We draw the line at cold-blooded murder, mate!’ said Mike, but the other gave no answer.

Stony had picked himself up, and, casting one horrified look at his enemy, turned away, and plunged into the blackness of the Bush, running like a frightened animal.

‘What’s he been up to, anyhow?’ asked one of the teamsters, as they released the stranger. The latter did not reply, but instantly darted after the runaway. The four men listened to the retreating footsteps, and presently the Bush echoed two pistol shots fired in rapid succession. The birds murmured and moved in the trees, a monkey-bear grunted disgustedly, and then all was still again.

VIII

For some little time the four men stood with their faces turned in the direction Stony and his pursuer had taken, listening breathlessly, and then they went to their blankets again. Done was greatly disturbed; the others took it more as a matter of course.

‘You won’t follow them?’ said Jim.

‘Well,’ one of the brothers replied, ’I ain’t particularly busy just now, but my hands are too full for that kind of foolishness.’

‘He meant murder!’

‘Somethin’ too like it to please old Stony.’

‘What do you think it was all about?’

‘Can’t say. Long grudge, evidently.’

‘The clean-shaven man was a lag,’ said Mike. ‘Convict,’ he added, seeing a question in Jim’s eye. ‘Maybe your friend lagged him.’

‘Don’t know him from a crow,’ replied the teamster addressed. ’We’re taking some traps and ware up to the Creek for him on our load, and he travelled along.’

‘I think you’re mistaken about that man being a convict, Burton,’ said Done to Mike later, breaking a long silence.

’Sure I’m not. Saw the cuff-marks on his wrists as he was battling with Stony. Why?’

’He’s the man who was in the trap with Macdougal of Boobyalla the other day in Swanston Street.’

‘The swell in the choker and double-decker?’

‘Yes. For some reason his face impressed me. I couldn’t mistake it.’

’Didn’t notice it; but if he’s own brother to Governor Latrobe himself, I’ll take my affie he’s a lag.’

The mates overtook the carter with their tent and stores and tools within a day’s journey of the rush, and pushed on to secure a claim. Done’s first sight of a busy goldfield was gained on a clear, sunny morning, when, after passing through Sawpit Gully, they came upon the beginning of the long lead that comprised many rushes, known as Forest Creek. The impression Jim retained was a semi-humorous one of humans reduced to the proportions and the dignity of ants, engaged upon the business of ants wrought to a pitch of excitement by some grand windfall at their doors. Little figures bustled about, carrying burdens; pigmies swarmed along the lead. The holes, with their white and yellow tips, were clustered

Page 46

as close together as the cells in a great honeycomb, and into the shafts and out of them bobbed hurrying, eager creatures. The whirring of windlasses, the clatter of nail-keg buckets, the incessant calls, ‘Look up below!’ and the distinct ringing of hammer on anvil, blended into a quaint symphony of labour. The swish, swish, swish, of the wet dirt in the cradle-hoppers and the rattling of the tailings thrown from the shovels providing an unvarying substratum of sound. There were tents everywhere, large and small, dotting the distance, but clustering into a township of canvas to the right of the Creek, and over the scene floated a faint mirage, so that the whole field and all in it quivered in the warm ascending air, the gauzy effect aiding the idea of stagy unreality.

At the first sight of the lead Mike threw his hat into the air and cheered wildly. Another party coming in were beating their jaded horses to a run, the men jumping beside the team mad with joy, shouting like maniacs. On all hands were the waggons and drays unloading by tents not yet fully erected. The men who were not busy at their claims or puddling, cradling or panning-off dishes by the creek, were breathlessly engaged upon the work of getting their canvas houses into order and be stowing their goods; newcomers passed unheeded, however boisterous.

‘Before tea we’ll have our pegs in here, Jim,’ said Mike joyfully.

They had been walking since two hours before daybreak, but elation possessed them to the exclusion of all thought of fatigue. The sight of the field of action set Jim’s sinews twitching; he longed for the strife, and found some difficulty in restraining himself from running with the preceding party pell-mell on to the creek. But he had nothing of the gold-seeker’s fever in his blood; the thought of amassing a fortune had merely occurred to him: it was the free, strong, exhilarating life that stirred him most deeply.

Burton discovered an old acquaintance in a sooty blacksmith perspiring copiously over an open-air forge, and the mates left their swags in his tent and hastened to the high-walled, square tent occupied by the warden of the field to secure their licenses. Here Jim had his first taste of officialdom in Australia, and he did not like it. The tent was thronged with miners eager to secure their papers; they were met with cold-blooded intolerance by a class of officials often bred to their business in the infamous convict system, and now incapable of putting off their tyrannous insolence in the faces of free men. Several foot police—Vandemonians from the convict settlements—were stationed in the tent to enforce the mandate of Commissioner McPhee, or any understrapper who might resent the impatience of a digger, and order him to be propelled into the open on the toe of a regulation boot. The new hands bore the indignities carelessly, but the experienced diggers came up to the rough counter grimly and silently, conveying in their attitude Some suggestion of a reckoning almost due. They under stood all the injustice and flagrant abuse the licenses implied, the new chums did not.

Page 47

‘Take care o’ that, Done,’ said Mike, flipping his own license with his thumb; ’they’re important. I’ve heard em called tickets of admission to the new republic.’

‘What do they stand for, Mike?’

’One month. For one month James Done is entitled to burrow for gold in Her Majesty’s mud hereabout, an’ for that time he’s reckoned to have a right to be alive. At the end of the month he trots up to renew, and the price is thirty bob every time.’

‘But if James Done doesn’t happen to have thirty bob?’

’Then his right to be alive is null and void, and if he’s caught so much as scraping dirt to bury a pup he’s dealt with according to law. If in his month’s work he doesn’t earn enough to buy grease for his windlass, he must take out his miner’s right or run the chance of being scragged.’

‘That seems strangely out of place here. And the men stand it?’

’And heaps more. This license qualifies a miner to be dragged out of his hole at any moment, like a blasted wombat, by the scruff, to be bully-damned from Geelong to breakfast by some lag-punching, lop-eared ex-warder with a string of troopers at his heels!’ Jim saw his mate in a bitter mood, for the first time.

‘But why the license, if it confers no benefit?’

’To rob the diggers mercilessly, and to provide swine like those in there with a chance of riding the high horse over better men!’ Mike was mixing his metaphors in his wrath. ’But you’ll know all about it in time. If you’re in the habit of using your hands, keep ’em tight in your pockets when the traps are out man-hunting. It’s worse than manslaughter to punch a trooper. They’d have you in the logs in ten ticks less ‘n no time.’

Done refused to be depressed by the prospect. He understood that with his right in his pocket a miner was safe, and the charge did not seem to him a serious grievance in this land of plenteous gold.

The mates had a crib with Duffy, the blacksmith; and after the meal, armed with wooden pegs, a pick, and a shovel, they set out to secure a claim. Acting on the urgent advice of Duffy, they headed for Diamond Gully, nearly two miles off; and here Mike loitered about amongst the claims, chatting with the men on top, keeping his eyes wide open, and gathering information as he went. The majority of the miners were quite enthusiastic; they were doing well, and had no desire to conceal the fact. One showed a prospect in the tin dish that wrung a wondering oath from Mike, and yet he moved on. Done could not understand. There was plenty of free land on either side, extending for miles.

‘Why not here, Burton?’ he asked, indicating a pleasant spot.

‘Off the lead, probably,’ answered Mike. ’We don’t want to waste time bottoming shicers —sinking duffers,’ he added in explanation. Done was still unenlightened. ‘Putting down shafts where there isn’t a colour,’ continued Burton. ’We’ll get right on the lead, or I’m a spud-miner from Donegal.’

Page 48

In due course they came to a claim that interested Burton deeply, but the man at the windlass was gloomy, almost despairing. He didn't believe he'd got a tucker show, and sadly advised Mike to shepherd a hole down to the left.

'We ain't in sight of her here,' he said.

Burton took a pinch of dirt from the side of the bucket at his feet, rubbed it between his finger and thumb, and grinned at the digger.

'Take me for a Johnny Raw, don't you?' he said. 'This is good enough for me. Quick, Jim, the pegs!'

The exclamation was drawn from him by the sight of three men running along the lead in their direction.

As Burton hammered in his first peg, the newcomers started hammering a peg for the same holding. Mike paced the twenty-four feet, and kicked the stranger's peg out of the ground. Not a word was spoken. The intruding digger, a stoutly-built, cheerful-looking Geordie, promptly struck at Mike, and they fought. Done stood aside, nonplussed by the suddenness of all this, and for a minute a hard give-and-take battle raged on the claim. Jim discovered the Geordie's mate busying himself driving in a peg. Seizing the man by the back of the neck, he dragged him to his feet, and sent him spinning with a long swing. After which he gripped Mike's opponent in the same way, and bowled him over and over.

'Now you get the pegs in, Mike,' said Jim. 'I'll attend to these.'

The Geordie arose and rushed at Jim with the vehemence of an old fighter, but Done stopped him with a straight left, closed, and threw him. Mike ceased hammering the peg to applaud.

'Neat and nice!' he cried. 'Would any other gentleman like a sample?'

'I'm quite satisfied,' said the Geordie, without a trace of ill-feeling.

'Then peg out the next,' continued Mike. 'It should be quite as good a spec as this if your friend's on anything like a gutter.'

'Ay, ay, lad!' responded the Tynesider, who had a mouse on his cheek as big as his thumb, and he set cheerfully to work to peg out two men's ground further on. His bluff having failed, he cherished not the slightest resentment, and two minutes later, to Jim's great amusement, all concerned were indulging in affable conversation. The newcomers were friends of the party in the working mine, where the lead had been cut, a prospect from the headings promising so well that the holders had hastened to

acquaint the Geordie with the fact. The latter arrived too late, however—first come, first served, being the law of the diggings, and first peg in meant legal possession.

Two men's ground measured twelve feet by twenty-four feet. Mike had taken the twenty-four feet in the direction in which the lead seemed to be running, and now he lined out a shaft about four feet by two feet, and commenced sinking. He dug down to the depth of his waist, and at sunset the mates returned to Forest Creek. That night the teamster arrived with their goods, and Done and Burton slept under canvas, the tent having been hastily thrown across a hurdle to provide a screen from the glowing moonlight, the trees here being stunted and widely scattered.

Page 49

’So you’re a wrestler, Jim said Mike, when they had turned in for the night.

‘I know a fall or two,’ answered Done.

‘You put Long Aleck down on his chin in short order, an’ he fancied his mutton, I can tell you. Know how to turn a fist to the best advantage, too, don’t you? That Geordie’s an old sailor who’s been through the mill. I know the breed. You stopped him like a stone wall. I’m satisfied I struck it lucky when we met.’

’Glad you think I’ll be useful. I don’t seem to have been of much account up to now.

’Useful! A man’s got to fight ’r knuckle under. The rushes ain’t peopled with penny saints. You’ve got to punch a few to get yourself respected.’

Done was not long learning the truth of this. He found in time that the feats of arms he had mastered with the idea of impressing his enemies in Chisley were his most valuable accomplishments in Australia.

Next day the mates carted their belongings to their claim, and the morning was spent in erecting the tent, rigging bunks, and making things shipshape. They got to work in the shaft again after dinner, Done taking his first lesson in sinking. Within two hours they came upon the wash dirt, the sinking at Diamond Gully being very shallow. While they were busy Jack Thorn, the Geordie, came up from the creek and approached them, grinning broadly, and hiding something under his hat.

‘Hope yer eyesight’s good, mates,’ he said. ’I’ve got a bit of a dazzler here to spring on you. What d’yer think o’ that?’ He removed his hat, and exposed a pint pannikin filled to the brim with clean, coarse nuggets.

‘Whew!’ whistled Jim. ‘You’ve hit it thick.’

‘Yes,’ he said. ’That’s from three buckets off the bottom. I s’pose you’ll get her just ez good. My mate’s got a few ounces o’ finer stuff. We’re mightily obliged to you boys for puttin’ us in this hole.’

‘You’re welcome,’ said Mike, grinning. ‘We did it for your own good.’

‘What weight is there in that?’ asked Done.

‘Over two hundred ounces. Eight hundred pounds’ worth, perhaps.’

Jim gasped and turned to his work again, digging rapidly. Later, Burton took a sample of the gravel in the dish, and carried it away to the creek. He returned in ten minutes with a little water in the pan. Jim could see only a few specks of gold in the bottom of the pan, and his face fell.

‘A shicer?’ he said.

’Not a bit of it. That’s a good enough prospect. Let me have a cut at her.’

The hole was now too deep for Done to throw the dirt to the surface, inexperienced as he was in the use of a shovel in so narrow a space. Burton continued the work till sundown, and then washed a prospect that made his eyes glisten. Next morning they bottomed. Jim was at the mouth of the shaft when Burton called from below:

’Look out on top! Catch, old man

Page 50

Jim caught the object thrown up to him. It was coated with clay, but the gold shone through, and Done handled his first nugget—a plump one of about ten ounces. A little later they set to work, puddling the best of the wash dug out in the course of sinking; and then the debris was put through the cradle, and Jim awoke at last to the full zest of the digger's lust. Pawing among the gravel in the hopper of the cradle, he picked out the gold too coarse to pass through the holes, and the gleaming yellow metal fired him with a passion that had in it all the frenzy the winning gambler feels, with an added sense of triumph and success. When Mike lifted the slides out and sluiced water over them, showing the gold lying thick and deep, he felt a miser's rapture, and yet had no great desire for wealth. He did not fear work, and had no love of luxury, so that the hunger for riches never possessed him; but this joy was something apart from avarice. The yearnings of untold generations after the precious gold have filtered the love of it into our blood, made the desire for it an instinct. Jim went to bed that night richer by over one hundred pounds than he had been when he rose in the morning.

Done and Burton logged up their shaft and rigged the windlass, and set about the methodical working of the claim. The second day's cleaning up was not as good as the first, but it was highly satisfactory. It was not usual for the miners to keep the gold about them for any length of time. If it was not carried to the storekeepers at Forest Creek, there were gold-buyers—buying for the Melbourne banks, as a rule—who called regularly, eager to exchange bank-notes for the virgin gold. On the afternoon of their third working day, Jim and his mate were leaning on the windlass, talking to two or three men who had gathered about, waiting for one of the gold-buyers then riding along the lead, when they were joined by a tall, fine-looking digger, with a remark ably handsome brown beard and bushy brows.

'Good-day, mates! Got a good thing here?' he said, seating himself on one of the logs.

'Oh, not so bad!'

The newcomer had dropped his revolver, apparently by accident. He stooped and picked it up, but instead of returning it to his belt, toyed with it absently as he made inquiries about the lead and the yields on the field. All eyes were attracted by the peculiar manner in which he handled the weapon, tossing it to and fro carelessly, and twirling it through his fingers with remarkable rapidity.

'That's a pretty clever trick,' said Thorn.

'This is no great shakes.' The owner of the beautiful beard twirled his revolver more rapidly. 'Lend me another.'

Thorn threw his, and the stranger caught it smartly, and juggled with the two.

Brigalow Dick, the gold-buyer, rode up. A particularly bright ex-trooper from Sydney, Brigalow Dick had a reputation as a safe man, and the horse he rode was one of the finest on the field. On one side of the front of his saddle was strapped the stout leather case carrying the gold, on the other was a bag containing money.

Page 51

‘Any gold to sell to-day, Burton?’ asked Dick.

‘Yes, in half a minute, old man,’ replied Mike, deeply interested in the tricks of the juggler.

Brigalow Dick drew his horse up closer and watched the performance.

‘Bet you’re Californian, Whiskers,’ he said.

The stranger nodded. ‘Let me have another shooter,’ he said.

A third was thrown to him, and he twirled the three in the air, discharging each into the tip as it reached his hand.

‘Bravo! bravo!’ The performance was growing quite exciting.

‘That’s simply nothing,’ said the amateur prestidigitateur modestly. ‘Throw me another, and I’ll show what I call a damn good trick.’ He cast his eye around the group. It lit upon the gold-buyer casually.

‘Here you are.’ Brigalow drew his revolver from his belt, and threw it.

‘Very good, and many thanks,’ said the stranger. He coolly placed the other revolver in his shirt, turned the gold-buyer’s long six-shooter on its owner, and said: ‘Come down off that horse, Richard, my boy!’ Brigalow laughed uneasily, but did not stir. ‘Comedown, curse you!’ cried the other with sudden ferocity; and, springing to his feet, he seized Dick, and brought him heavily to the ground over his horse’s rump. ’Lie there, or, by God, I’ll scatter your brains on the grass!’ said the juggler. ’The first man that moves will peg out a claim in hell to-night,’ he continued, leading the horse away, and walking backwards himself, with the revolver pointed. No man doubted his word. Dick crouched on the ground, staring after him, furious, but quite beaten. Suddenly the robber sprang to the horse’s back with a clean jump. ’Now, that is what I call damn good sleight of hand, Brigalow!’ he cried; and, producing a short, heavy green-hide whip from his shirt, he lashed the horse mercilessly, and went riding at a breakneck pace down the gully, heading for the distant timber.

‘Tricked!’ cried the ex-trooper, jumping to his feet—’ tricked by the great Blue Bunyip! Tricked like a kid!’ He turned and ran for the troopers.

‘I surmise Mr. Solo was lurkin’ behind them there whiskers,’ said a tall, thin Californian, when the party had somewhat recovered the surprise.

Jim started, recalling the encounter with Long Aleck in the Melbourne bar.

‘Was that Solo, do you think?’ he asked.

‘Dead cert’ replied the Californian. ‘Them’s his playful ways.’

‘If you guessed it, why didn’t you give a hint?’

‘Not knowin’, can’t say; but it’s just pawsible I ain’t pushin’ myself forward as a target this spring.’

Done found this indisposition to interfere in ‘other people’s business’ very marked amongst the diggers; and their toleration of notorious evildoers was a pronounced feature of their easy-going character, encouraged, no doubt, by their contempt for the law, which appealed to them only as an instrument of oppression.

Page 52

‘This means a gallop for the troopers,’ said Mike.

‘They’ll run him down!’ ejaculated Jim at a venture.

‘The man occupyin’ my socks is bettin’ ten ounces agin all the feathers off a wart-hog that they don’t,’ answered the Californian.

‘But look at the weight he carries!’

‘You’re a bright boy—a most remarkably bright boy!’ drawled the American, ‘an’ I guess you’ll pick up a heap o’ knowledge afore you die out, but up to now you don’t know much about Solo. He kin ride like the devil, an’ fight like the hosts of hell, an’ he’s ez full o’ tricks ez a pum’kin’s full o’ pips. I tell you, Amurka’s proud of her son.’

‘Who sez he’s American?’ asked a digger, resenting the appropriation.

’Well, sir, if he ain’t he’s that good an imitation he might’s well be the real thing.’

About half an hour later three troopers came cantering through Diamond Gully, looking very smart in their Bedford cords and shining top-boots, and the diggers yelled derisive orders, and greeted them with cries of contempt, jeering them from every hole along the lead. ‘Jo!’ was the favourite epithet hurled at the troopers and all representatives of constituted authority. Done never discovered the origin of the term, but into it the diggers compressed all the hatred they felt for unjust laws, domineering officials, and flagrant maladministration.

‘I thought you knew this Solo,’ said Jim to his mate that evening.

‘Well,’ replied Mike, ’I reckoned I did; but he changes his disguises pretty smartly, ‘r else that was another party in the same line o’ business.’

IX

In the four days and a half of their first week on the field Burton and Done cleared close upon seven hundred pounds. By the end of the second week they had worked out their first mine, and Jim possessed eight hundred pounds. They tried another claim, and bottomed on the pipeclay. The hole was a duffer. They tried a third, and cut the wash once more. This claim was not nearly so rich as their first, but rich enough to pay handsomely, and Mike, young as he was, was too old a miner to abandon a good claim on the chance of finding a better. By this time Jim was feeling himself quite an experienced digger; he could sink a straight shaft, knock down wash-dirt with the best, and pan off a prospect as neatly and with as workmanlike a flourish as any man on the field. He was rapidly coming into close touch with the life about him, adopting the manners of his associates, and slowly wearing down that diffidence which still clung to

him in the society of strangers. He was reticent, but there remained no suspicion, no animosity towards his kind. Looking back a year, he could hardly recognise himself; the Jim Done of Chisley seemed an old man by comparison. Already Jim of Forest Creek could laugh at Jim o' Mill End, but the consciousness of an escape from a horror remained. How serious he had been in those days! How he had permitted himself to suffer! Thank God, it was all gone!

Page 53

Going into the tent on the afternoon of the second Sunday, Jim found his mate asleep on one of the bunks. In the hollow of his out-thrown hand lay a cheap lacquered frame containing a daguerreotype of a girl's face. A sudden contrition smote Jim; he turned anxiously to his bunk, throwing the clothes left and right. The vest he had worn when he left the Francis Cadman lay under the pillow. He dived his finger into the watch-pocket, and heaved a sigh of relief. Yes, it was there, safe and sound. He held Lucy Woodrow's miniature, gazing on it, suffused with chastened emotions. Heavens! how beautiful she was, and so gentle and generous! What an ass he had been! He kissed the picture very tenderly, and with a bit of twine secured it in the pocket of his jumper in dangerous proximity to his heart.

Jim Done had now seen much of the fanciful night life of the camps. A populous lead presented a picturesque appearance by night. The illuminated tents and the flaring camp-fires dotted the field thickly, and where the tents of the business people were drawn in line and something like a main street formed, slush lights and kerosene torches flamed and swinging oil-lamps lit up the scene. Here the wilder spirits assembled and drank square gin, and gambled in the canvas shanty bars, or danced with fine frenzy to music provided by some enterprising German Fraeulein stolidly grinding a hurdy-gurdy. There were numerous sly grog-shops amongst the tents, and most of the storekeepers sold illicit drink with open impudence. These places were often centres of roaring, ribald life after nightfall; but the majority of the diggers lay in groups about their camp-fires, chatting quietly or reading the most recent papers available, and were peaceably inclined, easy-going citizens.

It was the fiercer side of existence on the fields that appealed most directly to Jim; he loved the strong colour, the exultant animation, the devil-may-care character, that marked the gatherings in the bars and the gambling-saloons. He took little active part in the playing and the drinking, but the feverish energy of the men and the stirring scenes provided such vivid contrast to what he had hitherto known and seen of life that his soul was greedy for it all. To Mike these scenes were all familiar; his attitude towards them was one of quiet indifference, and he regarded Jim's rapture with the amused tolerance a sedate, elderly gentleman feels for the enthusiasm of a little boy.

The mates had shifted their tent to a convenient position near the claim they were now working, and were camped within two hundred yards of the establishment of Mrs. Ben Kyley, laundress and baker. Mrs. Kyley was a big-limbed, fresh-coloured, dimpled woman, whose native canniness did not, militate in the least against an amazonian joviality that made her hail-fellow-well-met with half the diggers on the field. Her voice was the loudest amid the clamouring tongues in her

Page 54

large tent at night, and her guffaw overbore everything; it was one of the wonders of Forest Creek. Many a time its echoes, rebounding from Boulder Hill, had set all Diamond Gully grinning in sympathy. It was not known whether Mrs. Kyley and Ben were married or merely mates, but popular opinion tended to the latter belief, legal unions being incompatible with a nice adjustment of forces at the rushes. The exigencies of life on the diggings made sudden changes of scene necessary to the men, and a woman like Mrs. Kyley couldn't be expected to abandon her business for the sake of a husband, seeing that it was so much easier to set up another husband than another establishment. But the most important branch of the business, that of sly grog-selling, made a man who could handle the riotous and evil-disposed quite essential. Ben Kyley's appearance, broad, thickly-set, solid as a gum-butt, broken-nosed and heavy-handed, and his reputation as the man who was beaten by Bendigo only after an hour's hard fighting, marked him as the fittest man on the field for the position he held. For the rest, Ben was a quiet, mild man, whose voice was seldom heard, and whose subjugation to Mrs. Ben was almost comical. Ben worked on his claim by day, and at night he officiated as 'chucker-out' in Mrs. Kyley's bar—for a bar it was, to all intents and purposes. Ben's duty was not to suppress disorder, but merely to see that the common disorder did not develop into licentiousness, to the danger of Mrs. Kyley's property or the detriment of her trade.

Mrs. Ben Kyley made bread because bread-baking at three shillings a loaf was an exceedingly profitable business. For the same reason she washed shirts at twelve shillings the half-dozen. But selling rum at a shilling a nobbler to 'flash' diggers who despised change was much more profitable still. The industrious woman, who washed and baked all day, was kept busy for the greater part of the night retailing rum to insatiable diggers, and the mystery was that, although nobody could see rum in the bottle or in bulk anywhere about the place, it was rare that the supply ran short.

Jim had visited the tent on one or two occasions, walking from the other side of the gully; he went again on the Saturday afternoon following their removal to buy bread. Mrs. Kyley's big camp-ovens were nestled in the fires outside the tent, three of them in a row; Mrs. Kyley herself, half smothered in suds, was washing with the rapidity and the indefatigability of a machine.

'Aurora will attend to you, my boy,' blared Mrs. Kyley, blowing a storm of suds out of her mop of hair.

Aurora! Jim entered the tent wondering, and found three or four men at the counter, conversing with a young woman, twenty-three perhaps, tall, black-haired, dark-eyed, flushed with colour, happy in temperament, free in manner, a striking representative of a not uncommon type of the time, meeting men on a mutual footing, asking no

concessions and making none—Jim's 'Spaniard' of the Melbourne dance saloon. She recognised him immediately.

Page 55

‘Hello!’ she cried. ‘Look now! if it ain’t the boy wid the blushes, an’ there’s the blush to prove it agin’ him.’

Jim was blushing; his rebellious blood gave the lie to his assumption of easy indifference.

‘How are you?’ he said. ‘I knew you at once.’

’To be sure. ‘Twould be indacent to forgit, seem’ it’s my debtor ye are, for the price of a dance.’

‘Which you gave me for natural love and affection.’

’’Deed, then ‘twas because you were poor an’ motherless in a strange land, but now the gold’s a worry to you, I doubt.’

Jim laughed and shook his head. ‘I want a loaf,’ he said. ’My mate is hungry and waiting.’

‘Heigho!’ sighed Aurora; ’devil a scrap of gallantry have these slips of boys, Quigley! You wouldn’t leave me for all the mates on earth, would you, now?’

The big bearded digger banged his fist on the counter, and swore a firm, fluent oath that he would not.

‘Worse luck,’ added Aurora, with a twinkling eye. ’Here’s yer bread, Teddy-was-me-darlin’, an’ ye’d have it fer love if ‘twas me own to give.’

Aurora assumed and dropped the musical brogue according to her whim. Ordinarily her English was as pure as Mrs. Kyley’s, and Mrs. Kyley had the reputation of being a lady of vast attainments.

‘There’s the money,’ said Jim, ‘and will you take this for the dance?’ He offered her a nugget he had picked from the week’s yield, a flat, heart-shaped slug, curiously embossed.

’’Deed, an’ it’s mighty fine,’ said the girl, ’but I’d rather have ye me debtor for life.’

‘Take it for natural love and affection, then.’

‘Ah, if it’s the heart you’re givin’ me, I’ll be uncommon greedy, so I will.’ She kissed the nugget, and slipped it into her breast.

Jim went away, glowing with the satisfaction a very young fellow feels in having provoked the admiration of a woman and the jealousy of a man. Aurora’s of interest

was open and unabashed. Quigley's jealous passion was just as artless and free from disguise. Done had intended to send that nugget as a natural curiosity to Lucy Woodrow. He put the shade of regret the recollection provoked hastily out of his mind. Mike had heard a good deal of talk about the new girl at Mrs. Kyley's, now Jim swelled the chorus of admiration. Both young men spent that evening at the washerwoman's tent.

The Kyley establishment consisted of a tent some fifty feet long, divided into two compartments with a canvas partition. This screen ran just behind the counter, and through it Mrs. Kyley dived to replenish her jug of rum; but that room at the back represented the sanctity of the Kyley home-life, and to it the diggers never penetrated. The public portion was furnished with two long deal tables, at which the men sat on the Bush stools and diced and drank, or played monotonous, if noisy, games of euchre and forty-fives.

Page 56

That night Aurora—surnamed Australis by a facetious digger—was particularly attentive to Done. Jim was flattered by her open preference, dazzled by her bright eyes and glowing cheeks, and piqued by her bantering manner, for she still implied that he might be allowed indulgences because of his beardless, boyish face and his seeming ingenuousness. As a protest against this attitude, Done was impelled to drink rather more rum than was good for him, and under the influence of the fiery spirit he lost some thing of his habitual reserve, and a fight with Quigley was only averted by the tactful intervention of Burton.

‘Didn’t like interferin’, Jim,’ said Mike next morning, ’but Quigley’s a hard nut and an ugly fighter. He’d have eaten you if you’d taken him on as you stood.’

‘I’m much obliged, old man,’ answered Done mournfully. ’I suppose I made an outrageous ass of myself.’

But he went back to Mrs. Kyley’s bar again on the Monday evening, and there got good advice from Aurora.

‘You don’t like this rubbish, Jimmy,’ she said, serving him with the drink he had asked for. The remark was made with an air of positive assurance. They were alone.

‘Well, no, I don’t particularly,’ he admitted.

’Then, don’t be a fool. Don’t gammon you do. You need not drink it. I don’t want you to. See here, Jimmy,’ she continued gravely, ’Quigley doesn’t like you; he is looking for a chance to do you a mischief, and he would have had his chance the other night if I hadn’t overlooked you like a mothering hen, and sold you good creek water at a shilling the nip.’

‘I did act the fool, I admit.’

’Never a bit; but don’t give Quigley his chance by numbing your good sense with Mary Kyley’s rum. Sure,’ said Aurora, dropping into her honied brogue, ‘it’s fer the love of me ye’re comin’, not for the dthrop o’ drink. Murther! would ye kill me wid denyin’ it?’ She was sitting on the counter; she pressed her fingers on his lips, and laughed in his face with happy impudence, her large handsome mouth full of pearls, her eyes flashing a challenge. Jim’s arm stole to her waist of its own initiative.

Then Mrs. Ben Kyley came roaring into the tent. ’Inveigling my girl away!’ she cried. ’Get out, you kidnapper! Where’s your taste, anyhow, philandering with a slip of a girl when there’s a fine woman about with a heart as empty as a big sieve?’ And the bouncing washerwoman bore down upon him, and bombarded him out of the place with gusts of laughter.

As yet, Done had seen little of the trials and tribulations of the diggers. Diamond Gully was a prosperous rush, and the impositions under which the Victorian miners complained so bitterly had not come home to many on this field; but he had heard a great deal. The political and social wrongs of the diggers were the staples of conversation about the camp-fires. To Jim's great surprise, he found these men, surrounded with the exciting conditions of their peculiar

Page 57

life, allowing their minds to be occupied with aspirations after political freedom. The failure of Chartism in England had driven thousands of hot-blooded champions of popular rights to Australia, and these were the leaven that leavened the whole lump. They talked of people's parliaments, manhood suffrage, and payment of members in a country governed by a pack of British nominees who had no knowledge of the bulk of the people and no sympathy with their aspirations. The ideas stirred the miners; they found a lodgment in every breast, and already men spoke of an Australian Republic south of the Murray, governed on the liberal principles enunciated by Fergus O'Connor.

Jim had supposed the tolerance of man towards man, the absence of petty prejudices, and the large appreciation of individual liberty that belonged to the character of a brave, self population to be manifestations of an absolute freedom; he found the men fired with a passionate aspiration for liberty, just as the masses in England had been five years earlier, and possessed of even more substantial reasons for revolt. The idea of the young republic delighted him; he was already prepared to shed his blood in establishing that glorious ideal. Stories he had heard of the indignities to which the miners were subjected by an insolent bureaucracy, of men being hunted down like dingoes and beaten with the drawn swords of the troopers because of their failure to comply with the outrageous licensing decrees, bred in him a hatred akin to that felt by the diggers who had suffered in person.

But Done's first experience of a license-hunt was largely farcical. Mr. Commissioner McPhee had chosen a sweltering hot day for his hunt. Most of the diggers on Diamond Gully were below, sheltered from the mordant rays of a sun that blazed in the cloudless sky, so close to earth that its heat struck the face like a licking flame. Jim had just brought some picks from the smithy, when he saw the troopers, headed by the magnate on a fine chestnut, descend upon the gully, their glazed cap-peaks and their swords flashing gaily in the sun. The mounted men divided at the head of the gully, and came down on each side of the lead; the foot police followed Commissioner McPhee, head Serang and cock of the walk from Sawpit Gully to Castlemaine. The duty of the foot police was to rouse the diggers out of their drives, and enforce the orders of the high and mighty McPhee. On Diamond Gully the wash was so shallow that the police had no difficulty in getting the men to the surface, and the inrush of the troopers was the signal for a swarming The men poured from the crowded claims, and in a few seconds the gully was awakened to violent action, and given over to tumult.

The air resounded with the yells of the miners, raised in warning and derision. 'Jo!—Jo!—Jo!' The cries travelled the whole length of the lead, like a salute of musketry. Mike came up the rope, hand over hand.

Page 58

‘A license-hunt,’ he said. ’Now you’ll see how these gaol warders amuse themselves.’

‘What are we supposed to do?’

’Have your license handy. Show it to Huntsman McPhee, and keep your hands off his hounds.’

Mr. Commissioner was not having much trouble; he came through the claims like a monarch demanding obeisance and tribute, and the shouts of the miners followed him. ‘Jo!—Jo!—Jo!’ The men made a sort of chorus of the jibe. A fistful of wet pipe-clay thrown from the cover of a tip struck the sergeant of troopers in the face, and he spurred his horse furiously towards the spot. There was a rush of police and diggers, and a bit of a melee resulted, but Sergeant Wallis received no satisfaction. Four or five unlicensed diggers had been captured, luckless workers for whom Fortune had spread no favours, and these were handed over to the mounted police, who guarded them with drawn swords, accelerating their movements with blows of the blade and not infrequent prickings, for the hatred in which the diggers held the troopers was not more fierce than the troopers’ hatred for the men.

Done and Burton stood on the little hillock of mulluck about their shaft, watching the course of events, when the Grand Serang rode at them. He was a fine stamp of a man, and loved an effect in which he was the central figure. It was becoming in a mere digger to make way for the horse of Mr. Commissioner. Burton, however, stood his ground, the flush burning through his tan, and, rather than give way an inch or be run down, raised his hand and struck the noble nag of the big official on the nose with his palm, with the result that the chestnut went up on his hind-legs, pawing the air, and rattled down the tip on his heels, while the crowding diggers, to whom any indignity inflicted upon a commissioner, however trivial, was a joy and a solace, set up a shout of scornful laughter.

‘What the devil, sir, do you mean by striking my horse?’ thundered the irascible McPhee.

‘I don’t care to be ridden down like a thieving dingo’ replied Mike.

’Sergeant, search this impudent jackanapes, and if his license isn’t O.K., jam the beggar into the logs!’

At this point another handful of white clay was thrown from the back of the crowd, and this time McPhee was the target. The clay struck hint in the breast, and clung to his black cloth. Again there was a rush of indignant and amazed under-strappers, and the Commissioner, crimson with wrath, raised himself in his stirrups and shouted orders, the execution of which it was beyond even his great power to enforce. They enjoined the immediate precipitation of the offenders into the Bottomless Pit.

A diversion was created by the sudden appearance of a new quarry. A slim youth had darted from behind one of the piles of mullock, and was running at full speed up the lead towards the head of the gully, followed by three foot police.

Page 59

‘After him!’ shouted McPhee.

A couple of troopers and two more foot police joined in the chase, but the youngster was a good runner and very cunning. He kept to the mined ground, where the troopers would certainly have broken their necks had they put their horses after him, and springing like a wallaby he cleared the holes, and darted in and out amongst the tips, to the utter confusion of the lubberly and ill-conditioned pursuers. Straight up the lead he ran, and now all the foot police were hunting him, while the troopers rode along the right and the left of the gully to keep him from breaking for the tents, or for Boulder Hill, where there were hiding places amongst the big rocks and in the wombat-holes under them.

‘Run him down!’ shouted McPhee, furious after the indignities that had been put upon his high office. ‘Five pounds to the man who nabs him!’

The diggers shouted a grand chorus of encouragement to the lad, and added a cry of contempt for Mr. Commissioner and all his horde. A number of the men joined in the chase, to add to the confusion of the police. The rest, crowded on the higher ground, formed a large audience, and a more enthusiastic audience, or a more vociferous one for its size, had never witnessed a sporting event in wide Australia. The excitement grew with every successful trick of the runaway, and now he was leading his hunters in and out amongst the claims at the gully’s head, apparently quite indifferent to the heat of the day or the stress of the chase. The miners were giving the youth all the assistance they could by devising hindrances for the police. Barrows, picks, shovels, buckets, and hide-bags found their way under the legs of the pursuers, windlass-ropes were stretched to trip them up, and preoccupied miners jostled them at every turn, and endeavoured to detain them in argument.

Presently the prisoners, in the charge of three troopers, finding attention diverted from them, seized the opportunity to make a bolt for the hunted digger’s haven of refuge, Boulder Hill, and the confusion of tongues swelled to one rapturous howl at the sight. The unlicensed diggers spread, running their best, and dodging smartly to avoid the horses. One poor devil went down under the hoofs of a big roan, and there arose another roar of different portent.

The youngster was being hemmed in amongst a few claims on the extreme left. The troopers had stationed themselves beyond, and the police were closing in on him, while the crowd yelled encouragement and advice. With a rush and a reckless spring from a mullock-heap, the youth cleared his enemies again, and came racing up the gully once more, the baffled police and a number of miners following pell-mell, the troopers cantering on the wings of the hunt. If the boy could reach the crowd where it was thickest there was a chance for him, but he was running straight at Commissioner McPhee, who sat upon his horse watching the chase, and relieving his official feelings with a flow of elegant objurgation.

Page 60

On came the young digger, the cheers swelling as he advanced. The men of Diamond Gully had never so thoroughly enjoyed anything in the nature of a chase. It seemed that the race was to be to the swift. The crowd parted to take the runner to its heart, when Sergeant Wallis threw himself from his horse, and the young digger simply sank panting into his arms. Wallis put on a grip that had reduced many a recalcitrant convict to order, and looked inquiringly at McPhee, who had ridden to the spot. The crowd closed round, overlooking the scene from mullock-heaps and windlass-stands.

‘Produce your license, you rascal!’ roared the Commissioner.

The youth was too short of breath to speak, and remained panting under Wallis’s hand.

‘He has no license, sergeant. Run him in!’ said McPhee.

‘Sure, Commissioner dear, what’d I be doin’ wid a license whin I’m only a woman?’ The captive plucked the billycock from her head, and a mass of black hair fell over her shoulders.

Done, who had pressed to the front, recognised Aurora. That section of the crowd which saw and understood sent up a shout of surprise and jubilation. Wallis retained his grip on the girl, and the sight of his hands upon her stirred a savage resentment in Jim. He made a rush at the sergeant, but Mike was beside him and held him.

‘Don’t be a fool, Jim. Don’t give them a chance,’ he said. ’She’s right as rain. McPhee can do nothing to her; he’ll lumber you if you only open your mouth!’

‘What’ll I do with him—her, sir?’ asked Wallis.

‘A pretty chase you’ve led us, you vixen!’ blurted the Serang. ’For two pins I’d chain you to the nearest log, and give the flies a treat.’

‘Would hairpins do, Mack dear?’ panted Aurora, thrusting an impertinent, flushed, handsome face up at the Serang, and feeling amongst her tangled hair.

There had been an expectant hush upon the men for the last few moments. On this broke a great bovine roar of merriment from the opulent lungs of Mrs. Ben Kyley, who stood foremost in the ring surrounding McPhee, the sergeant, and the girl, her strong white hands, suspiciously pipeclayed, supporting her shaking sides. The familiar guffaw was infectious; the diggers caught it up, and, laughing like madmen, closed in on Wallis, snatched his prisoner from his hands, and, hoisting her shoulder high, bore her off in triumph.

Commissioner McPhee, surrounded by his minions, rode from Diamond Gully that afternoon with one prisoner—the man who had been run down, and the crowd that

ushered him out bore Aurora Griffiths aloft, and sang a long chant of derision, which, keenly as he felt it, the Serang did not dare resent.

X

Page 61

Naturally, Aurora's popularity was greatly increased, and the tent of Mrs. Ben Kyley became a favourite rendezvous. The girl's good looks and her good and Mrs. Kyley's own breezy, genial disposition, were sufficient to assure a large interest on the part of the men; but Aurora, in taking action against the troopers, had identified herself with the enemies of officialdom. Thenceforth she was a public character. There were not so many women about the rush but that scores of sober, reputable diggers would have travelled far and drunk much indifferent rum merely for the privilege of gazing upon the merry, handsome face of a girl like Aurora Griffiths. Now she was in some measure their championess there was more reason for offering devotion at her shrine, and Kyley's saw busy nights.

'Why did you do it?' asked Jim a few nights later, throwing into his words a hint of reproach. Done was unconsciously assuming some little air of proprietorship over Aurora. Whenever the girl noticed it smiles sparkled in the corners of her brown eyes.

'Pure devilment! What else?' she answered.

'Wasn't it a little—just a little—' He was at a loss to express himself, and Aurora's laugh chimed in.

'The dear boy's brought his sinse iv propriety wid him!' she cried. 'Maybe ye' have a few words to say on moral conduct an' the dacent observances iv polite society, an' ye'll be axin' me to put on a proper decorum before the min. Arrah! ye have some purty maxims for young ladies, an' a heap iv illegant an' rare ideals iv yer own as to what's good an' becomin' in young persons iv the other sex, haven't ye, dear?'

'No, no, no!' cried Done, shocked to find how easily he had slipped into the attitude of the common moralist.

'I stand on my merits and my lack of them, Jimmy. There's only one of me here!' She touched her breast. 'And good, bad, or indifferent, my friends must take me whole.'

'Whole, then.'

'Wait, boy, you don't know a fifth of it yet.'

'Do your worst, and test my devotion, Aurora. I defy you!' Jim was getting on.

'Devil doubt you. You're a bold man, Mister Jimmy Done, an' I like your cheek, for all it's as smooth as my own.' She touched his face caressingly with her fingers, and turned to serve clamouring customers at the other end of the counter.

'Good-night, mate,' said a quiet voice at Jim's elbow. Done turned quickly, and started back a step with some amazement on beholding the pale, impassive face of the stranger who had attacked Stony at their camp in the Black Forest. The man was

smoking a cigar. He was dressed after the manner of a successful digger, with a touch of vanity. He regarded Jim earnestly, and the young man experienced again the peculiar feeling the first sight of this stranger had provoked.

‘Good-night,’ he said.

‘I see you recollect me.’

‘Oh yes. Did Stony quite escape you that night?’

Page 62

‘He did, thank’s to you, Done.’

’A man couldn’t see murder done under his very nose without stirring a hand.’

’Don’t apologize. I have no grievance. If I had killed him I should have regretted it more than the death of my dearest friend, although no man from the time of Cain had better excuse for murder. I suppose you have not seen the man since?’

‘No!’ answered Jim with emphasis.

’Meaning that you would not tell me if you had. You need not fear being an accessory before the act. I want Stony alive, Mr. Done.’

‘Mister Done!’ Jim laughed. ’I did not think there was a Mister on the camp. But how do you know my name?’

’I have heard it here to-night half a dozen times. My name is Wat Ryder—Walter Ryder, but mono syllabic Christian names are insisted on amongst our friends.’ He pointed his cigar towards the diggers at the tables. ‘Forgive me,’ he continued in an even voice, ’but your scrutiny of me is suggestive. May I ask what there is in my appearance or my manner that disturbs you?’

The question was put without feeling of any kind, but it startled Jim a little. He was surprised to find that he had betrayed any trace of his emotion.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘my experience of you has not been commonplace.’

’You mean that affair in the Bush?—a casual fight, with the usual loud language merely, for all you know.’ Ryder maintained silence for a few moments. He was studying his cigar when he spoke again. ‘By the way,’ he said abruptly, ’I know a good deal about you, Done, if you came out in the Francis Cadman. He expected this announcement to have some effect.

‘I saw you one day in Melbourne,’ Jim replied. ’You were driving with Mrs. Macdougal.’

‘Mrs. Donald Macdougal of Boobyalla,’ said Ryder gravely.

‘She was a shipmate of mine.’

Yes; and you saw my face for a moment in Melbourne and remembered it. You observe narrowly and quickly, Mr. Done. It was not Mrs. Macdougal who was most communicative on the interesting subject I have broached, however, but a very charming young friend of hers, Miss Woodrow. The young lady’s concern was excusable in view of certain services, but nevertheless flattering. She asked me to constitute myself a sort of foster-Providence over you if we ever met, Mr. Done.’

Jim laughed to smother a pang.

‘Do I need it, Mr. Ryder?’ he asked. He fancied there was a flutter of the other’s eye towards Aurora, but Ryder did not reply to the question. ‘Miss Woodrow told me of the rescue,’ he said, ’of your solitary disposition, and spoke of a life of suffering in England.’

Done’s lips tightened; he squared his shoulders. The fear that had possessed him on leaving his birthplace was no longer upon him, but he desired no revelations, no digging into the past, and there was a hint of motive in the other’s tone—he was inviting confidence. For a few moments Ryder bent a keen glance upon the younger man, his face bowed and in shadow, toying with his cigar.

Page 63

‘Jo!’ yelled a voice out in the darkness.

Instantly every pannikin was emptied on the floor, and thrust into a digger’s shirt.

‘The traps!’ cried Mrs. Ben, and her rum-jug flew into a tub of water behind the counter. Several bundles of washing were tossed out, a loaf of bread was thrust upon Done, and at the same moment the door was thrown back, and in marched Sergeant Wallis, followed by five police. Mrs. Ben Kyley was not surprised, and had expected that Aurora’s imposition would bring a raid down upon her sooner or later, and here it was.

‘You’re selling sly grog here, ma’am,’ said Wallis, sniffing like a retriever.

Ben Kyley rose silently from his stool and approached Wallis.

‘Sit you down, Ben Kyley!’ roared Mrs. Ben; and Kyley returned as silently to his seat, and sat smoking throughout the scene that followed, apparently quite listless.

’Am I selling sly grog, Mr. Sergeant? Then it’s a miracle where it comes from. I haven’t a drop in the place, or I’d stand you a nobbler gladly. It’s my opinion there are worse-looking men than Sergeant Wallis in gaol.’

‘Rubbish, ma’am! the place reeks of rum,’ said Wallis.

’A bit of a bottle Quigley shouted for the boys, this being his birthday.’

‘Quigley has too many birthdays. Search the place, boys!’

The police commenced a systematic search of the tent, examining both compartments, and trying the earthen floor for a secret cellar. They found nothing, and meanwhile Mrs. Kyley was bantering Wallis with boisterous good-fellowship.

’The idea of an officer of your penetration, sergeant, mistaking a poor washerwoman’s tent for a grog-shop.’

The poor washerwoman does a big business, Mrs. Kyley.’

’Not amongst the police, Sergeant Wallis. It is a miserable living a washerwoman would make out of them. I hear they beat their shirts with a stick once a month, as we dusted the carpets in the old Country.’

‘We can find nothing, sergeant,’ said one of the police.

’Remember how Imeson tricked you all at Bendigo, Wallis, with a hollow tent-pole that held ten gallons of brandy.’

‘I do, Mrs. Kyley. You were Mrs. Imeson then.’

‘And if you have the luck I may be Mrs. Wallis one of these days.’

‘Heaven forbid, ma’am!’

’Don’t waste your prayers on me, sergeant. Maybe I deserve even that, my sins being many and various.’

’And sly grog-selling is one of them. But I’ll have you there yet, my good woman.’ Wallis turned his thumb down.

’Remember I am only a poor weak woman when that happens, sergeant. Will you have a drink before going? There’s a nip left in Quigley’s bottle.’

‘No, ma’am, I don’t drink,’ answered Wallis from the door.

’Then, sergeant, commit your nose for perjury. It’s bearing false witness against you all over the field.’

Page 64

There was a yell of laughter, interspersed with the usual cries of ‘Jo!’ as Wallis passed out after his men, and the diggers bombarded Mrs. Kyley with the bundles of washing that had been hastily distributed amongst them. Ben Kyley followed the police out, and presently returned and nodded to Mary, who seized her jug and dived through the canvas partition. She was back again in a minute with a jug full of spirits.

‘My shout, lads!’ she cried. ’Roll up, and drink the health and long life of Mary Kyley!’

The device that enabled the washerwoman to deceive the police was known to a few of the diggers, but they kept the secret well. Her tent was pitched close to a big hollow gum-tree. High up in the butt nestled a barrel of rum, the bottom coated with cinders, like the interior of the burnt tree. From this barrel a pipe came down under the bark to a neatly disguised little trap-door where the canvas lay against the butt. A hidden slit in the tent corresponded with the trap-door. It was Ben’s office to replenish the barrel at night, with kegs brought from their safe hiding-place in an abandoned claim, over which was pitched the tent of his mate, Sandy Harris. Mary had adopted this plan on three rushes, and her savings, regularly banked in Melbourne, already assumed the proportions of a modest fortune.

When the police were gone Jim looked about him in search of Ryder, but his acquaintance had disappeared. As his friendship with Aurora Griffiths ripened, Done shook off thoughts of Lucy Woodrow, since they never came without an underlying sense of accusation. He was enjoying his present life to the full. In his heart was a great kindness towards the people with whom he mingled. He was naturally sociable, a lover of his kind, and recognised now that half the torment of his life since coming to manhood had arisen from his isolation, from the lack of opportunities of gratifying this affection. He admired Aurora, comparing her with his youthful ideal, the strong animal, self-reliant, careless of custom. True, she lacked the intellectual superiority with which he had endowed his defiant Dulcinea, but he had even forgotten to take delight in his own mental excellence of late, so that did matter. He only concerned himself with living now. He was quite at his ease in Aurora’s society, and the atmosphere on the Kyley establishment pleased him. The place was full of interest, but his warmest interest was in the full-blooded pagan who officiated as Hebe to the assembled diggers.

He had quite respectable qualms at times, seeing her the object of so much rough gallantry—qualms he stifled instantly as being in flat rebellion to his fine philosophy of individualism as applied to behaviour. His rights of man must be rights of women too. But, for all that, there was much comfort in the belief that Aurora showed no preference elsewhere. Quigley’s prominence as a suitor was not due to any partiality on the part of the girl, but rather to Quigley’s own aggressive character, and his imperturbability under her eloquent banter. To be sure, she persisted in treating Jim as an interesting boy, a line of conduct he found somewhat absurd, but which was partly the vein of her humour, and partly due to his inexperience in the role of Don Juan.

Page 65

So the merry months passed, and the mates worked claim after claim on Diamond Gully, doing much prospecting work and sinking sundry duffers, but unearthing sufficient gold to make Done's riches a good deal of a nuisance to him, although translated into the biggest bank-notes available. During all this time Quigley's dislike for Jim was only kept within bounds by the vein of flippancy that ran through Aurora's demonstrations of preference for the younger man. The quarrel was inevitable, however, and it was precipitated by a half-drunken demonstration of affection towards Aurora on Quigley's part, which the girl resented with a savageness that betrayed an unexpected trait.

One Saturday night Done and Burton were partners in a four-handed game of euchre going on at one of the tables, when a sudden disturbance arose at the counter. Mrs. Ben Kyley's familiar rum-jug crashed and flew to pieces on the table amongst the men. The players were on their feet in an instant. At the other end of the compartment Aurora was struggling in the hands of Pete Quigley. Pete held her wrists firmly, and Aurora's fingers clutched the neck of a bottle. Her face was distorted with passion, no trace of its habitual humour remained; the fury of a mountain cat blazed in her eyes, her lips were drawn back from her large white teeth, which were clenched with a biting vindictiveness. The other men reseated themselves, watching the struggle without much concern. Mrs. Kyley shouted an uncomplimentary summary of Quigley's character from behind the counter. Jim alone advanced to interfere.

'Drop it, Quigley,' he said quietly, but his warmer feelings stirred. 'Blast it, man, let the girl be!'

'An' have my brains knocked out with a bottle? I'll see you flaming first!'

Done pressed Aurora's fingers apart, and threw the bottle behind the counter.

'Now release her!' he said in a tone conveying a threat.

'Mind your own infernal business!' answered Pete. 'I'll deal with you in half a minute.'

'Release her!' Done was at Quigley's throat with a grip that started Pete's eyes from their sockets, and the elder digger abandoned his hold on Aurora to fight for his own breath. There was a brief struggle, and Jim sent Pete sprawling over a stool.

Quigley picked himself up. He did not rush at Done: he was apparently composed. He undid the wrist and collar buttons of his jumper, drew the garment over his head, and threw it on the floor at Jim's feet.

'I suppose you'll take it fighting!' he said. 'If you won't I'll thump the soul out of you, anyhow.'

Aurora rushed between them, and endeavoured to grapple with Pete again.

‘You shall not fight!’ she cried. ‘You coward! You brute!’

At this juncture Kyley, who had been away replenishing the rum-barrel, entered the tent. He took in the situation at a glance.

‘Look after Aurora, Ben!’ ordered Mrs. Kyley, and Kyley calmly took the struggling girl in his arms, and handed her bodily over the counter into the washer-woman’s gentle care.

Page 66

Mike was promptly at his mate's back. 'Stave him off, Jim,' he said. 'Use your straight left, and if he gets in throw him. He's a dirty in-fighter.' Mike had boxed a good deal with Done lately, and did not tremble for his friend.

Kyley came forward again. It was no part of his duty to prevent an honourable settlement of a quarrel between man and man, and very far from his inclination.

'If yer meanin' fight,' he said, it's got to be fair, square, an' in order. First man that fouls 'll hear from me. Are you ready?'

The men had formed themselves into ranks along the sides and the end of the tent, leaving a clear space about eighteen feet square. Jim threw aside his shirt, and stood erect and composed. The flannel he wore was sleeveless, and his uncommon length of arm excited the attention of the cognoscenti, and if there was a miner on Diamond Gully who did not know the points of a fighter, he was ashamed to admit it. Done had done most of the windlass work since coming to the field, and his forearm was corrugated with muscle, while the flexors responded to movements like balls of iron starting under the brown skin. His shoulders were broad and set well back, his poise buoyant, and his air of absolute confidence gave a dubious tone to the words of the quidnuncs who were allowing Quigley three minutes to whip him out of all recognition. Done looked slight and small before his big opponent, but Pete's bigness was due largely to surplus material, and Pete had been anything but a temperate man of late. Jim recollected this in calculating his chances and determining his methods.

'Time!' cried Kyley.

Done took his ground easily, with his left arm well up, and his right in for defence, a style so unusual at that date as to provide a little derision amongst the onlookers. Mike, standing with his arms outspread and his shoulders to the crowd, keeping the ring, smiled complacently. Pete, confident in his height, weight, and strength, was determined to make a short, hot fight of it, and went straight at Jim, both hands up, and launched his right for the young man's face with terrific force. This must have been a decisive blow had Jim's face remained there to receive it, but Done ducked neatly, and the next moment his left was shot into Quigley's cheek, sending the big man staggering, and raising a purple wheal under the eye almost instantly. Pete's composure forsook him at the first set back, and uttering a furious oath he rushed in again, swinging both fists; but that shooting left hand met him full in the mouth, and balked him again, his own sledge-hammer blows falling short of his opponent. He pushed in recklessly, punching right and left, but Jim dodged smartly, slipped under his arm, and jumped to the other end of the ring. Quigley swung round and dashed at him, and once more Done's hard left shot into his face, while the heavy blow of the giant was neatly parried, and again Jim bewildered his man by ducking and slipping from him.

Page 67

‘Why don’t you stand up and fight him like a Briton?’ cried one of the supporters of the big digger.

‘He’s fightin’ fair, an’ as long as he fights fair he’ll fight as he dom well pleases!’ said Ben Kyley, who had constituted himself referee.

Already Quigley was bleeding freely and panting from his exertions, while Done, who betrayed no excitement and conserved his energies with miserly care, was no more disturbed than if he had been taking a hand at cards. He faced his foe as before, presenting as little as possible of his body for a target, and met Pete’s rush this time with an adroit side movement and a heavy lifting blow in the body that made Quigley gasp, and robbed him of the little bit of sense that had remained. He went blundering at Jim, lashing out with left and right. There was a rapid exchange, and using his guard arm in offence for the first time, Jim sent in a swinging blow that crashed on Pete’s chin; and Pete dropped as if his legs had suddenly broken under him, and lay in a grotesque attitude, his cheek pressed to the earthen floor, while the assembled miners sent up yells of excitement that presently settled into a babel of criticism.

Quigley made an effort to rise, but collapsed, and was lifted into his corner, and freely sprayed and towelled by his seconds. Jim sat unmoved, while Mike and an aristocratic digger, known as the Prodigal, fanned him with the towels Mrs. Kyley had thoughtfully provided.

Quigley came up again at the call. He was still blinking and a little dazed, but far from being beaten, and the first round had taught him a lesson. He advanced more warily, displaying some little respect for his enemy’s darting left, but Jim’s tactics puzzled and disgusted him. The young man was as nimble as a cat, and no matter how Pete pushed him, he always broke ground and slipped away when it seemed that his towering opponent had him at his mercy.

‘Why don’t you fight, blast yer!’ stuttered Pete, swinging on the runaway for the third time in two minutes.

‘Yes, stand up to it. This ain’t a dancing lesson!’ his second growled.

Jim’s answer was a quick feint and a hard drive on the nose with the left, following up quickly with the right on Quigley’s ear. Both blows sank in deeply, and Jim eluded Pete’s rush, jumped out of his reach, and, coming at him from the side, punched him heavily in the neck, whereat Mike and his friends clamoured joyously. Quigley rushed at Jim, spitting oaths, but he was a better fighter than he appeared to be, and was prepared for the other’s swift, cutting left hand by this, and, ducking, he landed both fists on Jim’s body. Jim countered on the ear and neck, there was a fierce rally that set the crowd jumping and shouting madly, and Jim slid out and skipped away, then got back at

Pete before he had quite realized what had happened with a powerful blow over the kidneys.

Page 68

Pete's blood was up; he set his teeth, and went at Done with hungry passion. The young man's style of fighting was new to most of the onlookers, and few of them appreciated it. What they liked was to see combatants stand up to each other, giving punch for punch, a system in which the strong brute had all the advantage. Adroitness in avoiding punishment was not regarded with favour; but, in spite of the derisive cries of Quigley's backers, Jim kept strictly to his methods.

'Shut up, you!' cried Kyley. 'The lad's fightin' his own battle, an' fightin' it well. He could wipe the floor with a bunch of you.'

Breathing heavily, and looking extremely ugly under his blood and bruises, Pete followed Jim round, watching for an opportunity to rush in and grip him. He felt that it was only necessary for him to get the smaller man in his arms to settle the contest once and for all; but Jim fought him warily, sparring, ducking, and dodging, cutting Pete again and again with left-hand punches, or clipping him neatly with a swinging right when an opening offered. Taking advantage of an instant when Done was driven against the line of men, Quigley bore in, shaking his head from a blow that might have felled a bullock, and, clasping Jim round the waist, deliberately carried him into the centre of the ring, making nothing of the short-arm punches that cut like a hammer. Three times he tried to dash Done to the ground, but the latter was lithe as a serpent, and his limbs writhed themselves about Quigley and clung tenaciously. The crowd was shouting the two men's names, and exchanging cries of triumph and abuse. Suddenly an arm shot across Pete's breast, an elbow was driven into his throat, the two men wheeled, and the big one was sprung from his feet and sent down, with a stunning shock. The yelling ceased suddenly, every eye was upon Quigley.

'My God! he's killed!' said one awed voice.

They dragged Pete to his corner, and Jim submitted himself to the attentions of his seconds. All the passion had gone out of his heart before the first round was finished: there remained no emotion but the lust of conquest. Aurora, who had watched the fight lying across the counter under the washer-woman's restraining arm, her dark eyes shining, her face ablaze, beat the boards with her knuckles, and cried out incessantly, a prey to a fever of excitement that quivered in all her flesh.

'Time!' cried Ben Kyley, and the men came to the scratch for the third round, Pete badly shaken, but game and still eager.

'Stand in an' fight me, an' I'll belt the hide off you!' he said savagely.

Jim laughed mockingly, and pushed his face forward, inviting the other to lead, and when Pete lunged at it he ducked, and got right and left on to his enemy's ribs, slipping, away under Pete's arm when he endeavoured to return the blows. For a time Jim simply led the big man a dance round the ring, landing a stinging blow now and then, to

add to Pete's discomfiture; but the latter got him cornered at last, and the thud, thud, thud of the blows stirred the crowd to enthusiasm once more. Pete got after Jim smartly when the latter broke ground, and landed his best blow, a heavy right swing on the temple that sent Done down, and left him confused for a few seconds. Quigley's friends shouted themselves hoarse as Mike helped his mate to the chair.

Page 69

‘How goes it, Jim?’ asked Burton anxiously.

‘He’s beaten, but my hat won’t fit me for a day or two,’ answered Done, smiling through the water.

Quigley showed his bad condition very markedly when he came up, and Jim, excepting for a cut chin and a big lump over his temple, appeared none the worse. Pete maintained his wild policy, rushing the young man about the ring, wasting energy in terrible blows that were rarely within a foot of their object, while Done, who scarcely seemed to be fighting at all, slipped in every now and again and battered Pete’s body, chary of hitting his cut and swollen face. This was maintained for two rounds more, and three times Quigley went down. When time was called for the seventh round Jim said decisively:

‘I’ll fight the man no more! He’s beaten!’

There was a yell from Quigley’s corner, and Pete rushed Jim, forcing him back among the men. Again they clinched, but Jim broke away, and Quigley followed, almost blind, and scarcely able to stagger. Done put him off with the left, and drove in a right-hand blow that took Pete on the point of the chin, sending him to earth, helpless and hopelessly beaten.

‘Jimmy Done’s the winner,’ said Kyley authoritatively, when a measure of quiet was restored, ‘an’ I don’t mind sayin’ I ain’t seen a prettier bit o’ fightin’ this five year. You’ve got a lot o’ Tom Sayers’s dainty tricks, my lad!’ he added, shaking Done by the hand.

XI

The miners pressed about the victor, eager to shake hands with him, and invitations to drink were showered upon him. Aurora clamoured on the out skirts of this crowd, trying to fight her way through, still half delirious with excitement and exultation, calling Jim’s name. Her rapture was uncouth, half savage; she had many of the instincts of the primitive woman. But Mike dragged Done’s shirt over his head and led his mate away. Burton prepared a hot tub for Jim that night, and after nine hours’ sleep the hero awakened on Sunday morning with only a bruise or two, a lump on his forehead, and a stiff and battered feeling about the ribs, to remind him of his fight with Quigley.

It was a pleasant morning, the winter was already well advanced; but only an improved water-supply, an occasional wetting at the windlass, and the need of a rug on the bunk, marked the change of season, so far as Jim could see. There was no place for verdure on Diamond Gully; the whole field turned upside down, littered with the debris of the mines, washed with yellow slurry, and strewn in places with white boulders and the gravel tailings sluiced clean by the gold-seekers. The creek, recently a limpid rivulet, was now a sluggish, muddy stream, winding about its tumbled bed; but a bright sky was

over all, and a benignant sun smiled upon the gully, scintillating among the tailings and burnishing the muddy stream to silver. The tents looked white and clean, and the smoke from the camp-fires rose straight and high in the peaceful atmosphere. A strange quiet was upon the lead; it needed only the chastened clanging of a church-bell to complete the suggestion of an English Sabbath.

Page 70

Jim was sitting on the foot of his bunk reading. Mike had gone up the creek on a prospecting expedition. Presently a magpie in a dead tree at a little distance burst into full-throated melody. Done dropped his book to listen. That clarion of jubilation always delighted him. It seemed to him that if the young Australian republic men were talking of ever came into being its anthem must ring with the wild, free notes of its bravest singing-bird.

‘So the bold hayro was not kilt intoirely?’ Aurora was smiling in at him, her eyes full of sunshine, her cheeks suffused with more than their wonted colour. ‘Are ye axin’ me in? Thank ye, kind sir.’ She slipped into the tent, and, placing a hand upon each shoulder, examined him critically, while he smiled back into her face, and wondered why she brought with her suggestions of a bounteous rose-garden. ’Ah, Jimmy, I thought I’d hardly know ye!

’"Where are your eyes that looked so mild?
Hurroo! Hurroo!
Where are your eyes that looked so mild
Hurroo! Hurroo!
Where are your eyes that looked so mild,
When my poor heart you first beguiled?”

She sang no more, but sank upon his knee, and her arms were about his neck. Her accent was mischievious, but there was the fire of rubies in her eyes.

‘They’re both there fast enough,’ laughed Jim. ‘An’ niver a black one among them. The big fellow didn’t spoil your picture, then? Ah, Jim, it was fine! fine! fine! It maddened me with delight to see you beating him. You—you sprig of a fighting devil, I love you for it!’

Jim’s heart took fire at hers. He strained her to him, and his lips sank upon her handsome, eager mouth in a long kiss that transported him.

‘Dearest, you have kissed my heart,’ she whispered. ’You fought him for the love of me, didn’t you?’

Only twice in his life had he kissed a woman, and as if greedy from long fasting he kissed her now, lips, cheeks, eyes, and neck. His lips searched the deep corners of her mouth.

‘But you don’t say you love me, ma bouchal!’ Aurora murmured, and her arms tightened about his neck.

‘You are beautiful! You are beautiful!’ he said fiercely.

‘But you don’t say you love me!’

‘I love you! I love you! I love you!’ There was not now in the young man’s mind any self-questioning; there was no probing for logical reasons, no doubting, no examining emotions in a suspicious, pessimistic spirit. Done abandon himself to the delicious intoxication of the moment, and Aurora was transfigured under his caresses her aggressiveness, her bonhomie, her bold independence of spirit, were all gone; she developed a clinging and almost infantile tenderness, and breathed about him a cloud of ecstasy.

When Burton returned in two hours’ time, Done said nothing about Aurora’s visit, but Mike did not fail to mark his mate’s demeanour, which was unusually thoughtful.

Page 71

‘Not feelin’ too bright, old man?’ asked Mike

‘Nonsense, Mike; I’m all right.’

‘Thought p’r’aps those rib-benders o’ Quigley’s were pullin’ you up.’

‘Not a bit of it. I haven’t a thought to spare for Quigley.’

Burton understood better later in the evening, when he saw Jim and Aurora sitting together at Kyley’s in the dim corner furthest from the wide fireplace, and the Geordie touched him on the arm and jerked his thumb in their direction.

‘She was down to your tent to see after her champion this mornin’,’ he said.

‘Spoils to the victor!’ said the Prodigal.

Mike’s eyes drifted towards Jim and Aurora several times during the evening, and he thumbed his chin in a troubled way. He had been thinking it was almost time to try fresh fields; but it was not going to be so easy a matter to shift as he had imagined.

A few nights later, seizing the opportunity when he was alone in the tent, Jim cut the stitches that secured the locket containing Lucy Woodrow’s portrait in the breast pocket of his jumper, convenient to his heart; and drawing from under his pillow the tin box that held his mother’s brooch and picture, and the few papers and heirlooms he cherished, he placed Lucy’s gift somewhat reverently amongst his treasures, and hastily stowed the box away again. He had formulated no definite reason for doing this, and experienced some contrition in performing the act, and a sense of relief when it was done.

The young man’s complete victory over Quigley made his reputation throughout Diamond Gully. Pete Quigley had two or three hard-won battles to his credit, and it was thought there was no man on the field so hard to handle, with the exception of Ben Kyley, whose showing against a professional of Bendigo’s calibre set him on a plane above the mere amateur. Pete confessed himself beaten without equivocation.

‘I ain’t got any patience with this blanky new fangled style o’ fightin’,’ he said. ‘A man ought to toe the scratch an’ take his gruel like a man. With those Johnnie-jump-ups it’s all cut an’ run, an’ I admit it licks me. I ain’t neither a foot-racer nor a acrobat, an’ Done gave me as much as I cared about.’

Indeed, Quigley looked it. The fact was patent on the face of him, and he would not be in a condition to dispute the thoroughness of his trouncing for three weeks at least.

Jim was regarded as a celebrity. Strangers even went to him, and gravely asked to be permitted to shake hands with him as such. He was pointed out to newcomers, and

observed on all hands with a serious respect that had all the comedy of piquant burlesque.

‘’Pon my soul, Mike!’ said Jim, ’if your republic comes while my popularity lasts, I shall be first President.’

‘Well,’ answered Mike soberly, ’if you could talk as well as you fight, I’d like your chances.’

Page 72

Done's opportunity of increasing his popularity came on the following Saturday. The Saturday afternoon off was strictly observed on the rushes. The miners were nearly all batchers—that is, bachelors keeping house for themselves—and the tidy men amongst them needed one half-day for washing and cleaning and putting their tents in order. Only the more prodigal spirits cared to pay Mrs. Kyley's exorbitant rates for laundry work, and for the others who cherished a respect for cleanliness—the nearest the ordinary digger came to Godliness—Saturday afternoon was washing day, and scores might have been seen after crib outside their tents performing the laundress's office, usually astride a log, on which 'the wash' was spread to be alternately splashed and soaped and rubbed. Saturday was the great 'settling day,' too. If there were any differences to be fought out, or any disputes requiring the nice adjustment of the prize-ring, they were almost in variably made fixtures for Saturday afternoon.

For a month past Aurora had forcibly taken over the mates' washing, and as they were well-disciplined batchers who performed their domestic duties effectually from day to day, for them Saturday afternoon was really a holiday; and on this particular afternoon they were sitting in the open, sunning themselves, and talking with the Prodigal of the latest news from Ballarat, where the leaders of the diggers' cause were agitating resolutely for alterations in the mining laws and reform of the Constitution, when a party of about twenty men approached them from the direction of Forest Creek. The party halted at a distance of about fifty yards, and after a short conference two of the men came on.

'Hello!' said Mike, 'here's trouble.'

'Five ounces to a bone button they are looking for fight, added the Prodigal.

'Good day, mates!' The foremost of the two strangers greeted them with marked civility, and the friends replied in kind. 'One of you is the man that beat Pete Quigley, we're told.'

'This is Jim Done,' said Mike, giving an informal introduction, indicating Jim with the toss of a pebble.

'Glad to know you,' the other said, with some show of deference. 'Fact is, we've got a man here who's willing to fight you for anything you care to mention up to fifty pounds.'

'What!' cried Done in amazement.

'Oh, quite friendly, and all that. He hasn't anything against you.'

'Confound his cheek! Does he—do you think I've nothing better to do than to offer myself to be thumped by every blackguardly bruiser who comes along?'

’Softly, mate; no need for hard names. We come here as sportsmen, making you a fair offer, thinking, perhaps, you’d be glad of a bit of a rough-up this fine day.’

‘Then you can go to the devil!’ said Jim, laughing in spite of himself.

‘You won’t fight?’

’I will not. I’m no fighting man. I only fight when forced, and then with a bad grace, I can assure you.’

Page 73

The two men looked quite pathetic in their disappointment as they turned to rejoin their companions.

‘Well, of all the outrageous—’ gasped Jim.

’Price of fame! said the Prodigal.

Mike grinned. ’Don’t be selfish, Jim. I’ve got nothing to do this afternoon, an’ would just as soon watch a good scrap. Why not oblige the kind gentleman?’

‘You and the kind gentleman can go hang!’

‘They’ve got Brummy the Nut there,’ the Prodigal said. ’Brummy is a lag who had all the sensibilities battered out of him in the quarries. He has no science, but hits like the kick of a cart-horse, and is humbly grateful for punishment that would knock the hide off an old man hippopotamus.’

‘Look here, you won’t disappoint poor Brummy the Nut,’ pleaded Mike, with mock gravity.

The deputation of two returned after another conference.

‘How would you take it,’ asked the first speaker—. ’mind, we’re just asking, being anxious to bring about a friendly meeting—how would you take it if our man gave you a bit of a clip over the ear?’

This was put as a reasonable possibility, and as a simple and pleasant method of establishing a casus belli that might satisfy Done’s ridiculous punctilio.

‘I’d take it very badly,’ said Jim warmly, ’and probably knock your man’s confounded head off his shoulders with this pick-handle.’

‘’Twouldn’t be done unfriendly,’ said the second man in a hurt tone.

‘Why doesn’t your man show himself?’

‘They guessed his beauty would prejudice you,’ said the Prodigal. ’You might have conscientious scruples, and refuse to do anything to mar so perfect a specimen of Nature’s handiwork.’

One of the strangers beckoned, and his party advanced with their champion. Done gazed wonderingly at the man they brought against him. Brummy the Nut was perhaps five feet nine inches in height, but walked in the stooping attitude of a person under a burden, his long arms swinging in a manner that strengthened the hint of gorilla in his broad, battered face; he dragged his feet as if the ball and chain were still at his heels,

and, despite the enormous strength suggested by his massive limbs and great trunk, bore himself with a childish meekness in ludicrous contrast with his sinister appearance. All that long years in a convict hell could do to rob a man of the grace of humanity and harden him to pain and labour had been done for Brummy the Nut. The Nut favoured Jim, Mike, and the Prodigal each with a duck of the head and a movement of his hand towards the forehead.

‘This is our man, Brummy the Nut,’ said the party’s spokesman.

‘Well, Brummy, I won’t fight you,’ replied Done. Brummy ducked his head again, and muttered something in a husky voice about being ’proud to hey a fr’en’ly go with any gent ez is a gent.’

‘He’s a gentleman amateur like yourself,’ said the spokesman persuasively ‘and a fairer fighter never stripped.’

Page 74

‘Oh, make tracks!’ retorted Burton with some impatience. ’We’re tired. Set your man-eater at a red-gum butt or a bull—something in his class.’

‘It’s very disappointing after coming so far to oblige you.’

‘You didn’t receive a pressing invitation from any body here,’ said Jim.

‘Any other day,’ ventured the Nut deferentially in his small, hoarse voice, intelligible only at intervals. ‘Way o’ friendship—no ill-feelin’s—gent ez is a gent—no ‘arm did.’

‘I’ll not fight you at any time,’ Done replied. ’You see, Brummy, my friend hesitates to raise false hopes in your heart,’ said the Prodigal. ’He might promise to punch the hair and hide off you at some future date, and then disappoint all your tender, joyful anticipations; but he’s not a man of that sort: he tells you straight he wouldn’t attempt to ’spoil beauty like yours for all the gilt in the Gravel Pits.’

‘Gent don’t wanter fight,’ whispered Brummy; ’tha’s all right—no ’arm did.’ Brummy was the only man of his party who betrayed no feeling whatever in the matter.

There was a further conference, and the spokesman turned to Jim again.

Brummy claims the championship of Diamond Gully,’ he said.

’That’s no business of mine. He’s welcome to claim anything he takes a fancy to for me,’ replied Jim.

‘No ill-feelin’s——way o’ frien’ship,’ said the husky champion; and he made his curious salutation again, and went shuffling off with his keepers, who had the airs of sorely ill-used citizens.

‘Well,’ gasped Jim, ’if this is what a man brings down on himself by waging a casual battle in his own defence, I’ll be careful to keep out of fights in the future.’

However, Jim Done was not again called upon to do battle while he remained on Diamond Gully. The reputation he had won was a guarantee against further molestation and Aurora’s open and unabashed devotion prevented any approach to serious rivalry. The girl still preserved her manner of a boon companion in the presence of Mrs. Ben Kyley’s customers, but no man of them was given occasion for the ghost of a hope of supplanting Jim in her tempestuous heart. She now assumed towards Done an attitude of happy submission; the quizzical insistence on his boyishness was abandoned: she acknowledged her master with an exuberant rapture that had not the faintest suspicion of coyness, and although Jim often blushed under it, and experienced a great uneasiness in the course of a public demonstration, Aurora showed a barbaric disregard for contemporary opinion. She felt no shame in the presence of her emotions, and

consequently had no impulse to hide them. She beguiled Jim from his work to take long rambles; she devoted herself to him, to the neglect of Mrs. Ben Kyley's patrons.

Mike Burton was often lonely in his tent, and often Mrs. Kyley stormed at Jim, highly vociferous and wildly pantomimic, but good-natured and sympathetic at bottom, for there was a vagabondish harmony between the two women that made them fast friends, and caused Mary Kyley to feel a share in Aurora's happiness.

Page 75

The writing of the letter to Lucy Woodrow was now indefinitely postponed, and Jim found himself reluctant to open the box containing Lucy's locket. When his hand fell upon it by chance he put it by hastily, as if it were just possible that the face in the trinket might force itself upon his attention. He never lived to understand this fugitive idea, for the thoughts were cast aside just as hastily, and with an absurd touch of impatience.

The young man had given himself up to Aurora's influence. The plenitude and the ardour of her love carried him along; he felt at times like a twig in a torrent, but the sensation was luxurious, and another joy of life was with him. He opened wide arms to it. Once again he saw the world with new eyes, and for having despised and mistrusted it so found it the more adorable. He squared his shoulders and experienced a curious sensation of physical growth and accrued manhood. Two years ago he might have weighed his feelings for Aurora and hers for him, and sought out motives; to-day he went along the flow of life, unresisting, with a leaping heart, and had he been questioned would have said that not he but the world had changed.

Mike Burton watched the development of events in a judicial way, without offering any comment. There had not been a waste month in his life for as long as he could remember. In spite of his busy days and his Bush breeding, he had been much in touch with the humanities, and he knew men and women well enough to expect no startling surprises from them; but Jim was a curiosity. With a certain robustness of character, no little knowledge, and considerable worldly wisdom in abstract matters, the younger man yet seemed to bring a boy's mind to bear upon actualities, and excited himself absurdly over matters which, from Mike's patriarchal point of view, were merely the expected events of existence—the things that happen to all men, and about which no man need distress himself. He had seen a good deal of the women of the camps, and thought he knew the types well. He summed up Aurora to his own satisfaction: 'Like an eel—easy to catch, but hard to hold!' Amongst other pleasant qualities, Mike had the comfortable human one of often being wrong in his estimates of men and women and things. He expected the girl's infatuation to wear itself out quickly, and meanwhile possessed his soul with patience, prospected here and there, tried new claims, and found a few payable and one rich before the summer came again; but he wanted to try the other rushes, and the winter passed without his having broached the matter to Done.

Page 76

Jim was quite ignorant of the fact that he was making unfair demands upon his mate's loyalty. They were doing well on the whole; the life on Diamond Gully had lost none of its attractiveness—it was still vigorous and eventful. There had been a riot in Forest Creek during May, providing a stirring week, and many alarms and excursions on the part of the miners and the license-hunters. Solo had visited Diamond Gully again, and neatly victimized Cootmeyer—a gold-buyer at one of the stores—gagging his victim with his own bacon-knife, and imprisoning him in a salt-pork barrel. The revolutionary feeling in the hearts of the men had increased in intensity, and the talk about the camp-fires stirred the bad blood to fever-heat. To Done time had gone on wings so swift that he could not mark its flight. Burton, a nomad in blood and breeding, thirsted for change, and in ordinary circumstances would have rolled his swag and gone on alone long ago; but the liking he had for Jim was the strongest emotion that had crept into his stolid soul, excepting only the affection he bore for a certain black-browed boss-cockie's daughter on the Sydney side, and be found it hard to break away. But Aurora's hold on Jim had not weakened so far as he could judge, and the time came at length when his restless spirit drove him on. He broke the news to Jim one night as they lay in their bunks, he smoking, Jim reading.

'I'm full o' this, old man,' he said abruptly.

'Of what?'

'Oh, of Diamond Gully! I reckon it's played out or thereabouts.'

'And we got twelve ounces a man for the last week's work.

'Not enough, Jimmy. Not more 'n wages, an' men like you 'n me should be in the thickest an' richest of it. I'm gettin' along to-morrow.'

'You mean to say you are going?' Done jerked himself on to his elbow and stared across the tent at his mate.

'Um—m Mean to try a new rush.'

'Anything wrong, Mike? Have I been getting on your raw lately? You want to break up this partner ship of ours.'

'My oath, no!' Mike had raised himself eagerly, and was looking at Jim.

Then you reckoned on having me along?'

'No; I thought maybe you wouldn't care to pad out from here jes' yet awhile.

'If it rests with me, mate, where you go I go. You've given me a bit of a jolt, old man.'

‘You’ll come, then?’ cried Mike.

‘Why, yes! What should keep me?’

The two men gripped hands, and a few minutes of, silence followed, during which Mike’s pipe went out and Jim’s book fell to the floor. Both were more moved than they cared to show.

‘This makes things much more comfortable,’ said Burton presently.

‘Where do we go?’

‘To Jim Crow, an’ from there we may make tracks to Ballarat.

‘To Ballarat!’ The name epitomized all that Done knew of mining life and the aspirations of the diggers.

Page 77

‘Yes, Jim. If there’s goin’ to be fightin’, we must be in it.’

‘Mike,’ said Jim, breaking the thoughtful silence that followed, ’what put into your head the mad idea that I would want to break with you? God, man, I’d be a desolate, helpless wastrel without you!’

‘Aurora!’ said Mike sententiously.

‘Aurora!’ Jim sat up abruptly, and then sank slowly back upon his pillow again. It was very curious, but till this moment no thought of Aurora had occurred to him.

Mike blew out the candle, and it was quite half an hour later when he said, speaking as if the conversation had just been dropped: ’You’ll go all the same, Jimmy?’

‘Yes,’ said Jim, with the emphasis of a man making a resolution.

XII

Aurora! What would she say? What would she do? It was less the thought of his losing Aurora than the picture of her great distress that worried him. She would be broken-hearted. And yet go he must, there was no question of that; he had not come to Australia to tether himself to a woman’s apron strings, even though that woman be the brightest and winsomest of her sex—excepting one. He smuggled that saving clause in in a cowardly way. He had carefully masked his treachery even to his own eyes, and yet it was treachery that was in his bones. Of course, he must assure her that they would meet again: they were not necessarily parting for ever; but even as these thoughts worked in his mind he was not conscious of any anxiety at the prospect of a lasting separation. Jim did not realize to what extent the passion for Aurora had fastened upon his blood; he still liked her, there remained a decided tenderness, and he hated the idea of hurting her or causing her grief. This was the better part of his liking for the girl, but the vehement selfishness seemed to have gone from his love, and without a fierce note of selfishness love becomes as pale as friendship. She had been a wonder, a revelation, a great glory; she had become merely an attractive, handsome girl, rather exuberant in her affection. If Done were our villain we could show him unmanly, ignoble, and vile for all this, but not one voluntary impulse went to the making of his present attitude; it was a development entirely foreign to his will, and that much at least must be remembered in the defence of our hero.

Mike put off their departure a day. He had intended leaving the tools and camp-ware with his mate, but now it was necessary to make arrangements with a teamster to follow them to the new rush with their property.

Done approached Aurora with great misgivings; he expected a passionate demonstration. There had been no sign of waning affection on her part; on the contrary, she had seemed to grow more devoted to him.

‘Burton thinks this field is pretty well worked out,’ said Jim, as a preparatory announcement.

‘Well, I suppose it is, Jimmy. Been panning out badly of late?’

Page 78

’Not very badly, old girl; but not good enough compared with what we hear of from the other fields.’

She was sitting on the counter, holding his arm, and turned and looked sharply into his face.

‘You’re off?’ she said.

Done nodded his head, and watched her apprehensively. She was not disturbed; next moment there was merriment in the eyes turned up to him from where her head nestled on his breast.

‘Mike thinks we are wasting valuable time here.’

And you are, too. Good luck go wid you, ma bouchal’ She kissed the point of his chin.

‘You don’t mind, Aurora?’ He had come in shivering with apprehension at the prospect of a passionate outburst, knowing the possibilities of her fervid temperament, and now experienced some sense of disappointment at finding her unmoved.

‘Mind, darlin’? Cud I expect to be keepin’ you here all the days of your life? Where are you going?’

‘To the new diggin’s, Jim Crow.’

’It’s a wild field, they tell me, Jimmy. No fighting, mind. Leastwise, none for other girls.’

‘We start early in the morning.’

‘I’ll be up to throw an old shoe after you.’

‘I came to say good-bye to-night.’

‘Good-bye, is it?’ She flashed upon him, her face crimsoned, and a look, half fearful, half angry, glowed in her splendid eyes. But the feeling was only momentary; laughter rippled into her cheeks again, and she wound her arms about his neck. ‘Good-bye?’ she said. ‘And isn’t it breakin’ your heart you are to be sayin’ good-bye to me?’

Done clasped her closer, and kissed her, stirred by her warmth and her beauty.

’Ah, my dear, dear boy, you may say good-bye to me a thousand times if you’ll cure the sting with such kisses,’ she said softly.

When Jim returned to their tent he found Burton already abed. Mike continued to read his paper, smoking placidly, but he was feeling no little concern. He had feared the

result of that last interview with Aurora, and now waited the word from Done, who seated himself on his bunk and unlaced his boots in silence.

‘She took it without a whimper,’ he said presently.

‘No!’

‘She didn’t speak a word or raise a finger to keep me.’

‘Well, I’m blowed!’ Burton was openly delighted; not so Done, who, true to the contrariness of poor human nature, was apparently quite depressed.

Jim Crow, maddest of fields, like Tarrangower, which came later, resort of the most turbulent spirits, and a favourite centre with runaway convicts, gold-robbers, and the riffraff of the rushes, was still young when Burton and Done went, hastening down the hills on to the lead, with the thin but turbulent stream of diggers, but its character was already formed. Here the revolver was counted among the necessities of life, and although the main body of the diggers, as on all the other fields, were sober, industrious, and decent

Page 79

men, there was so strong a leaven of dare-devils and so varied an admixture of rogues and vagabonds that Jim Crow quickly won itself an unenviable reputation on all the rushes, from Buninyong to Bendigo, and, rich as it was, diggers found it as difficult to keep their gold as to win it. The Jim Crow ranges were within an hour's flight, and offered splendid cover for the members of Coleman's gang, or the friends of Black Douglas, or any other rapscallion who preferred stealing gold to seeking it.

On the day of their arrival at Jim Crow the mates pegged out a claim and pitched their tent, which Mike had added to his swag. With the help of Mrs. Ben Kyley, they had succeeded in depositing the larger part of their earnings at Diamond Gully in a Melbourne bank, and now they were hampered with no great responsibility in the way of riches. That night Jim and Mike walked over the field, through the clustering tents, and Jim discovered that what he had taken for a wild life at Diamond Gully was peace itself compared with the devilment and disorder of a new field. Jim Crow had opened well, the first discoveries were enormously rich, and the restless diggers were pouring in from all quarters, and glare and confusion and a babel of music and tongues rioted in the camp. Here, again, Jim was struck with the untamed boyishness of the miners; their levity was that of coarse, healthy children. 'Is it civilization that is choking gaiety out of the souls of men?' he asked himself.

Done had a curious experience on the following day. He had gone to the tent to light the fire, boil the billy, and prepare the mid-day meal, and was carrying water from a convenient spring, when, in passing the tent of their nearest neighbours, twin brothers named Peetree, the first prospectors of Jim Crow, he was startled by a furious yell, more like the howl of a madman than the cry of a sentient creature. Jim turned and looked about. There was nobody within sight from whom the amazing sound could have come, but as he stood the cry was repeated. Done set down his billy, and, approaching the tent, peeped in. There was nobody there, but again the wild cry rang out. He looked under the bunks, and then walked round the tent, but discovered nothing to explain the mystery. He paused dubiously, suspecting a trick, when for the fourth time he heard the marrow-chilling scream, and this time so near that he sprang aside in real alarm. Against the side of the tent, chocked to prevent its rolling, was a barrel, brought to Jim Crow by the Peetrees to be cut into two puddling-tubs, no doubt. Jim examined it suspiciously.

'Le' me out, yer swines! le' me out!' cried a shrill old voice, following the words with a long dolorous howl, not unlike that of a moonstruck cur.

'Who the devil are you?' asked Done. 'What are you doing in there?'

His words only served to enrage the man in the cask; he had a paroxysm of linguistic fury, and curses spouted from the bunghole a geyser of profanity.

Page 80

‘I’ll be the death o’ you when I get loose!’ screamed the prisoner. Another long-drawn yell followed, and then sounds as of a terrible struggle going on inside, with occasional cries and curses.

Done was greatly perplexed, but there was, he thought, only one course open to him. A fellow-creature was pent in the barrel, and it was manifestly his duty to go to the rescue. He had seized the Peetrees’ axe with the intention of knocking in the head of the cask, when a warning shout from the direction of the lead caused him to desist. One of the Peetree brothers was running up from their claim. He arrived angry and breathless.

’What in thunder ‘re you up to?’ he panted.

‘There’s a man in that barrel,’ answered Jim.

’Well, I’m likely to know all about that, ain’t I? Drop that axe and mooch along after your own business.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Done, ’but it seems to me that this is almost any man’s business. You’re not at liberty to keep a fellow-creature cooped in a barrel at your own pleasure, even on Jim Crow.’

’That’s just so, but the man in there’s my father, which makes a dif’rence, perhaps.’

‘Your father? Are you keeping the old man in pickle?’

‘No; we’re keeping him outer mischief, an’ that ought to be enough for you.’

’Of course, I don’t want to interfere with your family arrangements, but this is a bit out of the ordinary, and you’ll admit my action was only natural.’ Jim picked up his billy and crossed to his own tent, the man in the barrel breaking into fresh clamour, and calling down Heaven’s vengeance on his son’s head through the bunghole.

‘Shut up, you infernal ole idiot!’ cried the dutiful son. While Done was busy over the fire, Peetree junior drove the bung into the barrel, and then rejoined our hero.

‘Naturally, you wouldn’t understan’,’ he said, jerking his thumb towards the barrel, ’but the ole man’s such a dashed nuisance when he’s on we gotter do somethin’ with him.’ The tone was apologetic.

‘I dare say you are quite justified,’ Jim answered. ’A man doesn’t keep his father in a barrel for mere amusement.’

‘No, he don’t ordinary, does he?’ answered the native gravely. ’Fact is, the dad goes on a tear now ‘n again, an’ we pen him up to sober off. We can look after him all right after

knocking off, but if we was to let him loose while we was at work he'd go pourin' Bill Mooney's fork-lightnin' gin into him till he had his bluchers full o' snakes 'an the whole lead swarmin' with fantods. So when he starts to work up a jamboree we pull off his boots an' tuck him in the tub, fastens the head, an' leave him till he's willin' to think better of it.'

'Well, that's bringing up a father in the way he should go,' laughed Jim. 'I apologize for attempting to break into your inebriates' retreat.'

'Inebriates' retreat!' A wide grin slowly developed on Peetree's gaunt face. 'That's a first name for it,' he said. 'Hanged if we don't have it painted up!'

Page 81

’A sign of some kind is necessary. But isn’t the old man likely to suffocate with that bung in?’

‘Not he; there’s heaps o’ breathin’ in the cask. That bung’s just to gag him awhile.’

That evening after tea the two sons, with old Peetree under guard between them, joined the mates at their fire. Harry, Jim’s friend of the morning’s adventure, was about twenty-eight, tall and bony, with the shoulder stoop of a hard worker. Con and the father had the same general peculiarities. The three were identical in height and complexion, and in their mannerism and tricks of speech; but to-night the old man had a vacant, helpless expression, and seemed for the greater part of the time unconscious of the company he was in, and looked furtively about him into the night, muttering strangely to himself, and picking eagerly at his shirt-sleeves. The sons pressed their father to a sitting position, and then seated themselves one on each side, mounting guard.

‘See, we got him loose again,’ said Harry.

‘He’s milder to-night,’ answered Done. ‘What’s the matter with him?’

‘Only a touch o’ the jims. He’s liable to howl a bit now ’n again, but don’t mind him. He’s all right. Ain’t you, dad?’ He gave the old man’s head an affectionate push.

‘Once he takes to smoke he’s comin’ round,’ said Con Peetree, making a vain attempt to induce the old man to draw at his pipe.

‘There ain’t a finer ole tough walkin’ when he’s off the licker,’ said the elder proudly, ‘an’ not a better miner-ever lived.’

Done watched the group with keen delight. The young men’s respect for their bibulous parent was quite sincere, their care of him was marked with a rough but unmistakable liking. The conversation turned upon the characteristics of the lead at Jim Crow, and drifted to the inevitable subject, the development of the agitation for the emancipation of the miners and the doings and sayings of the insurgent party at Ballarat, and every now and again Peetree senior would whisper ambiguously: ’There ain’t such a thing ez a drop of gin? No, of course not.’

Once Harry drew a small flask from his pocket, poured a little spirit into a pannikin, and gave it to the old man. ’Hair off his dog, you know,’ he said. And two or three times Con made an effort to induce his father to take a whiff of smoke, but old Peetree shook his head disgustedly, and returned to his mutterings and the picking of imaginary tarantulas off his sleeves.

In the morning Jim noticed that the wards ‘Inebrits’ Retreet’ had been printed on the barrel with pipeclay.

The good luck that had marked their initial effort on Diamond Gully followed the mates to Jim Crow. They struck the wash-dirt in their first claim, and Jim, in sinking through the alluvial, stuck his pick into the largest nugget he had yet seen, a lump of rugged gold, pure and clean, which Mike estimated to be worth four hundred pounds. It glowed in the sunlight with the lustre of a live ember, and, gazing upon it, Done trembled again with the vehement joy that thrills in the veins of the least avaricious digger at the sight of such a find.

Page 82

‘If there’s a large family o’ these we’re made men,’ said Burton, fondling the nugget.

’Unless some of Douglas’s men take a fancy to them when we’ve unearthed them.’

‘Or Solo chips in an’ lifts the pile. We must keep it dark till this field sobers up a bit.’

The tub of dirt taken from the bottom of their hole—that is, the deepest part of the strata of alluvial deposit, to which the best of the gold almost in variably gravitates—was extremely rich. The dregs in the tub, after all the clay and dirt had been washed away, blazed with coarse pieces, and Done carried away at least five hundred pounds’ worth in nuggets wrapped in his gray jumper. The coarse gold was picked out of the washed gravel, and then the remainder of the stuff was put through the cradle, the slides of which captured and retained the smaller gold, with a certain amount of sand, and this was washed again in the tin dish, the last grains of base material being got rid of by shaking the gold on a sheet of paper after it had been thoroughly dried, and blowing with the mouth, a process at which the diggers became so expert that very little of even the finest gold-dust was lost in the operation.

The mates finished their third day’s work on Jim Crow, wet to the hips, smeared from top to toe with yellow clay, dog-weary, but quite jubilant. They were as well satisfied with their next day’s work, and the next. They had succeeded in keeping the knowledge of their big find to themselves; but returning to their camp one night about a week later, Done was amazed to find the earthen floor of the tent dug up to a depth of about a foot. Burton grinned.

‘Someone’s bottomed a shicer to-night,’ he said.

‘What’s the meaning of this?’ asked Done.

’We’ve had a little visit from some damn scoundrel who thought we’d buried our gold here. Must ‘a’ taken us for a pair o’ Johnnie-come-latelies.’

At that moment a shot rang out on the night air, and sounds of angry voices and scuffling came from the direction of the Peetrees’ tent.

‘By the Lord Harry, they’ve nabbed him!’ said Mike. ‘Come along!’

They found Con Peetree holding a man down with a persuasive revolver, while Harry, with a burning match sheltered in his palm, examined the captive.

‘Cot him diggin’ in our tent. He broke ‘way, but I’ve winged him,’ said Harry.

‘He gave us a look in, too,’ said Mike.

‘Lose any stuff?’

‘Not a colour.’

’Same here; but we can’t let him go scot-free. That kink in the calf counts for nothing, and handin’ him over to the beaks means too much worry. Here, give’s a light, Burton.’

Mike struck a match, and, taking the thief by the ear, Harry Peetree drew a knife.

‘Good God!’ cried Jim, ‘you don’t mean to—’ Jim’s intervention was too late to help the prostrate man; Peetree had already slashed off the lobe of his left ear. He threw the fragment in the man’s face.

Page 83

‘Now scoot!’ he said, ‘an’ don’t show yer ugly chiv on Jim Crow again, ’r you’ll catch a fatal dose o’ lead.

The crippled thief limped away without a word, pressing a palm to his streaming ear.

‘That seemed an infernally brutal thing to do,’ said Jim to his mate, when they were discussing the incident.

‘Not a bit of it,’ answered Burton. ‘We’ve got to mark his sort, an’ a brand like that’s known every where. A bloke with an ear stripped off can’t pretend to be a honest man here; he’s got to be either a trooper or one of Her Majesty’s commissioners.’

‘But you weren’t at all bitter about Solo.’

’Solo ain’t a tent-robber; he generally robs the people who rob us. A tent-robber is the meanest kind of hound that runs.’

Jim was grateful for this lesson in diggers’ ethics, and went peacefully to sleep on it, having by this time acquired complete confidence in Burton’s hiding-place.

When the mates had more gold than they could carry in their belts with comfort, and trustworthy gold-buyers were not available, choosing a suitable hour long after midnight, Burton dug a hole near the tent, Jim keeping careful watch the while to make sure they were not observed. The gold was placed in a pan, and buried in this hole, and after that the camp-fire was built on the spot, and kept burning day and night. It never occurred to anyone to look under the fire for hidden gold.

Their first claim was nearly worked out, and the two young men were busy below digging out the last of the wash-dirt, when a voice calling down the shaft caused both picks to be suspended simultaneously, and the mates looked curiously into each other’s faces in the dim candle-light.

Hello below, there!’

‘Aurora!’ said Mike.

Jim went up the rope suspended in the shaft hand over hand. Aurora was standing by the windlass smiling down at him. The girl was remarkably well dressed. The gown she wore was too florid, perhaps, for that sickly refinement which abhors colour, but it suited her tall figure and her hale and exuberant good looks. As he came up the shaft the picture she made standing in the sunlight, with a background of sun-splashed, vari-coloured tips, and one drowsing gum-tree fringed with the gold and purple of young growth, gave him a thrill of joy, so vivid she seemed, so fresh. She had occupied his mind little since the departure from Diamond Gully; but seeing her again so radiant, he was glad through and through, and laughed with pure delight when she met him at the

shaft's mouth with a kiss. Once upon his feet, he clasped her in his arms. Her walk along the lead had attracted a good deal of attention, and the embrace was the signal for a sympathetic cheer from the miners about, and the men whirled their hats in the air.

'Arrah! Won't ye sarve the bla'gards all alike, darlin'?' cried a young fellow on the left.

Aurora bowed low, and scattered kisses over the field with both hands, winning another cheer. Jim watched her with pride. After all, she it was who stood as his goddess of gaiety in the twelve months of absolutely happy life that had marked the reaction from the brutal stupidity and sourness of that other existence. He owed her much gratitude, much tenderness. He kissed her again almost reverently.

Page 84

‘Did you think I was never coming, Jimmy?’ she asked softly.

Jim practised the virtue of equivocation. It had never occurred to him that she would come, but he would rather have bitten a piece off his tongue than have said so just then.

‘So you made up your mind to follow the moment I told you I was going?’ he said.

’What else? Could I have bid you good-bye so glibly? Could you have walked off with a smile and a kiss, and never a word of coming again?’

‘Darling, I can never want to lose you.’

‘Whist’ no words fer the future!’ she said, reverting to her whimsical brogue. ‘We’re weak mortals, an’ every one iv us is born again wid the new sun. I’d not have ye bind the strange man ye may be to-morrow wid oaths, an’ I won’t bind the unknown colleen I may be for the likes iv ye.’

‘But to-day?’

‘To-day? To-day I love you with a big, big heart!’ she said, with deep feeling. ‘Kiss me!’

‘Knock off!’ cried Burton, whose head appeared suddenly at the mouth of the shaft. ‘I reckoned you’d had time to get through with that.’

‘Och! we’ve been a long time gittin’ through wid it, an’ we’re not through yet,’ said Aurora, shaking Mike warmly by the hand. ’You may have one for yourself—there.’ She placed her finger on a dimple, and Mike kissed her gallantly enough. ‘Ah!’ she sighed, ’you love another. The kiss betrays you.’

Something that might have been a blush, had the deep tan of his skin permitted such a thing, warmed Burton’s cheek.

‘And where’s Mrs. Ben?’ he asked.

‘Somewhere about the field.’

‘They are with you?’ said Jim.

’To be sure; and the whole business—bakery, laundry, and light refreshments—has followed at my skirt with proper humility.’

‘They pitch tents here?’

‘Ben and Mary are now seeking a good business site.’

‘Adjacent to a hollow tree?’

‘The same bein’ a convanyint haunt fer Mary Kyley’s familiar evil shpirits.’

Done laughed, giving Aurora a one-armed, parenthetical hug. ’They wouldn’t part with you, then?’

’They would not, nor I with them. Dan’s been as good as a mother to me. But how is the luck, boys?’

‘Great,’ answered Mike. ‘We dropped on a patch here.’

’Come and see us cradle the last tubful, and I’ll give you the prettiest bit in the hopper,’ said Jim.

’Not a colour! The heart nugget you gave me long ago has worn tender places all over me.’ She tugged at the thin ribbon about her neck. ’I’ll carry no more.’

Done did not press the point, although he knew that she took gifts of quaintly-shaped nuggets from the other men with the indifference of a queen accepting tribute.

Page 85

Mrs. Ben Kyley greeted the mates with noisy joviality when they met, and Ben took his pipe from his mouth, and said he was ’right down blarsted glad,’ which amounted to quite a demonstration, coming from him. Within two days the tents were up, and Mrs. Kyley’s business was resumed, and was carried on as at Diamond Gully, and with much the same success. But here for some time Ben’s services as ‘chucker-out’ were more in requisition, spirits being more unruly on Jim Crow. One night he even had to fight a five-round battle with a riotous young Cousin Jack, in which engagement Done seconded him by special request. Ben triumphed, but came out of the contest with a black eye and an inflamed nose of a preposterous size, at which Mary was virtuously indignant.

’You, a professional, fighting for diversion like any fool of a gentleman!’ she said scornfully.

‘Man mus’ keep his hand in,’ replied Ben.

’If you can’t attend to your duties without making such a mess of yourself, you’d better have a month’s notice. What was the good of me taking on a pugilist if I’m to have fighting about the place continually?’

‘Come, come, Mrs. Ben,’ said Jim; ’if you treat him like this when he wins, what would you do if he lost?’

‘Divorce him and take up with the Cornishman!’ replied the raffish washerwoman, exploding into Gargantuan laughter.

Done had often thought of Ryder since the night of the troopers’ raid on Mrs. Kyley’s grog-store, but had seen nothing of him in the meantime. Mike recalled him to his mind again as they were lying out in the moonlight on a Sunday night about two weeks later.

’Remember the chap that tried to throttle Stony that night in the Black Forest?’ he said. ‘Saw him on the lead to-day.’

‘You did? Ryder was hunting Stony on Diamond Gully.’

‘He’s gettin’ pretty warm, then. Stony’s here too. That’s his tent above the bend to the left. He’s a hatter, an’ works a lone hand in the shallow ground.’

‘Then trouble’s brewing for Mr. Stony.’

‘You seemed to feel for him. Better drop him the word, hadn’t you?’

’No. My sympathies are with the other man, and as he means something short of manslaughter, Stony can take his chances.’

It was not long after this that Jim encountered Stony in Mary Kyley's tent. He was drinking alone, and drinking with the feverish haste of a man who deliberately seeks intoxication. He was more tremulous than when Done first met him, and his face had the colour, and looked as if it might have the consistency, of putty. The man was an instinctive hater: he lived alone, worked alone, and desired no companionship. Previous to the gold discoveries he had served for years in the capacity of shepherd on one of the big Australian sheep-runs, and had lived cut off from communion with his kind in the great lone land, absorbing into his blood the spirit of solitude that broods in the Bush and in time robs man of his gregarious impulses.

Page 86

Jim had been in the shanty about an hour, and was standing with his back to the counter; Stony was sitting in the corner, his hands clasped between his knees, his eyes fixed upon the floor, unconscious of his surroundings, when the flap of the tent was lifted, and Ryder stepped in, running a keen, searching eye over the company. Jim saw him start as his gaze encountered Stony. He paused for a moment, and then slipped back into darkness, dropping the tent-door after him. Done understood his intention. 'He will wait,' he said to himself, and determined to watch events. Ryder had awakened in him an extraordinary interest.

Stony sat in a state of abstraction for close upon half an hour, and when he arose and left the place Jim followed him. The night was dark, and Stony had disappeared, but the young man walked quietly in the direction of the hatter's camp. He could see nothing of either man, and had decided that he was mistaken regarding Ryder's intention, when a low but blood-chilling sound—the noise made by a man fighting against strangulation—broke upon his ear. He had been seeking for this, but the shock unnerved him for a moment.

XIII

Peering through the darkness, Done discovered the shadowy figures of two men. The figures were rigid upon the ground. There was no further sound. The young man approached closely and stood by Ryder, dropping his hand upon his shoulder. There was just light enough for him to see a revolver snatched from the belt, or a movement of such suggestiveness, but he fastened on that right arm with a grip to which it succumbed instantly.

'It is I, Jim Done!' he said.

'Save me! Save me!' cried Stony in accents of supreme terror.

'Why do you interfere?' asked Ryder with a ring of anger. 'What interest can you have in this hound?'

'None,' replied Jim. 'I followed from the shanty, guessing something would happen. I'm shamefully curious.'

'You are a fool! It might have cost you your life.'

'You certainly do not show any particular respect for human life.' Jim released the other's arm.

'For Christ's sake don't leave me!' moaned Stony. 'He means murder!'

’I have told you I value this man’s life. I tell you again I have no intention of killing him, but I hate him so that the ravenous desire to crush the soul out of him is hard to resist. There is a story he must tell me; when that is told he may go. If he refuses to tell there is no power on God’s earth to keep me from my vengeance. But he shall tell—the craven shall tell! There’ll be no further mischief done, I promise you. Leave us.’

‘For the love of Heaven!’ pleaded Stony. ‘He’ll kill! He’ll kill!’

‘I have your word,’ said Jim.

‘My word of honour,’ answered Ryder.

‘If it’s broken, I swear to help you to your hanging.’

Page 87

‘I tell you, I want this man alive.’

‘Good-night!’

‘Help!’ screamed Stony; but the other’s hand was at his throat again.

‘Listen, you foul cur!’ Ryder said. ’I mean to spare you, but you must tell—tell all!’

Jim Done turned and walked away, leaving the enemies alone. Next morning he saw Stony moving about his tent, and experienced a feeling of relief. He had been unable to divest himself of a sense of responsibility for the safety of the miserable hatter.

By this time quite a strong friendship had grown up between the three Peetrees and Done and Burton. Joshua Peetree, whom the twins called Josh, with a friendly absence of formalities, was found in his sober moments to share the moral qualities of his sons, and had the same quiet, deliberative manner of speech, as if every sentence, even those of the most insignificant character, were subjected to two or three successive processes of investigation internally before delivery. Indeed, the men spoke so little en famille that they might have lost ordinary power of easy articulation. Speech was hardly necessary between the three; they understood each other by something very like telepathic divination. At least, so it appeared to Done, who was puzzled again and again to see the ideas of one brother anticipated by the other, and his wishes met without any communication, audible or visible, to the third person. Men who have lived together in the Bush for the better part of their lives, cut off from other society and outside interest, often develop this quaint instinct of mutual apprehension. The Peetrees were not unsociable, but with them conversation was not essential to human intercourse. They were content to sit on a log, or spread themselves on the dry grass in company with friendly diggers, smoking composedly through a whole evening, without contributing more than an approving ‘My word!’ or ‘My colonial!’ to the night’s debate. Mike was in full sympathy with their neighbours. Like him, they were deeply imbued with the spirit of revolt stirring in the land, and they were as eager to participate in the struggle that was to overthrow the rule of the nominees of Downing Street and strangle the hydra of official tyranny; but Done, although his sentiments were just as strongly on the side of the miners, was too profoundly concerned with the actions and interests of the moment to content himself with the society of the Peetrees and the discussion of possibilities. He liked them; they were amusing elements in the varied life around him, but he wanted to see and to hear. His blood ran too hotly for camp-fire argument. When the time for fighting came, well and good: none would be more eager than he; but meanwhile love and laughter, play and strife, invited a man, and Jim responded with the impetuosity of an impish boy just escaped from parental control.

Page 88

The mates continued to do well at Jim Crow, and Jim Done found himself growing tolerably rich without any marked gratification. He could not see what more gold could confer upon him. He was now a nightly visitor at Mrs. Ben Kyley's tent, but gambled with rather more spirit of late, and, finding himself a much less easy victim to Mary's rum, drank more than formerly. A certain stage of intoxication—an intoxication of the blood rather than the senses—threw a roseate glamour over the gaieties of the shanty, and robbed him of that remaining reticence of manner and speech that would have kept him an observer rather than a participant.

Police supervision was fitful and weak at Jim Crow, and there were wild nights at Mary Kyley's. Aurora appeared in a new character—that of popular musician. Seated with her heels tucked under her on the end of the shanty bar, she rattled off lively dance-music on an old violin; or, mounted on an inverted tub, she sang songs of rebellion and devilment to a crowd of diggers warm with rum and rampant with animal spirits. Mary Kyley, whose gay heart responded readily to the conviviality of her guests, danced at these times, contesting in breathless jigs and reels, displaying amazing agility and a sort of barbaric frenzy, while the men yelled encouragement and applause, the pannikins circulated, and the smoke gathered in a cloud along the ridge-pole. Sitting above the crowd in a gay gown, with a splash of artificial red roses in her mass of black hair, flushed with animation, her eyes beaded with fire, Aurora was a striking queen of the revels, and Done exulted over her, and called her Joy. It was the new name he had given her, Aurora sounding too formidable for a lover's lips.

One such night Aurora played them 'The Wearing of the Green,' breaking in upon a moment of exuberant merriment with the quaint melancholy of the music. She wrung from the strings a pathetic appeal, and played the crowd into a sudden reverent silence. They were rebel hearts there to a man, and many exiles from Erin were in the company. The simple tune went right home to them all. The men sat still, gazing into their pannikins, and big bearded diggers had a chastened pensiveness that might have been comic had there been any there to laugh at them. Just as suddenly the girl swung into a rollicking dance-step, abandoning her tender mood with a burst of happy laughter; but Tim Carrol, a young new chum; fresh from 'the most distressful country,' sprang to the counter beside her, and, clasping Aurora and her fiddle in a generous hug, kissed the girl on the cheek.

'Shtop!' he cried. 'Niver another word will ye play till the hold iv that's gone from us!'

Done, who was standing near, saw the action, saw Aurora laughing in the man's arms, and experienced a revulsion of feeling that turned him giddy, and blurred the lights and the figures about him. He sprang at Carrol savagely. It seemed to him that what followed occurred in darkness. A few blows, a scuffle, and then he was torn away. The next moment he found himself in Kyley's hands, and Aurora before him, her eyes flashing anger, her white teeth bared, her hands clenched—exactly the termagant she

had appeared on the night she confronted Quigley in her wrath; but to-night her fury was directed against him.

Page 89

‘How dare you interfere?’ she said. ’How dare you meddle with my affairs?’ She struck herself upon the breast. She blazed with passion.

‘He kissed you!’ said Jim. ‘I couldn’t stand that!’

‘And what of me? If I do not object, what then?’

‘Aurora!’

‘Am I my own mistress? Are my inclinations to count for something?’

Jim had recovered himself. He felt cold, sobered. He shook the hands off him, ‘Your inclinations count for everything!’ he said with composure. ’I acted on impulse. I beg your pardon, Aurora. I’ll apologize to Carrol if he wishes it. I’ve had too much rum, Tim; I acted like a fool.’

’Tush, man, ‘twas nothin’! You didn’t hit me,’ said the Irishman cheerfully. ‘Don’t shpake iv it. I disarved what I didn’t get fer kissin’ your sweet, heart, any-how.’

Aurora’s anger fell from her suddenly, and she moved away. She played no more that night, and was markedly subdued in her manner, turning an anxious eye upon Done every now and again, and Jim, to carry off the situation, was much too free with the liquor and uncommonly friendly with everybody.

‘You took my temper like a gentleman, Jimmy dear,’ said Aurora, coming behind him when he sat alone. She was bidding for reconciliation.

‘I ought to have known better, Joy,’ he answered. I was an idiot!’

’No, dear, you were jealous, and that is an easy thing for a woman to forgive.’

‘I don’t think I was even jealous.’

‘Then you should have been!’ she said, with a flash of anger.

’Then, if I should have been, I was jealous—furiously, murderously jealous!’

‘Sure, how could you blame the poor boy,’ she murmured, winding an arm about his neck, ’wid the love of the dear ould sod hot in the heart iv him? ‘Twasn’t a lover’s kiss he gave me, darlin’, but a patriot’s.’

‘This is a lover’s, Joy!’ He kissed her softly.

All the same, flushed with liquor though he was, he was conscious that his attack on Carrol had been prompted by a meaner impulse than jealousy, and was more a

manifestation of the rum-flown arrogance of a man fighting for a prize in the possession of which he felt a large conceit. He was conscious, too, that there was little of a true lover's ardour in the kiss he gave her. But men are deceivers ever, and never so cunning in deceit as when love has slipped from their hearts. To be sure, Jim had the grace to be ashamed of all this in certain moods, but acknowledgment of the sin was not followed by renunciation. Aurora's flash of passion was probably due to the instinct that warned her of the fading of Done's love for her.

Page 90

Mike took his mate home that night, and had to help him into his bunk, and Jim awoke in the morning with feelings of mistrust and bitterness, a craven consciousness of having been untrue to him self. For a moment there was a belief that his new life was nothing but a dream. He stepped out into the sunshine with a childish fear upon him, and looked about him, breathing deeply, and relief came, but there remained a consciousness of loss of power. Drink was not for him: he was a hale man, full of vitality; in his normal state his sensibilities were capable of drawing the most generous emotions from the events of existence; excess of liquor gave him, in place of that natural gratification, a set of feverish and unreal sensations. He could understand others, from whom Nature withheld the joy of life, finding in intoxication a pale substitute, but for him it was a sacrifice of self, a sacrifice he could not afford, for it was only the other day that self had become sweet to him. How could he exchange his rich reality for the pale, misty, groping unreality he had become last night—give up the exhilaration he derived from the stir of life and friendly contact with men for the fantastic, fleeting emotions of the reveller in drink, emotions that fly through the darkened brain like shooting stars, the stir of a blatant egotism, the prickly heat of tiny, aimless joys that never penetrate below the skin! He determined to be content with sobriety for the future.

This very excellent and virtuous resolution did not keep Done from Mary Kyley's tent, however, and he retained his relish for the revels there: the boisterous horseplay of the diggers, the dancing, the gay spirits of Aurora, her beauty and her music. He believed Aurora still loved him, but the recollection of her appearance that night, and the fury with which she had repudiated his right to interfere, contrasted with her attitude on the occasion when he championed her cause against Quigley, gave him moments of dubious reflection. Coming up from their claim one evening at sundown after a particularly hard day, the mates found Aurora busy at the fire preparing their tea. They hailed her with shouts of thankfulness and welcome. She was bare-armed and bare-headed; a snowy-white apron of Mrs. Kyley's covered her frock, and was, if anything, an additional adornment to her trim figure. The tea was made, and the big billy stood by the embers, while Aurora attended to the grilling of the steak. She made a charming picture, with the firelight on her face and gleaming in her hair, and the men watched her for some minutes in quiet admiration, Josh Peetree being particularly moved by the glamour of domesticity her presence threw over the camp, and throughout the evening ejaculated a fervent 'My colonial!' every time his eyes encountered the girl.

'Hello!' said Aurora. 'I've invited myself to tea, boys.'

''Pon my soul, you're good to see,' cried Burton feelingly.

Page 91

’That’s mighty kind for a man who doesn’t waste much breath in compliments.’

This is magnificent!’ said Jim. ’Why have you never thought of it before?’

’Hear him! Little he knows I’m just here to convince him what a model wife I’d make. Would you believe it, boys, all the time I’ve known the villain it never occurred to him to ask me?’

‘I’d ask yer quick enough, b’gosh!’ blurted Con.

Jim blushed. ‘She wouldn’t have me,’ he cried in self-defence.

‘At laste ye might have given a poor girl the refusal.’

‘Take me, then,’ said Jim through the soapsuds. He was washing over a bucket.

’I will not. You know you’re safe, anyhow, when there’s not priest or parson to be got for love or money. Come, hurry up, there’s enough for all, and my contribution is an armful of Mary Kyley’s hot scones.’

The butt of a tree lying a few yards from the fire served the diggers as table and on to this Jim lifted Aurora.

‘That’s your place,’ he said, ‘at the head of the board.’

‘No, no!’ cried the girl, slipping to the ground again. ’I am mistress. I mean to attend at table.’ She served the men with the manners of a kindly hostess. ‘There’s milk for the tea!’ she cried.

’Milk! I haven’t seen the colour of it in Australia. Who work the miracle?’ said Jim.

’Mary sent to a station out there by the ranges. She got a quart, and I cabbaged half for my tea-party.’

‘You’re an angel, Aurora!’

‘There!’ she laughed; ‘and the trouble I’ve taken to keep it dark.’

‘We’ll be the envy of the whole field,’ said Mike; and Con uttered a corroborative ‘My colonial oath!’ that was eloquent of a grateful heart.

Aurora poured out the tea and buttered the scones, and then, sitting on a gin-case with her plate in her lap, ate a good meal in cheeriest fellowship, adding to the felicity of the party with gay badinage and happy laughter. Aurora’s laugh was a delightful thing to hear; it had never ceased to give Done a peculiar stir of joyance, whilst awakening

something of surprise. It was the laugh of a merry child; its mirth was strangely infectious, strangely suggestive of an unsullied soul. Hearing it, Jim turned to her wonderingly, but he had long since acquitted her of the suspicion of dissimulation. She was the least self-conscious creature living, the least calculating. If she had really set herself the task of displaying to the best advantage the more gentle and womanly side of her nature, she would certainly not have succeeded as well as she did this evening, moved by one of the thousand vagrant impulses that lent such varying colour to her character. Her humour was more subdued, her gaiety was restrained within the limits of an almost conventional decorum. She helped the men with a graciousness that was wholly effeminate, and the diggers responded to its influence.

‘Blast me if it don’t make a cove feel religious!’ was Harry Peetree’s sober comment, after he had lit his pipe and settled his back comfortably against the log.

Page 92

The night came while they were still at their meal, and sticks were thrown on the fire to provide light. Other diggers, attracted by the glow and the cheerful atmosphere of the party, sauntered up, and modestly disposed themselves in the shadows, where they lay smoking. Women of any kind were few on Jim Crow, and a scene like this was sufficient to stir the deeper feelings of many of the miners, particularly those in whose hearts long absence from hearth and home had served to invest domesticity with a reverent sentimentality.

Aurora insisted on washing up, but Josh dried the dishes, while the others lit their pipes, and, lying on their backs, with knees drawn up and hands clasped under their heads, gave themselves over to quiet enjoyment of the night. A big moon was stealing through the tree-tops; the denuded gully still lay in the lower gloom, dotted with camp-fires and illumined tents. But Aurora threw aside her domestic mood with her apron, and reappeared as the enemy of reflection and repose. Throned on her gin-case, where the ruddy light of the wood-fire glowed upon her, she chattered in her delectable brogue for an hour or more, the picture of animation. Then came Mary Kyley storming upon the scene.

’Do I pay a girl the wages of a princess to run a temperance meeting among my customers?’ she cried.

‘Go away, Mother Kyley, an’ work yer own ould shebang,’ replied Aurora, ‘or else bring me fiddle wid ye, an’ give us a step on the turf!’

‘Not a step will I.’

‘Then I’ll lave divil a man in the shanty, dthrunk or dthry!’

Aurora sprang upon her box, and began to sing a rousing nonsensical song of the moment. The chorus was caught up, and swelled in the shadows. Waving her scarf as she had done in the dance-room in Melbourne on the night when Done first saw her, she sang again, and her clear soprano rang in the gullies like the call of a bird, and brought the miners from their tents and their arguments. When the song ended half the diggers on Jim Crow were gathered about Burton’s camp-fire, and the loudest roar of applause came from Mary Kyley! Presently somebody out in the crowd commenced to play a flute, and slid from a few bars of’ Home, Sweet Home!’ into a rollicking jig. Half a dozen strong hands—Jim’s first—were laid upon Mrs. Ben, and she was dragged to the front.

‘Dance, alauna machree!’ cried Aurora.

The flute piped higher, a hundred voices took up the cry, and Mary was conquered. Gathering a bunch of skirts in either hand, the big woman commenced a step. Aurora enlivened it with quaint, melodious Irish cries, the men roared encouragement, and

presently Mary Kyley was dancing with heart and soul and every ounce of energy. Dancing was a passion with Mrs. Ben; she experienced a sort of delirium of movement once the swing of the melody took hold of her, and at such moments, despite her uncommon size, the woman became animated with a wild dignity and grace. Now, with head thrown back and face uplifted, her crimson petticoat flashing in the firelight, she danced like something wild, till she could dance no more, and Done took her in his arms and half carried her to the log, where he fanned her gallantly with his cabbage-tree, while the audience cheered again and again.

Page 93

Aurora found a partner for a reel in Tim Carrol, and the fun grew warmer, a liberal digger having contributed a keg of rum, which was rolled from Kyley's shanty into the illumined circle. But at this point a man stepped forward from the crowd, and stood where the light fell full upon him, a strongly-built digger of about five foot nine, not yet thirty years of age, with a powerful face, not handsome, but uncommonly attractive in its blend of kindliness and rugged force. Done recognised Alfred Lambert, a voice of the disaffected—one of the little band of men who, animated with that ardent love of freedom which is bred of tyranny and fed on oppression, were ever busy fanning the embers of discontent, and striving to work the diggers up to the point at which it would be impossible for the Government to withhold from the vast majority of the people their liberties and civil rights. Lambert held up his hand to impose silence.

'I have a great bit of news, men,' he said. 'The day before yesterday, at five in the afternoon, the M'Ivor escort was stuck up on the corduroy road in the Black Forest, and the gang got away with all the gold.'

This information was greeted with a yell of amazement, in which Jim thought he detected no little exultation. It was the greatest coup executed by the gangs since the opening of the goldfields; its magnitude astounded everybody.

'The robbers came on the escort suddenly, shot their horses under them, and carried off the whole swag,' Lambert continued.

'Whose gang?' 'Who 're suspected?' A score of voices shouted questions.

'It is believed that the raid was headed by Solo!'

'No, no; Solo goes alone!' cried a foremost miner with absolute conviction.

'He has always worked alone before, but it is pretty certain that this raid was planned and carried out by Solo, and that he had behind him a gang of the coolest and most daring robbers in the colony He outwitted the troopers at every point; they had no more chance with him than so many sheep. The fools had their carbines strapped behind them, as usual. Before they could fire a shot they were at the mercy of the thieves.' The crowd yelled again-a yell of derision. The discomfiture of the troopers was a source of grim satisfaction. Lambert held up his hand once more.

'This Solo is a ruffian and a robber. When we say that he stops short of murder we say the best we can for him; but the Government that denies to citizens the rights of men, and enforces laws the people have no voice in making through a vicious and brutal constabulary, cannot look to citizens to respect those laws or feel any sympathy with its officers.'

‘You’re right, old man!’ The crowd took advantage of the pause that followed to raise a clamour of fierce words.

Page 94

‘I have more news for you,’ said the orator. ’The cause of liberty is spreading, deepening, strengthening. We are on the verge of civil war. Latest information from Ballarat, Bendigo, and all the large centres shows that the hour of strenuous resistance, of resistance to the death, has almost come. Even now it may have struck. As I speak, the men of Ballarat may be shedding their blood to rescue our adopted country from the foul and foolish rule of that pitiful handful of nominees in Melbourne, the despicable instruments of a far-off power that is as ignorant of our needs as it is careless of our sufferings. We are commanded to stand ready—commanded by God, I believe with all my soul—and those of us who have the aspirations of men and the spirit of true Britons must look to our arms. The commissioners of the various fields have been particularly venomous in their treatment of the poorer diggers of late. On all the fields license-hunting has been pushed to such an extremity of oppression that only dingoes and Chinamen could bear it. We must fight! Men, no human creature detests bloodshed more than I, but what else can your leaders ask of you but to fight? Every channel of peaceful progression is closed to you. You are a great population of strong men, the adventurous spirits of the world, and you are held under the lash by a stupid minority so weak that one free movement of your limbs may dash them to perdition. You are asked to confine yourselves to peaceful and legal forms in conducting this agitation, while those who ask you deny you a breath of power, an iota of right, and manifest their goodwill by riding you down like wallabies, or rounding you up like scrub-cattle, and tearing from you the scandalous taxes that go to pay the expenses of a robber Government that represents only your enemies.’

The spirit of the crowd had undergone a surprising revolution; the gaiety of a few minutes since had fled from every heart, and Lambert confronted a great crowd, the faces of which glowed whitely in the moonlight, a crowd that broke into vehement cheering and a babel of oaths and yells at every pause.

The quoted words were the opening sentences of a speech that lasted nearly an hour, and held the diggers by their heart-strings every second of the time. Done felt himself strongly moved—the vehemence, the lusty eloquence, and the unquestionable honesty of the speaker possessed him. He was filled with a longing for strife; the fighting spirit strong within him was up in arms. Like many another in the crowd, he was ready to carve out a republic with a pick-handle, even though a score came to resist him with rifles.

Lambert spoke of the simple rights of manhood, of the demands of the new democracy in the Old World, and the growing belief in the sacred right of a people to govern themselves according to their light, and finished with an impassioned description of a recent digger-hunt on Forest Creek, in the course of which a man had been killed. The crowd was slow to depart when the speech was ended, and broke into knots, the men feverishly discussing the great news of the robbery and the possibility of a riot extending over the whole of the rushes. Whilst sitting on the log thinking of what he had heard,

Jim saw Aurora approach Lambert. She was visibly excited, and offered him an eager hand.

Page 95

‘Did I do well?’ she asked.

Lambert seized her hand and pressed it warmly. ‘Splendidly, my girl,’ he said. ’A man couldn’t want a better audience. Like a true Irishwoman, you’re the twin sister of Liberty, Miss Aurora.’

Done drew Aurora to his side a few minutes later. ‘So,’ he said lightly, ‘my Joy is a conspiratress.’ ‘It’s the hard name, me darlin’,’ she answered, taking his hand between hers. ’I just promised Lambert to have the half of Jim Crow here to hear him an’ I’m afther keepin’ me word.’

XIV

The rising Lambert had anticipated in August did not come off. For a few days the country trembled on the verge of civil war, but the blow did not fall. The trouble was averted; the anger remained in men’s hearts. During the lovely spring weather that followed Done saw much of the Bush. He and Mike spent weeks prospecting about the Jim Crow district. They loitered away a few restful days among the ranges, and for the first time Jim saw a wattle-gully in full blaze, a stream of golden bloom sweeping along the course of a little mountain creek as far as the eye could see, each tree a huge bouquet, the whole mass foaming in the gentle breeze, a rich feast of colour, lit up by a glowing noonday sun, and bordered by the subdued green of the mountain gums. The delicate perfume stole up to where the mates lay on the side of the range in peaceful enjoyment of the scene, and Done, looking with half-closed eyes, day-dreaming, felt the inspiration that has since driven about twenty-five per cent of the native-born population of Australia desperately to poesy.

Beyond and below them stretched the Bush, an ocean of tree-tops, as level as the windless sea, and over this green expanse shadows of fleecy clouds chased each other. Presently Jim discovered a brown space in the distance, and detected a thin column of smoke rising on occasions between the vagrant winds. He called Burton’s attention, and Mike turned experienced eyes in that direction.

‘A settler’s clearing,’ he said. ’No; by Jove, it’s Macdougal’s homestead!’

‘What!’ cried Done, sitting up with a jerk. ‘Donald Macdougal’s station?’

‘Yes, Monkey Mack’s.’ Burton rose to his feet and looked about him. ‘There isn’t a doubt,’ he continued. ’That’s Boobyalla all right. I was over the country to the west once with cattle.’

‘And since we came to Jim Crow I have been so near.’

’’Bout twenty mile as the crow flies. Why, old man, you look all caved in.’

‘I’m greatly surprised. I thought Boobyalla was right away in the wilds.’

A pity this isn’t wild enough for you.’

‘Yes; but cut off completely from the people.’

‘The people have been distributin’ themselves a good deal o’ late. Boobyalla was far enough out o’ the runnin’ till the rushes broke out at Forest Creek an’ Jim Crow. As ’tis, I’ll bet my boots the Macdougal’s as lonesome down there as a sick sheep.’

Page 96

‘Why do you think that?’

’’Cause you can’t keep white men on the runs these times; they prefer the rushes. Squatter, J.P., ain’t the little god almighty he used to be when he held his hands as if they were niggers bought an’ paid for.’

Done was silent and thoughtful for a few minutes. The knowledge of his proximity to Lucy Woodrow awakened mixed feelings, and contrition was prominent. He had promised to write to her. He remembered how anxious she seemed to win the promise, and how deep her interest in him had been. Suffused with a melancholy tenderness, he told himself he had never forgotten her; her image had lived in his heart as in a shrine, screened perhaps, but only for sanctity’s sake. No thought of Aurora stole in to disturb his unconscious hypocrisy. He had an unexpected longing to see Lucy again.

‘Fact is, Mike,’ he said presently, ’there is a ship mate of mine down there at Macdougal’s I should very much like to meet again. What do you say?’

‘I’m on. This shipmate, is she married or single?’ Mike accented the third person feminine.

’Single. She is teaching Macdougal’s youngsters. I had no other friend aboard.’ Aurora obtruded now, and he looked into his mate’s face. It was suspiciously vacant. ‘What the devil are you thinking of, Mike?’ he said with warmth.

‘A friend o’ mine,’ answered Mike.

‘Oh!’

‘Aurora!’

’The devil you are? It’s an infernal impertinence, then, let me tell you.’

‘That Irish girl would tear hair like a mountain cat,’ continued Mike serenely.

‘You’re wrong, Mike, quite wrong,’ said Jim impressively. ’This girl is—well, absolutely different.’

Done found the trip to Boobyalla very much longer than he had expected, but the mates reached the homestead at about two o’clock. The place was almost deserted. Two or three wolfish cattle-dogs ran from the huts, and barked at them in a half hearted kind of way; a black boy shouted from the shed, and two gins came to the kitchen door, watching them. On the shady side of the same structure a dilapidated, miserable-looking white man of about fifty lay in a drunken sleep, buzzed over by a swarm of flies. The dwelling-house was a wandering weather-board structure with shingle roofs and iron chimneys; a deep veranda, partly latticed, ran round three sides, and ebullient

creepers of many kinds swarmed over the house at their own wild will. The homestead faced into a big garden spreading into an orchard, now green and gay with the verdancy and the blooms of spring.

’Didn’t I tell you? Not a white man round but the motherless drunk there,’ said Mike.

One of the cattle-dogs had returned to the side of the sleeper, and employed himself snapping at the greedy flies, yapping impatiently to keep them from the man’s face.

‘No boss sit down there, Mary?’ said Mike, addressing the eider of the gins.

Page 97

The aborigine grinned cheerfully. 'Boss him bin gone sit down longa Porkpine,' she said. 'Missus ride by Longabenna. Bill dam drunk, White feller all gone make it hole, catch plenty gold. Gib it 'bacca!'

Burton threw his half-plug of tobacco to the gin; she caught it deftly, the second one snatched, and the two set up a shrill yabbering, like excited monkeys.

'Miss Woodrow?' said Jim interrogatively.

'Teachy missie longa garden,' answered the gin, with illustrative pantomime.

'Better go and hunt her out,' Mike said. 'I'll find the black boy, and work him for drinks if possible.'

Done passed through a side-gate into the garden, found his way to the main walk, and looked about him.

'Well?' called a voice from the veranda.

He turned quickly. Within a few feet of him, in the space between the vines where the steps led up to the doorway, a little dark-eyed girl of about seven, the miniature of Mrs. Macdougal, peeped round her skirts at the stranger. Lucy did not recognise Jim in a moment.

'Lucy!' he said.

'Jim!' Her face crimsoned; she sprang down the steps, extending two hands.

He took both in his, and looked at her. She had changed and strengthened—he could see that. Evidently she had lived much in the sun; the pallor had gone from her face, and it had warmed to a tender olive-brown, pure and soft, deepening to a ruddier tint on the cheeks. She was much stouter, too, and carried herself with more character. There was a swing in her movements, hinting at hearty exercises in the open. She was looking at him, and saw a wonderful difference. There was a short, thick, youthful beard upon his chin, a slight moustache upon his lip, both heightening the Grecian quality of his face; his tan had taken a deeper tone; he was the picture of health and strength, she thought.

Done saw that she was greatly disturbed, and regretted having come upon her so suddenly. There was no questioning her delight; her colour came and went half a dozen times as they stood thus, hand in hand; her eyes were misty with tears, but she laughed through all.

'Well?' he queried.

‘Oh, I am so glad to see you—so very glad!’

‘And is it to be Jim and Lucy still?’

’Yes, to be sure. How changed you are! Come, come, sit down and talk. Talk till my senses come back to me. I am bushed!’ She laughed a little hysterically.

‘I have startled you.’

‘No, no, it’s pure gladness—it is indeed. It was good of you to come.’

‘You are changed, too. Have you stood to your determination to be happy?’

‘I am not unhappy.’ She had seated herself beside him, and passed an arm about the shy child, of whom little more than one dark eye was visible, peeping at Jim from the other side, and yet that one eye recalled humorous impressions of Mrs. Donald Macdougal of Boobyalla. He expected to see it start revolving coquettishly.

Page 98

‘You are stronger. You have grown,’ he said.

’Yes, I ride a lot with the children. It is good for me. I love it. This life agrees with me well. But it is not only a change in you, it is a transformation. Why, you can laugh!’

‘Come, come! I could always laugh.’

She shook her head. ’Not convincingly. You love the new land? You have prospered?’

‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘I have had a wonderful spell of life.’

‘And the people—you find you can like them?’

The question gave him rather a shock; he had to think a moment to recall her optimistic advice and his old frame of mind.

‘Like is too feeble a word,’ he said presently. ’The thought of them warms my heart.’

‘Ah, that is good!’ She clasped his hand impulsively. ’That is best of all. I was afraid you might cling to your mistrust, and shut the kindly people out of your life.’

‘Before it was the people shut me out.’

‘Are you sure?’

He had never doubted, now the question set him wondering for a minute. He looked at her again. Certainly she had developed observation, acuteness. Or had he? Once more he wondered. He watched her with new interest. She was not so pretty as she had seemed on the Francis Cadman; the ethereality was gone, but Done liked her the better for it. He felt his whole physical being to be in sympathy with vital things, and, after all, how often the poets, in their rhapsodies on spirituelle and unearthly women, were merely rapturously apostrophizing the evidences of dissolution! He met her now without a doubt in his heart, with a soul free to respond to his natural emotions, and she filled him with delight. Unconsciously he was wooing her—not with words, but with accents more eloquent, and the girl felt it instinctively, with a sense of triumph.

‘I can’t take my eyes off you,’ he said. ‘In what are you so different?’

She smiled pleasantly. ’I am dreadfully sunburnt; I am no longer thin; I do not brood.’

‘No, no; it is a difference of spirit. Where is that constraint we felt?’

‘The constraint was wholly with you.’ She blushed again.

The kissing episode had been recalled to both. He laughed gaily, feeling very comfortable, quite forgetful of his mate.

’Yes, I was certainly a humourless, gloomy young fool he said.

‘Only an unhappy boy,’ she murmured, ‘and my wonderful hero.’ She, too, spoke as if it were a matter of long years ago, when she was a silly slip of a girl.

‘And is there no hero now?’

‘I have found no other.’

‘Ah, that is something! Do you still pray for the old one, Lucy?’

‘But you have no faith in prayers.’

‘I may have in the prayer.’

’Well, then, I do. You see, you can never be wholly undeserving in my eyes.’ With Lucy, as with many girls in whom gratitude is the precursor of love, most of the sentiments due to the kindling affection were credited to gratitude.

Page 99

‘You have not blamed me for neglecting to write.’

’No; I have had no anxiety for some time. I knew where you were and how you were.’

‘You knew!’

’I knew that you had made friends, that you were on pay dirt at Diamond Gully, and that the good Australian sunshine had warmed your heart.’ She smiled mysteriously.

‘Ah, I know,’ he said after a moment’s thought—’Ryder.’

’Yes, Mr. Walter Ryder. He wrote me that he had come across you at Diamond Gully. He seemed quite interested in you.’

‘And I am interested by him. He is a peculiar personality.’

’Yes, so flippant; and behind it all you seem to feel something iron-like, strong and impenetrable.’

Flippant! Ryder had appealed to Jim as anything but a flippant character.

’He is a man of good family. He came to Australia seeking change and adventure. He is rich—very. He did Mr. Macdougal some service, and we saw a good deal of him in Melbourne. Mrs. Macdougal thinks he is an earl at least, and has woven quite a romance about him. She will be glad to see you.’

Done’s mind had flown to Burton’s estimate of Ryder, and Lucy’s evident admiration of, him gave him a little uneasiness.

‘Is Mrs. Macdougal of Boobyalla quite well?’ he asked.

‘Quite. But you must not laugh at her. One gets to like her.’

‘If one is quite determined.’

‘Whether or no,’ persisted Lucy. ’One would care for nobody if one were resolved to see only the bad points.’

‘That serves me right. The little girl is very like her.’

’Eva is my boon companion, my confidante, my guide, philosopher, and friend—aren’t you, dear?’

‘My oath!’ said the child in a grave, sweet voice. Jim started at the incongruous expression, and looked inquiringly at Lucy.

‘Your teaching?’

’How dare you? No; that is the teaching of rouseabouts and gins. I am trying to unteach it. Poor kiddies! I found them queer, wild, little Bush animals, with no childish companions, so I became a child myself, and we are the best mates in the world. The other is a boy, a monkey and a rip, but we are civilizing together. Do you know the funniest things in the world? Children like these and half-grown dogs. I discovered that at Boobyalla.’

‘The world is a pretty good sort of place, after all eh?’

‘Yes.’ She did not wonder at its seeming so very delightful to her just then. ’But you do not tell me. Talk, talk! I want your Australian history.’

He talked, describing his life, pleased with his own fluency, and not a little surprised at it. In half an hour she knew his story since the day he left the Francis Cadman, with certain judicious reservations and emendations. Aurora’s name did not appear once in the narrative. This suppression was quite instinctive? Lucy told something of her existence on the station, and they chatted cheerfully of the people on shipboard and the incidents of the voyage, avoiding only the most sensational incident of all—the rescue from the sea.

Page 100

‘Dear me I’ cried Lucy; ’I am playing the hostess badly. I have offered you nothing, and you must have had a long tramp.’

‘And I’ve forgotten poor Burton.’

’Go, bring him while I get tea. I must know your mate. Of course you drink tea? Here everybody drinks tea at all hours.’

Jim found Mike admiring a wonderful big bay horse, the astounding virtues of which stimulated the black boy to an incoherent flow of yabber.

‘Don’t mind me,’ said Burton. ‘I’ve had a drink an’ a sleep, and I’ve seen the loveliest animal that was ever lapped in horse-hide. Look at him!’

’We were chatting away in there, and I forgot you, old man. But come along; we are to have tea and grub on the veranda.’

‘Not me!’ Mike looked wildly for a way of escape.

‘Here, here! but you must, Mike—I promised.’

’There’s a dirty trick to serve ‘a man!’ Burton was genuinely alarmed. ‘Yarding him up with a mob of old women! I’m hanged if I do it!’

’There’s no mob. There’s only one, and she’s young and pleasant. Come along, I’ll stand by you.’

‘Gi’ me your solemn oath you’ll break away as soon as possible.’

‘I do, I do.’

Mike was led on to the veranda and introduced to Lucy, who gave him a pleasant welcome. He placed his hat by his chair, drank his tea quietly, said very little and ate less, flipped his fingers once or twice at the little girl in a friendly way, looked quite imperturbable, and all the time was painfully ill at ease, and raging inwardly at Jim’s delay. When Lucy left them in quest of fruit, he turned furiously on his mate.

‘What’s that she says about staying?’

’She wants us to take a shakedown in one of the huts for to-night. Mrs. Macdougal will be home before dark. She wishes to see me.’

’By the big blue Bunyip, if you stay I’ll bush you in the next scrubby gully, an’ leave you to do a three days’ perish!’ Mike’s tribulation was pitiful, but Jim laughed derisively.

Done did not accept Lucy's invitation, however. To tell the truth, although it would have been a great pleasure to remain near the girl, he had no desire to meet Mrs. Macdougal. He made suitable excuses. Mike said it would require smart travelling to bring them to the camp where their tools and swags were left, and, having shaken hands with Lucy, sauntered away.

'You will come again?' said the girl to Jim.

'Yes, if I have the chance; but Burton is the Bush man. I could never find you without his help.'

'In any case you will write?'

'I am bound to.'

They parted with a handshake, but fingers unclasped reluctantly and with a clinging appeal.

Page 101

Done and Burton, on returning to Jim Crow, found that Harry Peetree, quietly prospecting in the vicinity of the rush, had opened up a new gully. The 'find' was kept dark pending Mike's return, and when the Peetrees had secured their ground, the mates were given the pick of the lead. The discovery leaked out as soon as the friends started operations, and a little rush from the original field followed. Jim was now a mile and a half from Mrs. Kyley's shanty, and derived some satisfaction from that fact. His feelings towards Aurora had undergone another change. Lucy's image loomed to the almost total eclipse of that of her rival, and yet he could not spend ten minutes in the company of the girl at the shanty without being won by her buoyant spirits and the kindliness of her soul. He had some dread of growing to hate Aurora now that Lucy had reestablished herself—a dread founded more on some familiarity with popular fiction than on a knowledge of his own heart.

Christmas came, and there was a rough attempt to celebrate it on Jim Crow, an attempt by which Mrs. Ben Kyley profited largely, as she and Aurora were kept working at high pressure for two days, making Christmas puddings, for which the diggers cheerfully paid half a guinea apiece. Rich plum-pudding, hearty eating, and heavy drinking, the proper concomitants to an English Christmas as the miners understood it, were not compatible with merriment during an Australian Christmas-tune, with the glass at one hundred degrees in the shade; but trifling considerations of that kind were not allowed to interfere with the uproarious festivities at Jim Crow. January passed quietly. The dirt at One Tree Gully proved highly remunerative, and the mates worked hard. Done had discovered an object beyond the rapturous enjoyment of the moment, and showed himself more anxious to win gold. He was living a comparatively quiet life, and the locket containing Lucy Woodrow's picture was restored to its rightful place next his heart. There was a time when the thought of such an act of flagrant and foolish sentimentality would have made him groan aloud.

One night in the following March, returning to their tent from the shanty, where he had left Burton deep in a game of euchre, Jim was startled to see a stream of light flash momentarily across the canvas wall. His first thought was of thieves, and, drawing his revolver, he stole noiselessly to the entrance and peeped in. He saw the figure of a man seated at the head of Mike's bed. On the small table between the two bunks at the end of the tent was a lighted candle, which the man was screening with his hat. Before the intruder the small tin-box in which Done's few heirlooms and papers were stored lay open, and the man was absorbed in its contents.

'If you stir a hand I'll fire!' said Jim, presenting his revolver.

Instinctively the other smothered the light, but after that he sat quite still.

'I can see you distinctly,' said Jim, 'and I'm a fair shot!'

Page 102

There was silence for a moment, the thief making no attempt to escape.

‘I am going to light the candle,’ said a voice.

‘Light it, then; but no tricks! I’ll shoot to kill!’

XV

A *match* was struck, and in its glow Done recognised his visitor. It was Ryder. The latter lit the candle, and then turned towards Jim. He was quite composed, apparently. Not so Done; the revelation amazed him. The hand containing the revolver sank to his side. He stood for some moments awaiting an explanation. None was offered.

‘Is Mr. Walter Ryder a tent thief?’ he asked bitterly.

Ryder shook his head. ‘No,’ he said.

‘It looks strangely like it.’

‘It does.’

‘And I purpose raising the camp, and submitting the matter to the men.’

‘You won’t do that.’

‘Why not?’

’Because I can satisfy you that I have a very excellent excuse for being here and for prying into your affairs.’

‘I’ll wait two minutes for that.’

‘It won’t take one, Jim. I am your brother, Richard Done!’

The revolver dropped from Jim’s hand. He did not speak; every particle of him thrilled with intense emotion. For half a minute he stood rooted, speechless, and then he strode forward and seated himself on the bunk, staring closely into Ryder’s face by the dim light of the candle.

‘You will want proof?’ said Ryder.

Jim shook his head. Ryder’s declaration, abrupt and dramatic as it was, had struck him with absolute conviction. He was amazed, but he did not doubt. He understood now the origin of the deep impression this man had made upon him.

‘That is proof enough,’ he said, laying a trembling hand upon the miniature of his mother upon the table.

‘Almost,’ answered Ryder, ’but not enough. We are both very like poor mother.’

‘We are very like each other.’ Jim’s faculties were stunned for the time; there was a dreamlike unreality in their positions.

Ryder nodded. ‘We are.’

’It must have been that and your resemblance to my mother impressed me. I was impressed without consciousness of the reason.’

’Miss Woodrow noticed the resemblance, and when I heard your name and your age I thought it very likely that you were my brother. When I saw you that night in the shanty I was almost convinced. These satisfied me.’ He indicated the scattered articles upon the table.

Jim made no demonstration; he sat with his eyes fixed upon the miniature, still dazed by the blow. There was something in his had—something he wished to know, but his ideas were all out of control. The thought centred with a shock.

‘Good God, no!’ he cried, clutching Ryder with a nerveless hand. ’They hanged my brother!’

Ryder’s face was perfectly bloodless; it looked cold. He shook his head slowly.

Page 103

’I was condemned to be hanged. They altered it to transportation for life.’

‘But they all believed—’

’Mother must have known. It would have made little difference. The horror of it was a little greater than the horror of hanging. It probably gave her no comfort.’

‘She died of it all.’ Jim spoke without volition. ‘Yes,’ responded Ryder dully. ’She was the kind of woman who would. I was transported, and for all those years I lived in hell.’

‘For murder!’ said Jim sharply.

Ryder shook his head again. His voice was quite even. ’I did no murder. There was no murder done.’

‘The body—what of the body?’

’There was none. The man for whose murder I was condemned still lives. Stony is the man!’

‘Stony!’ Jim peered into the other’s face again. ‘Stony!’ he cried. ’It’s not possible. You are lying. It’s utterly incredible. Stony! Then this explains?’ He did not doubt even while the words of unbelief were on his lips.

’This explains. My coming upon you that night in the Black Forest was not so extraordinary as it seemed. I was following you both. I had been to Melbourne on Stony’s track, having caught a glimpse of him one night at Ballarat. I ascertained that he had started for Forest Creek. Meanwhile Mrs. Macdougal and Miss Woodrow had told me of you. It was reasonable to assume that you also had started for the field everybody was talking of. At our first meeting I did not see you: I was too deeply interested in Mr. Stony.’

‘Stony was not the name.’

‘Stony is an assumed name. Cannon is his real name—Peter Cannon.’

’That is the name. But I cannot understand. My head fails me. I am utterly bewildered!’

‘You’ll hear Stony’s story? He is in his tent.’

’Not now. You have overwhelmed: me. For God’s sake, give me time to straighten things out!’

Jim sat in silence for some minutes, but the excitement lingered. He drifted into questions, and plied the other like a cross-examining lawyer eager to trap a witness; but

Ryder knew every detail of the family history. He told Jim of a birthmark on his own body. He described the furnishing of the home in Chisley much as it remained within Jim's memory.

'You have not mentioned our sister,' he said.

'She killed herself.' Jim spoke with blunt brutality. He had no energy for equivocation.

Ryder accepted this piece of news in the spirit of a man steeled to the keenest strokes of Fate.

'She was a beautiful girl,' he said. 'I remember I loved her dearly.'

'You speak as if it were fifty years ago.'

'I have been in hell since, I tell you.'

Jim looked closely into his brother's face again, but it baffled him; it betrayed no more feeling than a stone.

'Why have you divulged this now?' he asked.

'You forced it from me. I did not expect you to return. I saw you playing cards at the shanty. But it is as well. I should have told you later.'

Page 104

‘There is something behind?’

’Much; but till you have heard Stony tell his part I shall say no more. And for the present let this be our secret.’

‘Burton may come in at any moment.’

‘Good-night, then.’

’No; I’ll go with you. I cannot face Mike in this condition. He would think me mad.’

‘To Stony’s tent?’

’If you like. In Heaven’s name, man, why are you so cold? Why am I like a stunned brute? We are brothers. We may shake hands.’

Ryder made no advance. ‘Better hear the story out,’ he said.

It was a two-mile walk from where Jim and Mike were now camped to Stony’s tent, and the hour was midnight. The two men walked in silence, Jim with his head bowed, racked with nervous excitement, his mind running from point to point, grasping nothing wholly, seeing nothing clearly, the other erect and calm. When the tent was reached Ryder entered unceremoniously, and, striking a match, looked about him for a candle. There was a slush-lamp on a box by the bunk, and this he lit. Jim saw Stony start up in bed, and stare at the intruder with a look of mortal terror.

‘I have brought you a visitor,’ said Ryder.

The apprehension faded from the hatter’s face when he Jim.

‘A nice hour!’ he grumbled.

‘I have not studied your convenience,’ answered Ryder. ’Here is the man to whom you are to tell the story of Richard Done and Peter Cannon. Tell it briefly, as you told it to me.’

Ryder seated himself on a block near the tent entrance, his back half turned to the others, and neither spoke nor moved throughout the narration. Stony looked from one to the other, and then commenced his story. He told it in a monotonous voice, with a dull face and eyes heavy with drink.

’We were always enemies, Dick Done and I—enemies as boys at school at Chisley, fighting over everything, picking at each other from morn till night. As young chaps we remained enemies. It seemed as if God or the devil had sent us to plague each other. Our enmity grew with us. In manhood we were as bitter as death. Then the woman

came. We both wanted her. It was just natural of us to get set on the same girl. She liked him—she didn't care a snap of her fingers for me; but I didn't give up. I followed her, plagued her, persecuted her, and hated Done worse than poison. With all my soul I hated him! Of course, we quarrelled over her, and Done went so far as to talk of killing. He didn't mean it, perhaps, but it told against him later. One bright night I came on him and her sitting on Harry's Crag. 'Twasn't an accident. I'd been told they'd gone down to the sea, and I followed. I interfered, furious at heart, but making a show of civility, knowing that would madden him. He was soon up in arms. He tried to drive me off, struck me. I used my stick, and we fought there and then—fought like madmen on the cliff edge, two hundred feet above the sea. The girl, frightened almost to death, ran away. Done got my stick from me, and we fought with our hands. He could beat me at that game, and at length struck me a blow that stunned me; then he left me lying there, and went after the girl.'

Page 105

Stony paused for a moment, and, drawing a bottle from the back of his bunk, took a long drink. Then his eyes wandered to Ryder again, and he went on:

’When I came to I was alone. I crept a little further from the edge of the cliff, and lay down again. I was pretty badly knocked about; my nose was bleeding freely. Presently, moving my hand, I struck a knife—his knife! It was closed. I opened it, looking at the long blade. The idea had already formed in my mind. I smeared the blade with blood, and dropped the knife, open as it was, over the cliff, being careful that it should fall on the ledge about twenty feet below. Then I smeared blood upon the brink, tore a scrap from my coat, and left it there, throwing the coat with the hat into the sea. I was never seen in Chisley again. I walked all that night. In London I read of the arrest of Done on a charge of murder. They had found my hat and my coat and the knife. The girl had told her story. Done was condemned to death; and then I stowed away in an Australian boat, and was allowed to work my passage out I thought Richard Done had been hanged till I saw him that night at the camp in the Bush. The man sitting there is Richard Done.’

Stony fell back upon his grimy pillow again, and was silent; his eyes were fixed upon Ryder, but at that moment he had more to fear from Jim, who looked down upon him, fierce with disgust, his fingers itching to be at the thin neck of the brute.

‘Let us get out of this!’ he gasped.

‘Have you no questions to ask?’ said Ryder quietly.

’None, none! And when I think of what this dog has brought upon me and mine I feel murderous.’

Ryder left the tent without another word, and Jim followed him. As they walked away, Done was stirred with deep sympathy for his companion. Ryder’s reiteration of the words, ‘I have been in hell!’ recurred to him. He felt that there were years of suffering and a fathomless hatred behind the phrase, and his blood ran hotly.

‘I wonder you have not killed that man!’ he blurted after a few minutes’ silence. ‘I regret ever having raised a hand to prevent it.’

‘I needed him,’ answered Ryder.

‘You intend to establish your innocence?’

For the first time that night a smile moved Ryder’s stark lips—a hard, mirthless smile.

‘No,’ he said; ‘where’s the use?’

‘How is it you are free?’ asked Jim with surprise. This view had not occurred to him before.

They were standing between the stunted and twisted gums. The Bush here was spare and dwarfed, and the moonlight shone clearly upon Ryder’s face.

‘I am an escaped convict!’ he replied

A bitter curse leapt from Done’s tongue. He felt himself bound to this man by a common wrong, a wrong that had clouded with misery the greater part of their two lives.

‘You may be retaken,’ he said.

‘I may, but I do not think it likely.’

Page 106

At that moment recollection flashed upon Jim. He recalled the adventure with Long Aleck in the Bourke Street bar, and the robbery of Brigalow, the gold-buyer, at Diamond Gully. His hand was upon Ryder again: he gazed at him with a new apprehension.

‘Sit,’ he said. Ryder seated himself on a stump by the side of the young man, and Jim continued:

’You say Miss Woodrow noticed a strong resemblance between us. Others have remarked it.’

’I am not surprised. There is no difference in our faces but that which years have made.’

’It was in Melbourne on the night of my arrival. I was attacked in a bar by a man who mistook me for Solo.’

The brothers looked into each other’s eyes for some little time, Jim anxiously, Ryder with no appearance of concern in his strong, handsome face.

‘I am the man they call Solo.’

‘Solo the robber!’ Instinctively Jim had moved back from the other, but Ryder took no notice of the action.

‘My boy,’ he said, ’there are two kinds of men—the active criminal and the passive. I am fairly active.’

‘But the blind folly of it—here, where fortunes are made so easily!’

’Are they? You have had a bit of luck. There are thousands on the rushes who do not make tucker. In any case I could not afford to place myself directly under the supervision of the troopers. Not that I had any weak desire to earn an honest living, by the way.’

‘What are you hoping for? Where is it all leading?’ Jim felt an emotion of despair.

‘Perhaps you would rather hear no more to-night.’

‘I must hear all. For God’s sake, speak!’

’I have been in hell. For fifteen years I remained in the convict prisons. It might have been fifteen centuries, an eternity. Everything beyond is so distant that my youth seems a mere dot in the perspective.’

Ryder was talking in a clear, even, unemotional voice.

’I cannot hope to give you anything approaching a true idea of the horror of that life. I know I can only faintly comprehend it myself now. Taken from happiness, a comparative boy, I was plunged into a state of absolute torment, an existence of brutalizing labour, ceaseless cruelty, and blackest infamy. I herded with men who had degenerated from criminals into brutes under the influence of the infamous system. Those fifteen years served to burn out of me most of the fine emotions and sentiments on which civilized men pride themselves, and then, during the blackest year of all, a wild craving to preserve something of humanity arose within me. That was my salvation. I had always before me the hope of escape. I fought now cease to retain some qualities of clean manhood, that I might appear amongst fellow as a man, and not like one of the lowering monsters by whom I was surrounded—men upon whose every feature and limb were stamped the repulsive brands of the lag. During that first period I maintained an attitude

Page 107

of fierce revolt, then, recognising my helplessness, I brought cunning into play, and practised dissimulation night and day. This saved me in some measure, but the ghastly life continued year after year, and I was thirty-eight before a reasonable chance of escape presented itself. My plans had been perfected, and when the opportunity came I seized it, with the resolution of a man for whom there was only one alternative to liberty—death.'

Jim never took his eyes from Ryder's; he sat as if fascinated by the ivory-pale face of his companion.

'I had one friend in Hobart Town, a freed convict named Wainewright. He provided me with the clothes of a gentleman. The beard I wore, and which has since served me as a disguise in my many enterprises, was given to me in the first place by Wainewright. To perfect that beard and destroy every semblance of artificiality, I had worked at it for three years in the cunning, patient way old prisoners toil at such a task. Wainewright helped me to get to the mainland, and I was safe, with a forged ticket-of-leave in my pocket in case the marks of the chains should be discovered by prying official eyes.'

'Did you make any effort to live honestly?' asked Jim.

'Almost my first action on reaching the neighbour hood of Melbourne was to bail-up a prominent resident, whom I robbed. That act afforded me absolute joy. He was a decent, orderly citizen, a pillar of the State, a powerful upholder of the law. No robbery I have since committed has given me quite the same delight. I stole then because I needed money. I rob now because I am a keen sportsman, and that is the particular sport I affect. Possibly you would not appreciate the pleasure of the game; you have not had the humbug of the world eaten out of your heart with live flame. Having wilfully exposed itself to me, and translated my respect for it into a magnificent hatred, society cannot reasonably expect to find me docile. I prey upon society.'

'It will avenge itself.'

'True, it may. Robbery under arms is a hanging matter, but I have graduated in a marvellous school for cunning, and have perfect confidence.'

'Yet you place yourself in my hands. What can the ties of blood count for between us two? For as long as I can remember I've thought of you only as something evil hovering over the door, silencing the home, darkening life.'

'I counted on finding in you a mind not wholly at variance with my own. What those two women told me gave me some insight into your character. I perceived that at least the flame had scorched the bloom from your soul.'

’Here I am a new man. I have known happiness, I have tasted love, and made friends with good men. Here I can live!’

Ryder looked at him closely. ‘You must tell me of your life,’ he said—’ the life in Chisley after my supposed hanging. No, no; not now. Go to your tent and sleep.’

‘Sleep! I shall not sleep.’

Page 108

‘Think over what I have told you.’

‘There is more behind?’ ‘There may be.’

‘You think I will join you?’

’In my present career? No. For the time being, let us say no more. I need not ask you to be silent. Meet me here to-morrow night at nine. While you are thinking, bear always in mind the fact that Peter Cannon is there ‘—he pointed in the direction of Stony’s tent —’ a living man. Good-night.’

The reminder was well timed; pity stirred warmly in Jim’s heart again, and he offered his hand.

‘So long,’ he said, dropping into the vernacular of mateship.

Ryder took his hand with no demonstration of emotion. ‘So long,’ he replied.

XVI

Burton found his mate gloomy and taciturn all next day, a condition so remarkable in Done that it gave Mike some little concern, but he made no comment; and Jim was too absorbed in the strange, new development in his life to discover his friend’s uneasiness. Ryder’s story brought Jim’s youthful sufferings back to him with painful vividness; it awakened some animosities he had thought dead, and he recognised, though shrinking from the idea with actual terror, in Ryder’s attitude towards his kind the frame of mind into which he was drifting when he broke away from Chisley and its associations. Remembering well his own heart up to the time when human interests and sympathies began to awaken kindred emotions within him, he understood that the resemblance between himself and his brother was as close on the moral side as it was on the physical, but with Ryder the demoralizing influences had worked their utmost. How like their sufferings had been! differing only in degree; but his own sufferings looked pale and fanciful now beside those of his brother. His afflictions were of the spirit only. He and Ryder were of a supersensitive race and every soul-pang he endured had been augmented a thousand times in his brother’s case, and driven in by the prison cell, the leg-irons, the loathsome associations, the animalizing toil in the quarries—the lash! Jim had heard enough of the infamy of the system to understand, if not the worst, sufficient to make his skin creep at the thought of it. He realized to what state of heart and mind Ryder had been driven, knowing how he himself had developed under the stress of comparatively trivial wrongs, and the whole man ached with sympathy. It required a strong effort to restrain his inclination to tears, a weakness of the flesh he had surprised in himself before now.

And Ryder had suffered all this, knowing himself to be guiltless of the crime of which he was convicted. Stony was there in his tent. If Jim had known where to find his brother he would have gone to him in the morning, prompted by the generous affection that had sprung in his heart, feeling that Ryder might be won over by new friendships and new interests. It seemed to him that the wholesome effects worked in his case might be repeated in that of his brother, forgetting their disparity in years. The change had come to him while he was yet little more than a boy; Ryder was a man in middle life, and no longer capable of youth's saving enthusiasms.

Page 109

Jim was early for the appointment, but Ryder was already at the rendezvous, seated on the log, smoking, and apparently deriving placid enjoyment from his cigar. The young man's greeting was warm, but the elder showed no emotion. If any liking for Jim existed in him it was carefully hidden away. Throughout their previous meeting he had borne himself with seriousness, as if something of importance to him were at stake; to-night he was in a wholly different humour, more like the man who had encountered Jim in Mary Kyley's bar.

'Are we to consider the relationship established?' he said.

'I am quite convinced,' answered Jim. 'I have not doubted it from the moment you declared yourself.'

'You are much too confiding, my boy. As an impostor I might have gathered all these details from the real Richard Done.'

'With what object?'

'Well, I have an object, an ulterior motive. I want you to share a large fortune with me.'

Jim laughed. 'You may pick up a large family of brothers on those terms,' he said.

'You will do. Is it a bargain?'

'What is this fortune? Where is it? How was it come by?'

'The fortune is mainly in virgin gold; it is in an untried alluvial field.'

'If the field is untried, how do you know the gold is in it?'

'I put it there.'

Jim looked at Ryder sharply. 'You have not answered one of my questions,' he said. 'How was the gold come by?'

'There's no objection on that score,' Ryder answered lightly. 'It was come by dishonestly, every grain of it.'

'To me that is a serious objection. I am an honest man, my instincts are all for fair dealing, and I believe, as a simple everyday working principle, honesty is the best policy.'

'Honesty is not a policy, my boy: it is a misfortune.'

'Why do you wish to share your loot with me?'

’Seventy or eighty thousand ounces of gold is not easily accounted for nor easily disposed of by a guest of the Queen who is on leave without a ticket that will bear the closest investigation. You could dispose of it safely enough.’

‘And if I were asked to account for it?’

’That is provided for. I have discovered a field within a day’s journey that nobody else knows of—that nobody else is likely to know of. You and I go there, we work it for a few months, and the gold I have mentioned is to be represented as the result of our labours if it becomes necessary to make explanations. A few thousand ounces in nuggets which might ’by some unhappy chance be recognised by previous owners we shall batter into slugs and reserve for sale in other lands.’

And then?’

’Then all that life in London and Paris means to men with great fortunes.’ Ryder was smiling as he spoke. ’Then to seize and enjoy all that smug respectability is willing to give to the wealthy, and much that it is unwilling to give, but which it shall be our pleasure to take. Then to exact our revenge for all we have endured at the hands of society by making it in some measure the slave to minister to our needs and our desires. I positively tremble, my brother, when I think of the little mischief one man can work; but with money and ingenuity, combined with devotion to purpose, we may succeed in accomplishing quite a decent vengeance.’

Page 110

‘I have no desire for revenge upon society.’

’To be sure, you have not sat through the long black night in, a cold cell with the rats, a wet rag thrown over your lacerated back, the chains eating into your flesh like the nibbling of tiny teeth, thinking of the good people who rule England, sitting at their blazing fires or smiling round the laden tables.’

‘No, thank God!’

’If you had you might appreciate the subtle delight of sinning against your enemies. I am going back to England to devote what arts I know, what cunning I have, and what attractions I can assume, to the gratification of the only passion left me. When I think of the fair daughters and the fair sons of the comfortable middle class, Jim, I have exquisite hopes.’ Ryder rolled the cigar between his fingers, and smiled at his brother in a gentle, kindly way. ’If I can bring an honoured son of reputable parents to taste the joys of the hulks and feel the caresses of the leaded cat, I shall, I feel, be almost reconciled to my past. They talk of stopping transportation and abolishing the system. I never cease to pray that the system may be spared to us. If it is done away with before I have gratified the magnificent malice I have stored up in this breast, morsel by morsel, hoarding it with the greed of a miser, I am afraid I shall lose my faith in a just Providence.’

’This is simply hideous exclaimed Jim. ’But you are joking. You speak without bitterness.

’I speak without bitterness because I would not waste any jot of it. When my moments come (and I have had a few) I desire to experience the perfect emotion. Revenge is only sweet when it opens the flood-gates of a pent-up hatred.’

‘Richard!’ cried the young man, ’for God’s sake put this black evil out of your heart! Here is a clean world—come into it, take part in it with the good men. Your soul is poisoned—purge it. Open your eyes to the sun. I’ll help you!’

Ryder placed his cigar on the log beside him, and turning back the left wrist of the silk undershirt he wore, struck a match, and showed Jim a broad red wheal encircling the arm like the scar of a deep burn.

‘Would you like to see my ankle?’ he said. ’Or my back? It’s a pretty sight. I am a hunted man. But if I were not, I would not consent to sacrifice my exquisite desires merely because the sun shines and girls are merry.’

’But I have been happy. I’ll have none of this ugly gospel of hatred and revenge.’

’Happy! Because you are free for a moment; because you are not treated quite as a pariah because that black-eyed houri down at the shanty smiles at you? You’ll sicken of

this presently. I tell you you must come back to your healthy hatred. The spirit of revolt is in your blood; the contempt is with you. I shall win you over.'

Never! Never!'

'Happy! Son of a mother tortured to death by a Christian people; brother of the girl driven to suicide by hate; brother of the man whom society set in hell.' Ryder's voice was low and musical, and his words were more dreadful than curses. 'You have not told me all,' he continued. 'Sit down, man—tell me of your life at home there.'

Page 111

Jim demurred, but Ryder led him on to the narrative, and eventually he described his past, and as he talked of the old troubles and tribulations, his former prejudices awoke, and something of the early hatred and disdain. Ryder, quick to detect the effect of the revival of his boyish grievances, kept the young man's thoughts on the more painful features of the story, and worked upon his feelings guilefully probing his soul, finding his weaknesses with an unerring touch, prompted, no doubt, by his knowledge of Richard Done, the man he had been, whose youthful character he found faithfully reflected here.

'You'll come with me?' said Ryder.

'No, I couldn't do it,' answered Jim. 'Your idea of vengeance strikes me only as the dream of a madman.'

'But you'll think it over?'

'You don't suppose a man can get this sort of thing out of his mind in a day.'

'Remember, I bind you to nothing, and there is a big fortune at stake.'

Got by crime.'

'By open, honest daylight robbery.'

Jim looked at his brother with a feeling of despair; he recognised the utter hopelessness of argument based on accepted ideas of right and wrong. In disputing he felt like a child blowing bubbles against a stone wall. Ryder's attitude implied that he had tested everything in the fire of a terrible experience.

'Man, man!' cried Done, 'how can you hope to beat the world?'

'For four years I have beaten it. And I am appreciated. The Government of Victoria has just raised the price of my head to one thousand pounds.'

'Why not leave the country at once?'

'As soon as you are ready.'

'Impossible. I will not go.'

'I remain until you change your mind, unless, in the meantime, some safe and convenient means of transporting my hard-earned gold presents itself. I have an alternative scheme, but it means greater risks, and, besides, I find I am still capable of the preposterous folly of liking. I like you.'

’Then give up this brutal scheme, join with me, make an effort to work the poison out of your blood, to revive a clean, honest interest in existence, and I’ll stand by you through thick and thin, against the law and all your enemies, while I’ve a heart-beat left in me. It’s worth the effort, Dick; the world is fair, men are decent, and women are sweet.’

Ryder sat nursing a foot, smiling a smile of kindly interest. ‘My boy,’ he said, ’you have the ardent sentimentality of a good mother’s pink-cheeked cub of nineteen. Has it occurred to you that I have run a very great risk in being seen for five minutes in your company? Your name is Done, and you made the name rather familiar along Forest Creek; we are alike, as you have noted, and although Richard Done, the escaped convict, is not much thought of at this date, it is certain that hearing your name awakened recollection amongst the old Vandemonians in the police here, and they have probably run the rule over you more than once. If I were to join with you, they’d clap the darbies on me within a week.’

Page 112

Jim spread his hands in a gesture of despair. 'I have been mistaken for Solo once; that risk must always follow you,' he said.

'I am prepared; but the Government shall never pay their thousand pounds for a live man. I appear as little as possible in the diggings in this guise, however. You did not know me as the chief performer in that little comedy with Brigalow on Diamond Gully. You did not recognise me in the dark man who talked with you and Burton while the madcap from Kyley's was leading the troopers a merry dance along the lead. By the way, I admire your taste in women, Jim. She's a fine, unshamed barbarian, this Aurora.'

The subject was distasteful to Jim. He put it aside hastily. 'If I worked with you in this scheme for disposing of the gold you would run the same risk,' he said.

'No; I need not appear in the matter. The field I speak of, which is probably very rich in itself, is so situated that we might work it for a year without being discovered. Meanwhile, by making frequent trips to Ballarat and Bendigo, you could sell a great deal of my gold along with such as we may earn. Then I should sail for England, taking with me as much gold as I could safely handle, leaving you to sell more, and eventually join me with the remainder. In this way we can, if we choose, rid ourselves of three hundred thousand pounds' worth without attracting any particular attention.'

'You reckoned on finding me greedy for gold.'

'I reckoned more on finding you willing to seize an opportunity of exacting from society some return for death, torture, and infamy!'

'There was a time when you might have prevailed.'

'That time may come again. It needs only a new grievance—the law to bruise you, the women to betray.'

Jim shook his head. He felt the disc of Lucy's locket pressing against his breast under his folded arms. 'I cannot believe it,' he said.

The other was silent for some moments, and Jim watched him with troubled eyes. None of the cruelty and the viciousness to which Ryder had given utterance found expression in his features, which were marked with sensitive lines and some refinement. Done thought of Brummy the Nut, and it seemed to him little short of miraculous that this man had been able to come through similar experiences and yet show no evidence of it in his face. Ryder arose and moved away a few paces.

'If you go from here to another field,' he said, 'leave word for me at one of the stores.'

'Are you going?'

‘I may not leave Jim Crow for a few days.’

‘You have something in hand?’

’Meaning some robbery? No; it is possible Solo has made a dramatic disappearance from contemporaneous history.’

You’ll drop the game? Good! Good!’

’It all depends. I have the gold I need, but the sporting instinct may be too strong for me. Just now there is other work in view. Be assured, my intentions are not honourable, however. We shall meet again. My proposition may appeal to you later. You will not forget it.’

Page 113

‘Put it out of your head,’ said Jim appealingly. ’Leave the country, take the gold if you must, live luxuriously if you care to, but dig out of your heart this devilish malice against people who have done you no conscious wrong. Do this for your own sake; the course you have decided upon is one of desolation and despair.’

’Least of all did I expect to find my brother a pulpiteer and a moralist with all the popular faith in the domestic virtues, and the quaint conviction that misery dogs the sinner,’ said Ryder dryly.

‘I have used no cant,’ answered Jim, ’and I said nothing of sin or virtue. I don’t ask you to trust God, but to trust man. Be at peace with your kind!’

‘And this is the man they called the Hermit on board the Francis Cadman!’

’Yes; and I was wretched aboard simply because I met the free and hearty men around me in a spirit of sullenness and suspicion. But my sick misanthropy was not proof against the heart-quickening sunshine and the grand enthusiasm of those fine sane men.’

’Evidently your philosophy sprang from a disordered liver. The sea-voyage, in stimulating that, cured you of your cherished beliefs. Another trip would probably make a devout Wesleyan of you,’ said Ryder banteringly. ’Now, my liver is a perfect instrument, and you couldn’t alter a single opinion of mine with a long course of antibilious treatment. In defiance of all Sunday-school precedents, I can be cheerful though wicked, and, having attained the splendid isolation of perfect selfishness, my happiness is not dependent on the gaiety or gloom of the crowd, My boy, you might remember that your experience is not so wide as to justify you in asking mankind at large to accept you as the touchstone for all human emotions. Good-bye.’

Jim gripped his brother’s hand and held it. ‘Good bye!’ he said. ’I wish I could do something for you, but you leave me helpless.’

Ryder went off with a laugh, and a moment later his voice came back through the trees—a light, musical baritone, singing an Irish love-song, and Jim, listening, troubled in spirit, wondered how much of the true man he had been permitted to see.

Throughout the quiet months that followed Done lived a sober, methodical life. He saw no more of his brother while they remained on the Jim Crow diggings, but thought of him constantly, dreading to hear of some further daring escapade on the part of Solo, fearing more the possibility of his capture. Burton was perplexed by the note of gravity that had developed in his mate, until he made an accidental discovery of Lucy Woodrow’s locket, and then he thought he understood all, especially as Jim’s visits to Kyley’s shanty were comparatively rare of late. Meanwhile, Jim had written once to Lucy, but had received no answer—a fact that did not disturb him, however, as the

postal service on the fields and in the Bush was extremely erratic. He was quite satisfied now that he had been in love

Page 114

with his shipmate all the time, but it was not easy to account for Aurora. Certainly he had been very fond of her: he was fond of her still, and could not bring himself to regret having known her. He strove resolutely to refrain from applying conventional standards of judgment, with which, he assured himself, he had no sympathy, but little uneasinesses and awkward moments would obtrude. It was difficult to maintain the fine idea of rationalism. 'I won't have you bind the strange man you may be to-morrow with oaths,' Aurora had said; yet it was evident the change in him was a source of great distress to her.

'I haven't seen you for a fortnight, Jim,' she said one evening, with a tinge of reproach that she was striving to repress.

'No,' he said shortly.

'And absence hasn't made you particularly fond.'

He was leaning on the counter, and took her hand between his own, but was silent.

'At least, you don't lie to me,' she continued.

Jim did not plume himself on that; he knew in his heart that if he had not lied it was because a thoroughly satisfactory fiction had not presented itself. He kissed her knuckles, which, in itself was a lie of inference. Aurora pulled her hand away, and robbed him of his one resource. He felt abashed and defenceless without it. He thrust his hands in his pockets, and turned his shoulders to her, gazing moodily on the floor, having a dawning sense of the differences that may suddenly afflict two hearts that have beat as one, realizing that the ardent affection of yesterday and yesterday's kisses count for nothing in the present estrangement. He could, not essay the role of friendship: it was as if they were strangers without a single affinity.

'The fact is, Aurora,' he said desperately, 'I'm a good deal changed. I've experienced a great shock lately, and it has pulled me up short.'

'And the woman?'

He turned upon her again with genuine surprise. 'The woman! The woman!' he cried. 'It has nothing to do with a woman. Upon my soul, no! Something has been revealed to me that has hit me hard. I don't get over it easily; it clings in my mind. If I could tell you, old girl, you'd sympathize; but I can't—the secret is not my own.' He spoke with emotion, and Aurora, watching him sharply, was touched. She put a hand on his arm.

'Not another word, Jimmy,' she said. 'I won't bother you. Sure,' she continued lightly, we weemin 're niver contint wid the throubles of the day. We're that curious we must be

wonderin' how much more's comin'. We may boast iv bein' sensible an' sthrong, but we're alwiz pushin' our tentacles out to feel the sorrow iv to-morrow. I reckoned you'd be hatin' me in a week, ma bouchal.'

Done felt himself justified in kissing her there and then, but the kiss partook a good deal of the nature of a benediction.

Page 115

This explanation did not serve to restore confidence; the constraint remained, and increased with time. Jim noted its effect on Aurora with some misgiving. His appearance in the tent was the signal for a display of boisterous animation on her part. If she had been depressed before, she suddenly became gay; if she had been animated, she became jubilant. She sang, and joked, and danced, and played, with an excess of jocosity that jarred him painfully. He gave her credit for uncommon intelligence, and undoubtedly she had been educated above the position in life she was content to occupy. Why should she resort to the shallow and obvious subterfuges of the most foolish and frivolous of her sex? He had no perception of the extent of her sufferings, and would not, in any case, have understood how independent are the workings of the head and the heart of a loving woman. On such occasions she flirted audaciously with the miners, and her blood burned in her veins because Done showed no disposition to be moved by it.

Tim Carrol imagined himself to be the specially favoured man, and was Aurora's most devoted slave, and the girl played upon his big, affectionate heart, with no object but to awaken in Done a sparkle of the recent fire. One night Aurora danced with him through a lively reel, and at its conclusion, in a spirit of mirthless mischief, put up her red mouth to be kissed. Not for all the powers of good and evil would Tim have foregone that delight. He kissed her, but this time Done offered no objection. Indeed, he gave no indication of having seen what was passing, although in reality he had been watching Aurora, impressed with the idea that she was drinking. Never since the first night he met her had she seemed to him to be under the influence of drink, and he admitted to himself that he might have been mistaken then, and was probably deceived now by the fervour of her character.

Done's indifference struck a chill to the girl's heart. She went back to her place silent, but feeling within her the stirring of a tempest. A quarter of an hour later she confronted Jim as he stood talking with Harry Peetree. For a moment she looked into his face, and all eyes were upon her. Then she struck him in the mouth with her right hand, and her eyes, cheeks, and whole being seemed to blaze into passion at the same moment.

'I have something belonging to you. Is it that you are waiting for?' She threw the small nugget in his face with her other hand.

The gold cut his temple, but he did not flinch; his eyes met hers without passion; his cultivated power of control helped him now. Taking out a handkerchief, he wiped the blood from his eye, and then, picking up the nugget, offered it to her.

'Aurora,' he said, 'you know in your heart that is a lie.'

His quietness made her action ridiculous, whatever his intention may have been, and the girl felt it with an access of frenzy; but at this point Tim Carrol felt himself called upon to intervene in his new character as knight-errant.

Page 116

‘D’ye mean to call the lady a liar?’ he cried hotly.

Jim, who had a real liking for the cheerful young Irishman, evaded the awkward blow aimed at his head, and stood back, and Ben Kyley saved further trouble by seizing Tim and hustling him into a corner.

‘I’m the on’y man what’s permitted to punch the customers in this tent,’ said Ben.

At the same time Mrs. Ben descended upon Aurora and bore her off with a mighty hug, much as if she were a rebellious infant.

XVII

It was some time before Jim Done visited Mrs. Kyley’s tent again. He bore Aurora no animosity, he had the kindliest feelings for her, but recognised that in frequenting the shanty he increased the difficulty of the situation and prolonged the task he had set himself. A letter had come to him from Lucy Woodrow—a bright, breezy letter, about Bush-life, about herself and the youngsters, and a good deal about him. Certainly a pleasant enough letter, but, considered as a literary production merely, not deserving of Jim’s high appreciation of it. Alter receiving it Jim sat down in a reverent humour and decided, with the formality of a meeting carrying a resolution, that Lucy was the only woman in the world for him, the one possible woman. The resolution practically abolished all other women so far as he was concerned. He could never think of another with patience, and his longing for her was so great that it left him little mind for Ryder, and scarcely any for Aurora. He was eager to pay Boobyalla another visit, but Mike was deaf to all insinuations, and Jim consoled himself with pretty imaginative pictures in which Lucy was vividly represented sitting on the shady veranda at Macdougal’s home stead, spotted with flakes of golden sunshine filtered through the tangle of vine and creeper. How sweet she was, how gentle, how tender, and yet brave of heart and keen-witted withal. She had understood him better than he had understood himself. That was very gratifying; it showed her deep interest in him, but he did not put it to himself in that bald way. Why hadn’t he taken her up in his arms and kissed her when they parted in the garden? Every drop of his blood prompted him to it, and something told him she would not have resented it. He had been a fool. He should have told her then that he loved her. Of course, it had hardly occurred to him then that he really did love her, but he was a fool in any case for not seeing it and understanding it.

Burton and the Peetrees had resolved to try a new rush before Done called at the shanty again.

‘I have come to say goodbye, Mrs. Ben,’ he said to the big washerwoman, ‘and to thank you for a thousand kindnesses.’

‘Thank me for nothing!’ cried Mrs. Kyley. ’Is it true you are off on the wallaby again?’

‘We shall start for Simpson’s Ranges in the morning.’

’It is so long since we’ve seen you that you won’t mind if we don’t break our hearts at parting.’ She glanced towards Aurora, who had turned her back to them.

Page 117

‘That’s the least I expect of you, Mrs. Ben.’

’Well, you’re not a bad lad, though inconstant. Give me a kiss, and good luck go with you. Be a man,’ she added in a whisper. ’Say a few kind words to the poor girl.’ She nodded towards Aurora.

‘I came wishing to.’

‘You ruffian!’ she said aloud; ’and you pretending you cared a copper dump about Mother Kyley. She pushed him towards Aurora, and rolled from the tent with one of her great gusts of laughter.

‘I’m off, Joy!’ said Done.

She turned and looked at him. She was in one of her quiet humours. If she had felt much grief, it had left little impression upon her. She was neatly dressed and looking very fresh and girlish to-day.

‘I heard you were going,’ she answered.

‘Joy!’ He put out an open hand. ’Let us part friends; I’m fond of you—I am, upon my soul!’

She caught his hand in both of hers and pressed it to her breast. ’I was wondering if you would come to see me before leaving.’

‘Ah, that’s better,’ he said. ’I’d be pretty miserable if I went thinking I’d left you an enemy, because—because—’ He had a heart full of gratitude and big, generous emotions towards her, and could not express himself. ’God bless you, Joy! he murmured, kissing her hair. ’Don’t think me an utterly selfish kind of brute, dear.’

’I haven’t one ill thought of you, Jimmy. Didn’t I woo you with every trick I know, but with my whole heart, too, for all that? It’s been a fair deal, old man.’

’I’ll never cease to wish you happiness, and I’ll always regret any trouble I may have caused you.’

’Regret nothing—nothing! You’ve been a big joy to me, and you bore my tantrums like a brick. I’m sorry I struck you, Jimmy.’ She drew his head down and kissed the scar over his right eye.

‘There was another blow here.’ He touched his left cheek, and she kissed that too, but she was showing no sign of sentimentality. Her attitude was that of a good friend, and in this pose she was delightful, Jim thought.

‘We are certain to meet again, Joy,’ he said. ’If ever I could do anything for you, would you ask me?’

She looked into his eyes for a moment. ‘Yes,’ she answered, ’before anyone else in the world.’

’That’s good. You’re one of the best, Joy. We go to Simpson’s Ranges, but may find our way down to Ballarat in the course of a few months if things don’t pan out well.’

‘When you hear of anyone coming this way, you’ll send a message, Jim?’

They were interrupted by three or four diggers, and in the course of half an hour the tent filled. Aurora was very charming that night, very gracious, very like the Aurora who supervised their open-air tea the night of Lambert’s big speech, but less buoyant. Jim felt her soft touch upon him many times, and watched her with curiosity. She had retained this peculiar quality of provoking faint wonder. He felt that he had not known her thoroughly, and drifted into the building of the suitable future for her with many ‘ifs’ and ‘buts.’

Page 118

‘I am going, Joy,’ he whispered later.

‘Not here,’ she said, taking his arm. ‘Outside.’

They passed out together, and stood by the big tree in which Mrs. Ben’s stock was hidden.

‘Good-bye!’ he said.

‘It’s hard!’ She put her hands upon his shoulders, and her voice trembled. ’I’ve been pretty badly in love, Jimmy. Remember that in kindness, Won’t you? It seems to excuse a good deal. It might even excuse a poor colleen makin’ the fool an’ all iv herself.’ The brogue sounded deeply pathetic. ‘A kiss,’ she whispered quickly. ’One of the old kisses, dear.’

As he bent down to her his cheek crushed a tear on hers, and he was touched deeply. The kiss was long and tender; as the kiss of a man for whom there was only one woman in the world, and she not the one being kissed, it was emphatically successful. It drew a deep sigh from poor Aurora, and thrilled Jim with not a little of the old rapture.

‘Good-bye!’ she said; but her fingers clung to him.

‘Good-bye!’ he repeated, taking her hands in his.

‘Have you the little heart of gold?’ she asked.

‘It’s here.’ He drew it from his pocket.

‘Give it back to me.’

He pressed it into her hand, kissed her cheek, and hurried away. Aurora stood for some minutes turning the nugget over and over in her fingers; then she moved to the shanty door and looked in, but turned away with a muttered exclamation, and went to the entrance of the back tent.

‘You’ll have to attend to those brutes in there,’ she said to Mary Kyley. ‘I’ve had as much as I can stand for one night.’ She threw herself upon her bed, and hid her face in the pillow.

‘Has he gone, dear?’ asked Mrs. Kyley, laying a big but gentle hand upon the girl.

Aurora nodded her bead in the pillow, and after looking at her in silence for a moment, Mary went in to attend to her customers, shaking her head sadly as she went. When she peeped into the back tent again an hour later Aurora still lay face downwards upon the bed.

‘Are you asleep, Aurora?’ whispered Mrs. Ben. ‘No!’ answered the girl fiercely. ‘For God’s sake, don’t bother me!’

Mrs. Ben went away again, sadder than before.

‘Oh, the men, the men!’ murmured the wise woman. ’To think of the good women wasted on them, and the chits they’re often wasted on!’

Jim Done enjoyed the tramp to Simpson’s Ranges. The weather was fine, the country was picturesque, and the company highly congenial. He liked the Peetrees better in his present mood, and his interest in the popular movement that was to culminate at Eureka was deepening daily. He had even addressed a small meeting of miners on the subject of the rights of the people, and he was no pusillanimous reformer. He declared the diggers had reached that point at which toleration meant meanness of spirit. The thought of civil war was appalling, but not so much so as the degradation of a nation in which the manhood plodded meekly under the whip, like driven cattle yoked to their load.

Page 119

The men carried small swags, having entrusted their tools and tents to teamsters, and, travelled quietly, taking four days to accomplish the journey. The route lay through trackless country. As yet few parties from Forest Creek had set out for Simpson's Ranges, and Jim and his friends encountered no other travellers until they were approaching the new rush, and then the road assumed the familiar characteristics, and the noisy, boisterous troops went gaily by. These might have been the identical men who tramped to Diamond Gully through the Black Forest, so much did they resemble the former in their joyousness and their wild exuberance of word and action, and in their manner of conveying their belongings too, and in their frank good-fellowship. But by this time Jim was an experienced Antipodean, and knew that in such circumstances men always behave much in the same way, and that dignity is the first oppressive observance to be abandoned immediately man breaks loose from the restraints of society. The novelty had gone from the rushes, but not the charm. The sight of the courageous, healthy, happy gold-seekers swinging by struck sympathetic chords in his own heart. He had kindred impulses, and was by far the most jubilant of his party, the Bush-bred Australians being the least demonstrative of all the men on the track.

On the morning of the fourth day Jim encountered a face he knew amongst a party of five travelling with a waggon.

'Hullo, Phil Ryan!' he said.

Phil advanced with a puzzled expression on his face, that presently gave way to a broad grin.

'The Hermit!' he cried, and, seizing Jim's hand, he shook it with effusive heartiness. One might think he had occasion to remember Done for many kindnesses, whereas the ignominious beating the Hermit had given him on the Francis Cadman was all he had to be grateful for.

'I've given up trying to be a hermit,' said Jim. 'There was nothing in it.'

'Begor, I'm that glad!' said Phil, and he certainly looked radiant. 'But you're th' changed man, Done. I hardly knew you wid th' amiable shmile. Have things been goin' rare an' good?'

'They have, Ryan. I'm a made man.' Jim meant the expression to be taken in a spiritual rather than a pecuniary sense.

It's hearin',' said Phil. 'My soul, but it's th' great land, man! I've had more gold through me hands these twelve munts than I iver dramed iv before. But it don't shtick,' he added ruefully, glancing at his horny palms.

'And the others—have you heard of them?'

‘We broke up into twos an’ twos whin we come near Geelong, fer fear iv being nailed by th’ police fer disertion. Jorgensen’s made his pile over be Buniyong; an’ Tommy th’ Tit —him what seconded me in th’ bit iv a contention we had aboard—have been rootin’ out nuggets be th’ tubful at Ballarat, an’ talkin’ fight and devilment t’ th’ min iv nights in th’ intherests iv peace an’ humanity an’ good gover’mint. Be th’ same token, there’s goin’ t’ be no ind iv sin an’ throuble down there, an’ I’d be sorry to be missin’ it.’

Page 120

‘He’s no true digger who’ll stand out when the time comes, Ryan.’

‘Thrue fer you, man. Och! it’s a lovely land fer a gravyince, an’ I’ll niver lave it.’ He looked Jim up and down again. ‘It’s put th’ good heart in you, Done.’ Jim nodded smilingly. ‘D’ye be hearin’ iv th’ little lady from off the ship?’ continued Phil, as if following a natural sequence.

‘Yes,’ answered Jim, his cheeks warming a little. ’She is with Mrs. Macdougal at Boobyalla, just beyond Jim Crow, and is well and cheerful.’

‘Good agin!’ Ryan sighed heavily as he resumed his swag. ‘It’s th’ on’y thing I’m lamentin’ here, th’ mighty scarcity iv fine wimmin,’ he said.

‘They’ll be bringing them out by the ship-load presently, old man.’

‘Th’ sooner th’ quicker. Manewhoile I haven’t seen th’ taste iv one fer sivin munts. So long to you! We’ll be meetin’ on the new rush?’

‘Yes. So long and good luck!’

Phil hastened on to overtake his mates, and Jim, looking after him, wondered that he had ever been anything but good friends with this man, whose lovable, ugly face radiated geniality as a diamond reflects light.

Simpson’s Ranges at first sight was a repetition of the other fields Jim had seen. The scene was one of intense excitement. No experience prepared the ordinary miner to take the possibilities of a new field in a philosophical spirit. The impetuosity, the bustling hurry, and the clamour that had so impressed him at Forest Creek were repeated here. Everywhere over a space of some fifty acres tents were being unfurled and carts and waggons unloaded in the midst of chaotic disorder. The feverish eagerness of new arrivals to peg out their claims on a rich lead accounted for much of the tumult. Those already in possession of golden holes were working like fiends to exhaust their present claims, and secure others before the land was pegged out all along the lead and the whizzing of windlasses and the monotonous cries of the workers added the usual character to the prevailing clamour.

Storekeepers who had dumped their stocks down in the open air were desperately busy, serving profane customers, or running up hasty structures over their goods. Newcomers were pouring in like visitors to a fair, shouting as they came, and of all the people Jim could see, Mike Burton and the Peetrees alone were prepared to take things calmly. For his own part, he had again proof of his susceptibility to the humours of the crowd; the excitement of the scene communicated itself to him; he wanted to add to the noise and the movement without acknowledging any sensible reason for doing so.

‘Me an’ Mike ‘ll get up the lead an’ spike a claim while you boys rig the tent,’ said Josh.

The mates had brought one tent to serve them, pending the arrival of their other belongings. It had been resolved that the five men should work on shares during their stay at Simpson's Ranges, and Mike and Peetree senior secured the land to which the party was entitled under its licenses.

Page 121

‘She’s well in on the lead all right,’ said Josh, commenting on their claim that evening after tea, ‘an’ if we don’t hit it rich I’m a Dutchman.’

Josh’s opinion proved correct in the main. Mike cut the wash-dirt on the following evening, and after sinking in it to the depth of two feet, washed a prospect that promised the party an excellent return for their labour. So far Jim Done had every reason to be grateful for his luck; and the diggers were nearly all implicit believers in luck; a faith they held to be justified by the scores of instances recited of good fortune following individuals through extraordinary conditions, when less favoured men all around them were not earning enough to satisfy the storekeepers.

Although the various Victorian rushes were much alike in general character, some peculiarity attached to each of them. Jim Crow was famous for its vigorous and varied rascality; Simpson’s Ranges became notorious as the most reckless gambling-field in the country. Card-playing was the recreation the diggers most indulged in here, if we except a decided penchant for Chow-baiting. Done found that already the gambling propensity had impressed itself on the lead, and the luckiest man on Simpson’s was a short, fat, complacent Yankee, who refused to handle pick or shovel because, as he said to Done, it might spoil his hand. Jim did not doubt that hands so slick in the manipulation of cards were worth all the care Mr. Levi Long devoted to them. Jim became rather interested in Long. The man was an amusing blackguard, and took the ‘gruellings’ that occasional manual lapses led him into with a placidity that amounted almost to quiet enjoyment, and tickled Done’s sense of humour immensely.

‘Man who drifts down the stream o’ life in a painted barge on the broad of his back among the Persian rugs, with a fat cigar in his teeth, an’ all his favourite drinks within reach, has gotter strike a snag now ’n agin,’ said Long. ‘The question’s just this—is it wuth it?’

‘I can’t understand why a tired man like you takes the trouble to shave,’ Jim said to him one night.

’Ever been tarred ‘n feathered in your busy career, Mr. Done?’ answered Long.

Never.’

’If you had you’d realize that the onpleasantest thing that kin happen to a man this side o’ the great hot finish is to get his chin whiskers full o’ tar. In my native town tarring the man you disagreed with was a favourite amusement.’

‘But there is no tar here.’

‘Well, no; but I guess this has become instinctive.’ He passed a hand over his fat, smooth face.

Chow-baiting was a later development. The Chinese and Mongolians came early to Victorian rushes, and remained long. They were never discoverers, never pioneers, but, following quickly upon the heels of the white prospectors, they frequently succeeded in securing the richest claims in the alluvial beds, and from the first they were hated with an instinctive racial hatred, that became inveterate when the whites found in Sin Fat a rival antagonistic in all his tastes and views, in most of his virtues, and in all his pet vices, bar one. The Chows were industrious diggers; they worked with ant-like assiduity from daylight to dark, and often long after that were to be seen at their holes, toiling by the light of lanterns.

Page 122

They had vices of their own, and not nice ones, but they gave way to only one of the amiable little social weaknesses in which the Europeans indulged, and displayed the overpowering passion for gambling that has since become characteristic of the China-men in all their Australian camps. They had no other amusement, and desired no leisure; they were squalid in their habits, and herded like animals; they were barren of aspirations, and their industry was brutish (though of a kind still belauded), since it left no leisure for humanizing exercises, no room for sweetness and light. They were law-abiding, but that was not a virtue to commend itself to the Victorian diggers at this date, and they were only law-abiding because of their slavish instincts and their lack of courageous attributes. The antipathy bred then survives in the third generation of Australians, but is less demonstrative now that laws have been enacted in accordance with the racial instinct.

The Pagans had secured a big stretch of the field close to the claim pegged out by Mike and Josh Peetree, and they were thought to have possession of the most profitable part of the alluvial deposit, but worked their claims with great caution, and were as secretive as so many mopokes, so that the whites really had no idea what their ground was like, excepting such as the experienced miners could gather from the general trend of the richer wash dirt. Extraordinary stories of the success of the Chinese were in circulation, and provoked strenuous profanity and exceeding bitterness in the Europeans, Particularly in those whose luck was not good. There was already talk of a white rising to drive the heathen from the field, and Done found his mates entirely in sympathy with the common sentiment; to him; also the Celestials became exceedingly repellent as he grew more familiar with their habits and manners, although he was opposed to making differences of race an excuse for wholesale robbery.

The Chinese camp was strictly apart from that of the whites, and there was no intercourse between the two parties, Levi Long being the only man who seemed attracted to the squalid huts into which the Mongolians packed themselves by some process mysterious to the Caucasian understanding. Men in whom gambling was an absorbing passion could never be wholly objectionable to a man of his peculiar principles; but he came back from his third visit to their camp with his hands sunk to the bottoms of his pockets and a troubled look on his smooth countenance.

‘They’ve sprung a new game on me down there,’ he said to a crowd in the shanty, nodding his head back. ’I thought I’d picked up something about it, an’ it’s cost me every bit o’ glitter I had on me to demonstrate to my entire satisfaction that I was quite wrong. I haven’t got a scale left. I’m feelin’ like a little boy who’s been tryin’ to teach his gran’ mother all about eggs.’

‘Fantan?’ said Burton.

‘Somethin’ o’ that character an’ complexion. Boys, I begin to think that p’r’aps after all we’re doin’ wrong in submittin’ to the encroachments o’ the alien.’

Page 123

Hear, hear!' shouted half a dozen voices.

'It strikes me that the inferior race that can skin Levi Long to his pelt in a gamble is providin' no fit associates for guileless an' confidin' children o' the Occident, like yourselves, f'r instance.'

Long's professional pride was hurt; the idea of being beaten at his own business by a pack of unlettered Asiatics made him sad. 'It kinder destroys a man's faith in himself he said. As a result of his eloquence the miners knotted windlass-ropes together, and stole down upon the Chinese camp in the small and early hours of morning. There were twenty men on each cable, and one lot kept to the right of the camp, the other to the left, and, going noiselessly, they dragged the ropes through the frail huts and kennels in which the Mongols were sleeping, mowing them down as if they had been houses of cards, and towing an occasional screaming Chow out of the ruins, rolled in his filthy bedding. The whole camp of huddled shanties was razed to the ground in about two minutes, and the diggers drew off, without having given any clue to the cause of the disaster, leaving the heathen raging in the darkness.

At about six o'clock Jim Done and his mates were awakened and brought pell-mell from their bunks by the sound of a great commotion coming from the direction of the Chinese camp. They saw the Chinamen gathered near the ruins of their dwellings, evidently in a state of tremendous excitement. A number of them were jumping about, gesticulating wildly, and uttering shrill cries, while half a dozen or so, armed with stout sticks, were energetically beating an object that lay upon the ground.

'By thunder! it's a man they're murdering!' cried Jim.

Mike and the Peetrees laughed aloud. 'Not a bit of it,' said Burton. 'They're only bastin' their Joss!'

'What's that?'

'They're beatin' their god. They keep a few of them little pottery or wooden gods round, an' if things don't go quite as well as they think they ought to go, they up an' take it out o' the god just then on the job, by knocking splinters off him.'

'They argue that Joss ain't been attendin' to his part o' the contract,' said Harry Peetree, 'an' they belt him for neglectin' his business. Saw a lot o' them blow up a big Joss at Bendigo 'cause their dirt was pannin' out badly.'

By this time the Europeans were all up and out, enjoying the spectacle, and Simpson's Ranges echoed their laughter, it being assumed that the Celestials' gods were being punished for the sins of those diggers who had wrecked the camp. Jim and Con joined a few curious men sauntering down to take a nearer view of the ceremony.

‘Wha’ for?’ Con asked one grave Chow who was looking on.

‘Welly much bad Joss!’ answered the Celestial composedly. ’Let um earth shake-shake, all sem this, knockum poo’ Chinaman’s house down.’

Page 124

A favourite way of tormenting the Chows was to rob them of their pigtails. A Mongolian's pride in his pigtail is very great, and his grief over the loss of it seems to be tinged with a superstitious fear. As soon as the diggers were made aware of this they vied with each other in reaving Sin Fat and hi brethren of their cherished adornments, and the rape of the lock was a daily occurrence at Simpson Ranges. No Red Indian was ever prouder of his trophy of scalps than the diggers were of their collection of tails, and the woe that fell upon the de spoiled Asiatics was most profound, but touched no sympathetic chords in the callous hearts of the miners.

It is not to be assumed that the Chows bore all their afflictions like lambs. They had methods of their own of getting even, and were efficient tent thieves, and peculiarly expert in the art of rifling tips, although this was not proved against them until the eleventh hour. They fought back on occasions, and one morning a big Californian was found near their claims, beaten almost to death. Evidently the digger had deserved his fate, and had been caught stealing wash-dirt from Sin Fat's tips; but his denials were readily and gladly accepted by the whites, and another excellent reason for demolishing the Chows was registered in the minds of the men.

Being up just after daybreak one morning, or not yet having gone to bunk, Levi Long was the unsuspected witness of acts of Chinese iniquity that brought about the climax of the anti-Chinese agitation. There was no water-supply at Simpson's Ranges, and the wash-dirt had to be carted four miles to the river at Carisbrook, to be puddled and washed. This morning the Chinamen were busy bright and early, carting their wash away; but the Celestials, always frugal, to save as much as possible the expense of drays, each carried two hide-bags of dirt suspended on a bamboo, and followed the loaded carts through the diggings with the peculiar trot they always adopted when bearing burdens. What Long noticed was that every now and again, when passing the tips on the claims of the Europeans, the sly Celestials dug their shovels into the wash-dirt, and threw a few shovelfuls on to their own loads or into the bags they carried. Keeping himself in concealment, Levi quietly awakened a few of the diggers, and drew their attention to what was going on. The Chinamen chattered noisily as they passed, and the movements of the crowd were evidently artfully designed to cover the depredations of the thieves.

Within a quarter of an hour every white man on the field knew what had been going on, and now the miners thought they understood the motive of the Chows in always carting their dirt away in the gray hours of morning, before the too-confiding Europeans were up and about. This was the last straw. A meeting was held very quietly, and, to Done's astonishment, his mate took an active part in the proceedings.

'The lepers have got to change their spots, I guess,' said Long. 'Is that understood, men?'

Page 125

‘You bet!’ answered a prominent digger, and the crowd uttered a unanimous ‘Hear, hear!’ that left no room for doubt.

‘Then, get ready!’ cried Mike. ’Every man get a pick-handle. There’s to be no killin’. We’ll drive ’em out like sheep. If the troopers interfere, unhorse them, an’ bolt the nags. Meet here again as quick’s you can.’

The miners scattered, and within half an hour the whole body of the white diggers marched upon the Chinamen remaining on the claims.

XVIII

The Chinese, most of whom were on the surface, viewed the approach of the enemy with great uneasiness, but did not anticipate the worst Evidently they trembled only for their tails, and a few took to their claims like startled rabbits. The others stood watching the advance, jabbering excitedly, with the volubility of so many monkeys.

‘Wha’ for? wha’ for?’ cried the foremost, when confronted by the Europeans.

‘This here’s an eviction, I reckon,’ drawled Long.

‘Go!’ said Burton, pointing threateningly.

‘Away with the lepers!’ yelled the men.

The Chows understood monosyllables, and began to expostulate in pigeon English.

‘Charge!’ cried Long, and the drive commenced in earnest.

Keeping a solid front, the whites drove the yellow men before them along the lead. Those below were dragged to the surface, and their movements were accelerated by prods from the pick and presently the whole mass was going at a run across the field, the Chinese in front, flying, as they thought, for their lives, the whites following, and the howls of the pursued and the yells of the pursuers united to make an uproar unprecedented on Simpson’s Ranges.

‘The troopers!’ The warning voices came from the left, and the full strength of the force on Simpson’s came riding gallantly from that direction, between white men and yellow.

’Pull ’em down!’ cried Mike, ‘but do no damage.’

‘Halt there!’ ordered the sergeant, rising in his stirrups, but the crowd took little account of him and his four gallant followers. It swarmed round them for a moment, plucked the

five men from their saddles, and passed on, leaving the troopers sprawling on the ground, and driving their horses before them with the terrified Celestials.

The chase continued all the way to Carisbrook, and for a mile or so beyond; but at the river, where the main body of Chinese was overtaken, there was a brief but vigorous fight. The Chinese used their shovels and sticks and stones, and what other weapons presented themselves, in defence of their property, and for about five minutes the hand-to-hand conflict raged with a rattle of pick-handles, a thud, thud, thud of busy clubs, oaths in good round English, and a squeaking and yelling in shrill Chinese, and then the Chows, overborne by numbers, backed, broke, and fled, and the hunt was continued. In two hours' time there was not a Chinaman in sight, and virtuous Europeans were busy washing the golden gravel left near the river, satisfying their consciences when they pinched that only even handed justice had been done in robbing the robbers.

Page 126

Five weeks passed before the Chinese went creeping back to Simpson's Ranges, and by this time the diggers were engrossed in more important affairs, and offered no serious opposition. It seemed that the trouble was rapidly coming to a head at Ballarat. Wearying of the effort to secure reform by peaceful agitation, the men were arming themselves as best they could. The lawful endeavours of the miners had resulted only in spurring their enemies to greater activity in oppression, and blundering and brutal officials had chosen the moment when the agitation was at its height to institute one of the most strenuous and tyrannical license-hunting expeditions that had been inflicted upon the miners of Ballarat. Diggers were brutally man-handled; in some cases their clothes were torn from their backs, in others they were insulted and beaten by the troopers. The hunt was manifestly an organized and deliberate effort to display the contempt officialdom felt for the men and their cause. Blood ran hotly; there were casual skirmishes between the people and the police, who, while serving as the zealous and willing instruments of oppression, offered the diggers absolutely no protection from the thieves and ruffians infesting the fields.

Arrangements had been made to convey the news of a general rising to the men at Simpson's Ranges in time to enable them to reach the disturbed centre before the outbreak of hostilities, and on a Friday morning, shortly after midnight, Jim Done, Mike Burton, and the three Peetrees set off together. They left their tents as they stood, and carrying only a blue blanket apiece and such arms as they possessed, started on their long tramp to Ballarat as gaily as if bent upon a pleasure excursion. They slept in the Bush on Friday night, and reached the Australian Eldorado on Saturday at about noon. Approaching the field from the north, they were bailed up on the edge of wide lagoon fringed with gum-trees and scrub by a party of men on horseback.

'Halt!' cried the leader.

'What's the matter now?' said Mike.

'I demand all arms and ammunition you may have about you.'

'Then I'm hanged if you'll get them!'

'For the use of the forces of the republic of Victoria,' continued the leader.

But we're goin' to join the rebels.'

'That's all right. You'll be given arms in the stockade. Peter Lalor has been elected chief of the insurgents. I have his warrant here for my action. Arms are badly needed. We can take no chances.'

The mates conferred, and after examining the warrant signed by the rebel leader, resolved to comply with the demand.

‘Has there been any fighting?’ asked Jim.

’A bit of a shindy with the swaddies in Warrenheip Gully, and an attack on the troopers at the Gravel Pits. Nothing really serious. The Imperial troops were drawn up under arms at our big meeting on Bakery Hill on the 29th. The flag has been floated, the men have taken the oath under it, and are now drilling within the stockade on Eureka.’

Page 127

‘We are none too soon.’

‘Not a moment.’

The five men had only their revolvers and a stock of cartridges; these they handed over to the emissary of the ‘republican forces,’ and continued their journey with eager feet, greatly elated. Ballarat was at this time the centre of the feverish interest the Victorian gold discoveries had excited throughout the world. Men were digging fortunes out of the prodigal earth with a turn of the hand. The Gravel Pits, Golden Point, Bakery Hill, Specimen Hill, Canadian Hill, White Hills, White Flat, and half a dozen other local rushes, were in the height of their amazing prosperity; economists were gravely considering the possibility of this tremendous output reducing gold to the status of a base metal, and Main Road seethed with life.

Done’s experiences on Forest Creek and at Jim Crow and Simpson’s Ranges had not prepared him for the stormy exuberance of Ballarat. This was the largest, most populous, and most prosperous of all the fields. In a little over two years’ time the population of a large town had overrun the Bush, swept the trees from the face of the earth, and had dug at and torn and tortured the wide fields till the landscape resembled a great cemetery where thousands of open graves yawned in advance of a mighty sacrifice. The work of devastation climbed up the hills, overthrowing them piece by piece, and through the debacle the sloven creeks, filled with yellow slurry, and thrown out of their natural courses a score of times by the ravishers, wound their painful way. Tents, glowing whitely under the bright sun, dotted the flats, and gathered into villages of canvas on the sides of the hills. Here and there a flag fluttered in the breeze, and men were everywhere—men remarkably alike in type, strong, bearded, sun burnt, their digger’s garb as monotonous as a uniform, but picturesque and easy. Evidently little work was going forward. The excitement of the revolt was at its height, a sense of the imminent climax was in the air, and the men were gathered in knots and meetings discussing the position.

As Jim and his friends came in by Specimen Hill, they saw bodies of troopers being moved as if in drill at the camp on their left. These operations were watched by hundreds of diggers. Further on they saw the massed red coats of swaddies, and heard the faint rattle of kettle-drums. The British flag floated over the camp. A mounted officer in crimson and gold passed them, riding at a gallop, and the sound of a gunshot struck upon their ears, a sharp note of war.

Main Road and Plank Road were well-defined streets of tents and stores. The great majority of the dwellings and places of business were of canvas still, but here and there a pretentious weatherboard hotel, iron-roofed, stood proudly eminent, luring the diggers with a flaring topical sign. Here again the way was crowded with blue-shirted men, smoking, talking, gesticulating, never a coat nor a petticoat amongst them. There were

a good many women in Ballarat in ‘54, but nearly all miners’ wives, little was seen of them where the men assembled. Jim noted yet again juvenile levity of the diggers.

Page 128

The situation was serious enough in all conscience, but the great majority of the miners refused to see it in that light. They had endured much; they felt that it was necessary to assert their rights as men, but the consciousness of their wrongs was borne down in a measure by the light-heartedness that follows great good fortune. Under the influence of a digger-drive or the stimulus of an impassioned speech they could feel keenly; but the sun shone upon them, the virgin gold glowed in their hands, the riot of devil-me-care existence, unchecked by social restraints, called them, and bitterness could not live in their hearts. They danced, and sang, and roared, and were glad, who two or three hours earlier might have offered their lives freely to avenge a slight or to mark their sense of a gross injustice.

Jim and his friends were served with a rough dinner at one of the hotels. The waiter, an old Frenchman, told them that bands sent out by the insurgent leader were taking levies on all hands.

‘Some gather at Eureka. Ze fight mus’ be soon,’ he said; ’but ze crowd—ah, zey laugh, zey drink, zey dance wis ze fiddle, zey will not believe! Et ces a great pity, but zey haff not ze—what, ah?—ze experience.’

‘Are many coming in from the other fields?’ asked Jim.

The Frenchman shook his head. ’Et ees expect zey will come; but the men say always, “Oh, et will go over!” Ze soldier say not so: they are ver’ bitter. My friend, the blow come soon; I go to the army of the republic this to-night.’

‘The men are rolling up all right,’ said a digger at another table. ’They’re rallying them at Creswick again, and on the other fields. We’ll have an army of thousands in a week.’

‘A week!’ cried the waiter. ’My soul! in two day more et will all be up wiss ze republic, suppose zey are not here!’

‘That Frenchman’s an all-fired skite,’ said the digger disgustedly. ’The swaddies don’t like the job: they won’t strike. We’ll have the making of the fight, and we’ll call time when it suits us.’

‘All the same,’ commented Mike later, ’the Frenchman’s got the safest grip o’ things, it seems to me.’

In the streets the watchword of the most serious of the diggers was ’Roll up!’ and the friends heard it passing from lip to lip. They did not lack company on their way to Eureka, but Done experienced a keen disappointment in the absence of deep and genuine emotion amongst the main body of the men. The popular impression was that there would be no fighting; it was thought that the demonstration Lalor and his men were making would have the effect of bringing the powers to reason, and this opinion

was held in spite of past bitter experience of the stupid immobility of the Legislative Council in Melbourne.

The five friends were challenged at the stockade, and on expressing their wish to be enlisted were marched before an officer of the rebel forces and sworn in. Standing under the blue Australian flag, with its five silver stars, they took Peter Lalor's oath: 'We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties.'

Page 129

There was really no stockade in the military sense. The enclosure was little more than a drill-ground fenced with rough slabs. These slabs, a few logs, and two or three drays, represented all that had been attempted in the nature of a barricade, and could not have been expected by the least experienced of the insurgent leaders to offer any serious impediment to a charge of regulars. Two or three small companies of men were being drilled within the limited space, and Done and Burton were attached to one of these and the three Peetrees to another. At this point Jim was again sadly disillusioned. He was given no weapon but a pike—a short, not too sharp, blade of iron secured to a pole about five feet long. Pikes were the only arms the men of his company possessed, and a blacksmith, who had his smithy within the stockade, was hard at work manufacturing the primitive weapons. One small company was armed with rifles, and another with pistols, but ammunition was so scarce that these could be of no great value in the event of an early attack.

Done estimated that there were about two hundred and fifty men within the stockade. He heard that there had been many more, but that the volunteers had returned to their camps on the surrounding fields to make further preparations, believing that there was no likelihood of an early encounter. There was much confusion on Eureka, and Jim could not see how the men were to benefit from the simple drill in which they were being instructed with great assiduity. The site chosen was an old mining ground, and the field was broken with holes and piles of dirt, rendering proper formation impossible; and although the leaders were serious and earnest men, the bulk of the rank and file preserved a spirit of careless levity, and were like big boys playing a game.

The rebel leader addressed the men during the afternoon, and Jim listened to him with deep interest. Peter Lalor was a young Irishman, not yet thirty-five, not far short of six feet in height, and splendidly proportioned; keen-eyed, too, with regular features and a resolute, convincing air. There was a note of domination in the man's character, and he was certainly the strongest personality in the republican movement. He pleaded for zeal in the sacred cause for which they might presently be called upon to shed their hearts' blood, and although his language was as simple as the diggers' speech, there was a warmth in his manner that stirred the men, and a whole-hearted conviction pointed every phrase; but even while his rebels were gathered under arms and drilling behind a palisade within a short distance of the regular troops sent to suppress the expected out break on Ballarat, Lalor did not expect the authorities to take the initiative.

Page 130

As night fell fires were lit within the stockade. A slaughtered bullock lay on its skin, near the smithy, and from this the rebels who remained on Eureka cut steaks, and they cooked their own rough meal. It was Saturday, and a number of the diggers left the encampment to participate in the gaieties peculiar to the evening in the Main Road dancing-booths and in the pubs and shanty bars. As yet, so backward were the preparations, there was only the feeblest attempt at military discipline in the stockade, and the password was common property. A few zealous recruits continued their drilling by the light of the fires, and the smith toiled nobly at his pikes. His hammer rang a spirited tattoo on the anvil till far into the Sunday morning, and he and his grimy but tireless boy helper made a dramatic picture against the night in the glow of their open forge. The rebels played and sang, and there was a little skylarking amongst the younger men; but Done and his companions, wearied by their long tramp and the drilling, had spread their blankets on the ground, and made themselves as comfortable as possible, Jim watching the antics of the rebels through half-closed eyes, the others smoking thoughtfully.

‘Well, ole man, what d’yer think of it?’ said Josh.

‘I don’t like it,’ answered Jim, feeling himself addressed.

‘Mus’ say there ain’t a very desperate air about the business so far.’

‘Why doesn’t Paisely attack?’ continued Done. ’He must know what’s going on here. There’s nothing to hinder him knowing as much of the rebels’ business as Lalor himself, so far as I can see. Why doesn’t he come on?’

‘You might join me in a little prayer that he won’t,’ said Mike. ’What sort o’ chance ‘re we goin’ to have if he drops in on us here with his mounted men?’

’Mighty poor, and you can bet the Colonel knows it. Unless he’s afraid of precipitating a general rising, he’ll charge down here and wipe this place out.’

‘If there should be any fightin’, gi’ me a call, won’t you?’ said Harry, with a yawn.

The others laughed and took the hint. Slowly the fires faded, and the encampment sank into stillness and silence, save for the slow movements of the sentinels and the clang of the smith’s hammer. The night had been warm, the early hours of Sunday morning were cold, but the men were all accustomed to camping in the open, and, huddling together, they slept soundly. The lights of Ballarat had flickered out; the whole field lay in darkness. The slow hours stole on, the sentinels were changed, and absolute quiet descended upon Eureka, for even the heroic blacksmith had stretched himself by his forge, and was sleeping, with the boy by his side.

‘The swaddies are on us!’

At about three o'clock that one fierce cry shook the camp into action. The men sprang from the ground; there was an almost simultaneous rush into position—the pikemen nearest the pickets, the rifle men to the left, the revolver corps to the right. It was a false alarm, but it gave Jim more confidence in the men, who had shown much better order than he had expected, and their promptness and determination pleased him.

Page 131

‘They’ll make a good fight of it when the swaddies do come,’ he said cheerfully, as they settled down in their blankets.

‘My oath!’ replied Mike. ’But we were chumps to give up our revolvers. What good can a man do pokin’ round in the dark with a blanky spike?’

The men lay with their primitive weapons in their hands. There was a little growling and cursing and once more the encampment was given over to sleep.

Jim Done awoke as the grayness of dawn was creeping through the night—awoke with an idea that he was sleeping under the gum-trees. There was a vague belief in his head that he and his mates were on the wallaby, but where they were going to, he was too sleepy to decide. A slight drizzle was falling, but he curled himself in his blanket, and disposed himself to sleep again. Then, with the shock of a heavy blow, he heard a sharp voice challenging. A gunshot followed.

This time there was no mistake. The men rushed to their positions, and the sudden confusion fell as suddenly into order. Jim found himself standing with his column, his pike grasped firmly in two hands, without quite realizing how it had come about that he was there. Mike was on his right; on his left was a little wild Irishman, and even in the intense excitement of that moment, when he could see the black line of infantry coming down upon them through the heavy dusk of early dawn, he marked the fierce, semi-conscious jabbering of the Paddy, with an inclination to laugh aloud.

‘Glory be, they’re comin’! they’re comin’! they’re comin’! Plaze the pigs, I’ll have wan! Jist wan ’ll satisfy me. Blessed saints, make it the wan that shot O’Keif! Och, they’re comin’, th’ darlin’s! Hit home, Tim Canty, an’ Holy Mary make it the wan that shot Barty O’Keif!’

Jim’s eyes were fixed upon the dark mass charging the stockade. The soldiers were now not more than sixty yards off, and he could see a horseman leading. He heard the order to charge, and heard Lalor’s sharp, stern reply. There followed a blast of rifles from the stockade, and the shadowy equestrian figure leading the Imperial infantry became blurred and broken in the dusk and the thin rain, and the riderless horse at the head of the column cantered on, and leapt into the stockade through the smoke.

‘First blood!’ muttered Mike, as the officer fell.

Finding the attack concentrated on one point of the stockade, Lalor gathered his handful of rifles here, and they met the charge of the regulars with another volley, checking their advance. A volley from the carbines replied, and the lead whistled into the stockade. A pikeman ran forward a few steps, plunged on his face at Jim’s feet, and lay still.

‘Holy Mother, if I can git wan iv them I’ll be content—almost!’ continued the little Irishman in his fierce monologue.

Page 132

‘Down, men! Take cover under the logs!’ said the captain of the pikes, and Done obeyed with the rest; and crouching there, hearing the cracking of the carbines, the terrible impatience of Canty began to work in his own blood. He felt himself to be utterly useless; his pike was impotent against the carbines of the enemy, and the lust of battle was in him. He burned for the stress of action, longed for the order to dash upon the enemy. It was difficult to repress the impatience that spurred him to jump to his feet, and, calling his mates to follow to throw himself against, the soldiers.

That wait under the logs seemed interminable, and meanwhile the riflemen within the stockade and the carbineers without exchanged several volleys, and in between there was an indecisive pattering of independent rifles, and Jim saw the vague figures of his comrades falling in the gloom, falling falteringly, without apparent motive. He could not connect the discharge of the guns with the dropping of the wounded: it was all so cold-blooded, so dispassionate.

‘They’re not comin’!’ cried Canty, whose frenzy would not permit of his keeping cover. ‘Why don’t they come on like min? God sind me wan—jist—’

He fell like a man whose legs had suddenly lost all power, and lay there, his face pressed to the moist earth, and Jim felt the dying man’s fingers moving upon his leg in a trifling way. Presently a hand clutched his own, and he was drawn down.

‘Are you hit badly, old man?’ said Done.

‘Mortal! I’m hit mortal bad!’ The hand clung desperately, and Jim peered into Canty’s face, and saw a smear of blood about his mouth. He was shot through the breast. ‘Mate,’ he said eagerly, ’kill wan fer me! Kill wan—if it’s only a little wan!’

‘I’ll do my best, old man.’

‘But one fer me, an’ fer the good man they murthered. Say “Take that for Barty O’Keif!” when you hit him.’

‘So help me God, I will!’

Jim placed Canty well under the cover of the logs, with his head pillowed on a clod.

‘Give me me pike here in the right hand. Good enough!’ He lay quite still now, and muttered no more, but Jim could see his bright eyes stirring in the semi-darkness.

The firing from without was maintained, but the swaddies were in no hurry to cover the patch of ground that lay between them and the stockade, although the insurgents had already almost exhausted their ammunition. Lalor sprang to the top of the barrier, and stood for a moment, turning as if to give an order, but the order was never spoken. A ball struck him, and he fell into the enclosure, severely wounded. The rebels had fought

bravely so far. While their powder lasted they beat off the well armed, well trained regulars, and for twenty minutes held the swaddies at bay across their poor palisade; but at the expiration of that time there were not two dozen charges left in the stockade, and now the riflemen were ordered to retreat to the shallow shafts and use them as pits; and presently the noble 40th finding the resistance broken, was tearing at the logs and pickets, and at last the pikemen were on their feet and face to face with the foe.

Page 133

The infantry poured into the stockade with fixed bayonets, and against their experience and their efficient weapons the insurgents made a poor show; but they fought stubbornly, if clumsily, and now Jim found himself fighting in grim earnest. He saw a big Lanky spring at him from the logs, with bayonet set stock to hip, and with a lucky twist of, his pole he beat down the other's weapon. But the long hafts of the pikes made them most unwieldy, and in the few seconds that followed Jim stood cheek-by-jowl with death. Suddenly his eyes encountered the face of Canty over the left shoulder of the swaddy. The little Irishman had pulled himself to his feet, his back was to the logs, his pike raised in his two hands. Lurching forward, he plunged the blade into the neck of the soldier. The Lanky's bayonet dropped from his hand, and he fell backwards. The haft of the pike striking the ground stopped him for a moment, and then he swung sideways and dropped on to his face; the pike remaining wedged in his spine, the shaft sprang into the air in a manner that was never after quite free of a suggestion of the hideously ludicrous in Jim's mind. Canty stared for a moment at his fallen enemy, and then, uttering a strange Irish cry of exultation, he fell back across the logs, never to stir again.

The fight at the logs was brief, but fierce. Finding the pikes useless for thrusting, many of the diggers clubbed them. Following this example, Jim swept a second soldier off his feet, and was laying about him with all his strength, when a cavalryman drove his horse at the stockade, and came over almost on top of him, slashing wildly right and left as he came. The soldier's sword struck Done on the left side of the head, inflicting a wound extending from the neck almost to the crown. Jim fell against the horse, clinging weakly to his pike, feeling the hot blood rolling down his neck. He saw the sword raised again, but at that instant a revolver flashed over his shoulder, and the mounted man dived forward, rolled on the neck of his horse, and slid slowly to the ground—dead. Jim turned and recognised the pale face of his brother in the dim light of morning, but at the same instant was struck again, and fell with a bullet in his shoulder.

Wat Ryder uttered a fierce oath, and sprang at the bridle of the riderless horse. With the rein over his arm, he knelt by Jim's side, and endeavoured to rouse him. The infantry were now all within the stockade, pressing forward, firing amongst the scattered insurgents and into the holes where the riflemen were, and the cavalry and mounted troopers were pursuing the rebels, cutting them down ruthlessly.

Ryder succeeded in getting Jim to his feet, and he clung limply to the horse's mane, only dimly conscious of what was happening.

'For God's sake, make an effort, Jim!' cried Ryder. 'Here, up with you, stranger! I'll give the boy a lift,' said an insurgent, suddenly appearing from a hiding-place amongst the logs.

Page 134

Ryder vaulted to the back of the horse, and, with the assistance of Levi Long, for it was the American who had intervened, soon had Jim in the saddle. A few blows from Long's pike started the nag, and Ryder rushed him blindly at the slabs of the stockade, and the powerful animal blundered through. A shot from an infantryman, intended for the riders, struck the charger, and he plunged forward, snorting with pain, and bolted madly across the broken ground of Eureka, and Ryder, clinging to the unconscious man with one arm, made no attempt to check or regulate their dangerous flight.

XIX

It was now almost day; the fighting was over. A smart shower had fallen during the struggle, and the wet pipeclay within the stockade was strewn with dead and wounded diggers, and along the line of attack taken by the three companies of infantry wounded and dead soldiers lay scattered, their red coats dotting the white ground with curious blotches of colour, the figures of the men still vague and indefinite in the mist and the feeble light of the dawning day. A wounded soldier near the logs writhed in his agony, with worm-like movements terrible to see. Confusion remained within the stockade. The killing was ended, but the prisoners were to be collected and guarded. Many of the insurgents had escaped, some by hiding in the claims, others by making a run for the surrounding diggings. A few brave friends who had hidden Peter Lalor under slabs sloped against a log succeeded in carrying the wounded leader away under the noses of the soldiers, and he escaped.

The fight had not lasted half an hour, and by the time the people of Ballarat fully realized what was happening it was too late to give help to the devoted few within the stockade; and the men gathered as near the miniature battlefield as they were permitted to go, with white faces, awed and penitent, many feeling the keenest pangs of remorse, knowing how bitterly the earnest souls had paid for their neglect.

One woman had made her way into the stockade within a few minutes of the firing of the last shot. She passed unnoticed in the confusion; her face was hidden in a shawl, and she went quickly amongst the fallen rebels. Some of the wounded men lay in puddles—these she helped; but it was evident that she was seeking someone she knew as she passed from one to another, peering into their faces, seeking to identify them in the feeble light.

This was Aurora Griffiths, and she was seeking Jim Done, cherishing an agonized hope that she might not find him. One wounded man dragged himself to a puddle to satisfy his craving for drink, and died with his face in the thick water; another, a mere boy, was sitting with his back to a log, staring with a puzzled expression at the gory fingers he had dipped in his wound. Presently, coming to a man lying face downward where the soldiers had broken through, Aurora uttered a sharp cry. The figure was familiar. Quickly she turned the face to, the light. It was pale and bloodless; the only

disfigurement was a small purple wound in a slight depression near the temple, but the man was dead.

Page 135

‘It’s Mike!’ murmured Aurora. She knelt in the mud; her trembling hand sought his heart. ‘Dead!’ she cried. She looked about her in terror, then, rising to her feet, she ran to others lying near. They were strangers. ‘Thank God!’ she cried—’ thank God!’ Aurora returned to Mike’s side, and, kneeling there, gazed upon him with streaming eyes. Burton’s face had assumed a Spartan dignity in death. ‘Poor, poor boy!’ she said, and with her fingers upon his eyelids she whispered a prayer for his soul. It was long since she had minded to pray for her own, but the dead are so helpless. They invite even the intercession of the faithless.

A soldier touched her on the shoulder.

‘You’ll have to get out of this, miss,’ he said. Glancing at the dead face, he corrected himself, and called her Mrs.

Aurora went with him. She looked closely at the prisoners as they passed, but Jim Done was not amongst them. Beyond the cordon of troopers she was liberated, and returned wearily to Mrs. Kyley’s tent, for the Kyleys had shifted their prosperous business to the vicinity of Bakery Hill a month before. At the tent-door she was met by Mary.

‘He is not amongst the dead, thank God!’ said Aurora, ’and he’s not with the prisoners. Jim is safe, but poor Mike Burton—’

‘Wounded, is he?’

‘Dead. Shot through the head.’

Mrs. Kyley threw up her hands. ‘My God!’ she said. ’The poor lad! Oh, Aurora, my dear girl, it’s a bad, bad business!’ The tears were trickling down Mrs. Ben’s plump cheeks.

‘Why, Mary, what else has happened?’

Mrs. Kyley had set her large bulk before the girl, barring the door.

‘You’d better not go in yet awhile, Joy darling.’

‘What is it—is it Ben?’

‘No, no, it’s not Ben, but someone is in there who is hurt pretty badly.’

Somebody I know?’ Aurora clutched Mary Kyley’s arm, and stared into her face with a sudden new fear.

‘Yes, deary, somebody you know.’

It's Jim!'

Mary Kyley nodded her bead, and mopped her tears. 'Yes, it's Jimmy Done.'

Aurora paled to her eyes, her lips tightened to thin purple lines across her white teeth, and she fought with Mary for a moment, seeking to make her way into the tent; but Mrs. Kyley was a powerful woman, and in her grasp, when she was really determined, Aurora was as a mere child.

'For God's sake, let me see him!' said the young woman.

'You mustn't be a fool, Aurora,' the washerwoman said firmly. 'I can't let you go blundering in on to a sick man—and this one is a very sick man.'

'He's dying!'

'No, no; he'll not die easily—he's tough stuff; but he's got two ugly wounds, and we'll have to handle him fine and gently. Pull yourself up, Aurora dear.' She wound her strong arms fondly about the girl and kissed her cheek, and, with a restraining arm still about her, led her into the tent.

Page 136

Jim Done lay on Mary Kyley's comfortable white bed. His face was ghastly. Aurora uttered a little cry of pain and terror at the sight of him. There was blood upon the sheets and the pillows, and Wat Ryder, working in his shirt-sleeves, was deftly closing a gaping scalp wound with horsehair stitches.

Ryder had carried Jim straight to Kyley's tent, and Mrs. Ben received the wounded man with open arms.

'We may be followed,' he said. 'I've brought him out of the thick of it. Keep watch, please, and give me warning if you see anything of the troopers. May I use your bed?'

'My bed! Yes, and my blood and bones if they're any good to you.'

'Your eyes can do me better service. I'm a done man if the police lay a hand on me, and Jim here needs attention.'

'Then, go to work with an easy mind.'

So Mary kept watch while Ryder worked over Jim with the quickness and decision of a surgeon. It was not the first time by many that he had dealt with ugly wounds.

'Don't neglect the watch,' he said, a minute after Aurora's entrance.

Mary looked at Aurora. The girl was now apparently quite composed; she had cast aside the shawl, and was hastily tying on an apron. So Mrs. Kyley slipped out again, quite reassured.

'It would be better, perhaps, if I held his head,' said Aurora.

'Yes,' answered Ryder shortly.

She seated herself on the bed, and took Done's head between her hands, raising it, and Ryder continued his work rapidly. No further words were spoken till the scalp wound was stitched, and Aurora, gazing into the seemingly lifeless face of the patient, had a strange feeling of insensibility, as if all her emotions were numbed for the time. There was not a tremor in her fingers; she felt that under the influence that possessed her she could have suffered any trial without a cry.

'Now hunt up anything that will do for bandages,' said the man.

She lowered Jim's head gently to the pillow again, and made haste to obey, while Ryder examined the bullet-wound. He showed her how to tear the material, and then bandaged the patient's head.

‘I was assistant in a hospital for a time,’ he said, in explanation of his masterly work, but he did not say that it was a gaol hospital in which he had gathered his experience.

Aurora watched the man’s hands. They were extraordinary hands, long and very narrow—wonderfully capable they seemed. They inspired her with complete faith. He was feeling for the ball in Jim’s shoulder. She helped him to turn the young man upon his face, and the slim, dexterous fingers probed the flesh above the shoulder-blades.

‘Ah!’ he said, with a sigh of relief; and taking his knife, he cut boldly, and, behold—the bullet! It was like a feat of legerdemain. This cut was washed with fluid from a small bottle on the table, smartly stitched, and then, after the wound in front had been treated, the shoulder was firmly bandaged, and Ryder seemed satisfied. He was none too soon, for at that moment Mary Kyley darted in.

Page 137

‘Half a dozen troopers are coming along the hill,’ she said.

‘Bluff them!’ said Ryder quickly. ’If they insist on searching, swear the boy was hurt at a blast. Cover his shoulders. Show no surprise in any alteration in my appearance. I am a customer.’ ’He snatched his coat and revolver, and sprang into the next tent.’

At that moment the sound of horses’ hoofs was heard on the gravel, and a voice cried ‘Halt!’ Mrs. Kyley’s broad figure filled the doorway.

’How many of those blackguard rebels are you hiding in your tent, Mother Kyley?’ said the sergeant.

’Is that you, Sergeant Wallis? Was there ever so attentive an admirer? You’d follow me to the world’s end for the love you have of me. I’ve a dozen rebels inside. Come and be introduced.’

A tall bearded digger with a loaf of bread under his arm had slouched from the business tent, and stood watching the scene with incurious eyes.

‘Who the devil are you, and where did you spend last night, my man?’ said the trooper.

’I’m a party by the name of Smith, Ephraim Smith—called Eph. I spent last night in my bunk, bein’ too damn drunk to join the boys down there, worse luck!’

‘Your license, Mr. Ephraim Smith.’

The license was handed up, and found correct. ’You had too much discretion to burn your license with the rest of the seditious blackguards, at any rate, Mr. Smith.’

As it happens.’

‘And your ruffianly husband, Mrs. Kyley?’

‘I haven’t such a thing about me; but if you mean Ben Kyley,’ said Mary, ’come down in your private capacity, sergeant, and put the question to him in the same gentlemanly way. I’ll hold your coat and see you get fair play, if I have to referee the argument myself.’

‘Where is Kyley, you harridan?’

’He went out an hour ago to watch the murder and manslaughter going on down at Eureka, Sergeant Wallis, and if you miscall me again, you Vandemonian pig-stealer, I’ll drag you from your horse and drown you in a tub of suds!’

Wallis struck his horse with his open hand, and rode away, followed by his men, laughing back at the seemingly furious Mrs. Kyley, whose assumed anger, however, suddenly gave place to a broad grin as they passed from sight, and she winked a mischievous aside at the bearded digger.

‘My oath, but that’s a beautiful beard you have,’ she said. ’I’ve a mind to see how it would suit me.’

’Get a doctor to Done as quickly as you can. There are several among the diggers who’ll stand by you,’ said Ryder, disregarding Mary’s levity. ‘You’ll look after him? You can draw on me for money to any amount.’

‘I’ll look after the poor boy, and I won’t draw on you for a sixpence.’

‘He’s with good friends, I know.’

’He is. There’s a girl in there who would work the fingers off her two hands to serve him.’

’I will call again when I can, and as often as I can, but I’m in no little danger myself.

Page 138

I understand. You were one of Lalor's men.' Ryder nodded. That idea would suit him very well.

Then, if it wasn't that I love the boy in there, I'd do it for your sake as a good man and true,' continued Mary.

Ryder gave a few directions as to the treatment of the patient and then turned and sauntered away, carrying the loaf under his arm. Mary reentered the tent, and found Aurora, very pale but apparently quite calm, busying herself about the patient. She had removed all the blood articles, and they lay in a heap on the floor. These Mrs. Kyley would have gathered up, but the girl interfered.

'No, no,' she said, 'leave it to me—leave it all to me! I must work—I must be busy! If I stopped now my heart would break. Look at him!'

'My God! it is very like death,' whispered Mrs. Kyley.

It was not easy to get a doctor in Ballarat that day. Ben was entrusted with the mission, and warned to proceed cautiously. He found the doctors in urgent demand. There were wounded men hidden away in many places, and the authorities had obtained a monopoly of the services of the practising physicians. At ten o'clock that night Ben led a young Scotchman named Clusky in triumph to the tent. Clusky had qualified but gold on the rushes had proved more attractive than the wearisome hunt for fees in a Scottish villages and on Ballarat Dr. Clusky was a working miner.

'He's the third to-day,' Clusky said to Mary, 'and the worst—by far the worst. No fool did that, though,' he continued, referring to the bandaging of the shoulder, as he rapidly removed the linen. 'The damage is not so very great here, after all,' he said a moment later; 'but there's no blood to spare left in his veins, poor devil!'

The doctor refused to interfere with Ryder's stitching in the scalp wound, and gave a long prescription and much advice, and Jim was left to the tender mercies of Aurora, Mary, and Ben. Ryder called every night for a week, and then, having received a favourable verdict from the doctor, disappeared, his disappearance being satisfactorily accounted for by the earnest inquiries of a police officer who called upon Ben a few days later. Meantime, Harry Peetree, who had remained in Ballarat to try and discover the whereabouts of Jim and Mike, hunted the Kyleys out, and learned the truth. He left a message for Jim, and then followed his father and brother, who had made for Simpson's Ranges again immediately after their escape from the stockade. But ere this, and long before Jim Done was again conscious of the world about him, poor Mike Burton had been buried with the rest of the slain insurgents in a common grave.

Page 139

Fever supervened on Jim Done's injuries, and December passed as he lay helpless in Mary Kyley's tent, babbling of Chisley, of life on the Francis Cadman, and of Diamond Gully and Boobyalla. The injury to his head proved the most serious wound, and there were moments when despair filled the heart of Aurora; but she nursed him with a devotion that overlooked nothing, and Mrs. Kyley, and Ben, and the business were all sacrificed to the patient's needs. Mrs. Kyley and Ben made the sacrifice gladly, the former because of the big soft heart she hid under her formidable bulk, and Ben because gall and wormwood were sweet compared with the bitterness he felt in being one of the many whose neglect had contributed to the sacrifice of the rebels in the stockade. Business was practically suspended in the shanty while Done lay in the adjoining tent, only peaceful drinkers being permitted to refresh themselves with Mary's wonderful rum. Mrs. Ben, too, was indefatigable in her care of the wounded man; but Aurora was jealous of her labour of love, and Mary was sometimes compelled to force her to take rest, and to go out in the open air and make some effort to drive the pallor from her cheeks.

Aurora's beauty was entirely the beauty of perfect health and fine vitality; under the influence of her long labours and the wearing anxiety she endured her good looks faded. She was apparently years older than she had seemed a month before.

'Your prettiness is all dying out of you, dear,' said Mary; 'you must rest yourself, you must go into the air and let the roses freshen again, or the boy won't look at you when he wakes.'

''Twill all come back fast enough when he is well,' Aurora would answer; and it was into her pale face that Jim gazed with a long look of childlike gravity when he opened his eyes to consciousness. She detected the light of reason in his gaze, and her fingers clasped his hand. From her face his eyes went slowly round the apartment, lingering with an intent look on familiar objects, and then they went to the roof, and for fully twenty minutes he watched the glowing patch where a sunbeam struck the canvas cover, and there was in his face something of the wonder of a creature born into a new world. Aurora was very grave: she did not smile, her heart felt no elation—it was numb and old. Jim had a perplexing sensation of feathery lightness; he felt like a frail snowflake in an unsubstantial world. The bed under him was a bed of gossamer, if not wholly visionary. He might fall through at any moment, and if he did he might go on falling endlessly, a pinch of down in a bottomless abyss. He tried to close his fingers on Aurora's strong hand. He knew she was there, and she was real, substantial, although something of the wanness of this mysterious world was about her.

'Joy,' he whispered. She bent her head to him. 'Where—what—' He relapsed with a sigh. After all, it did not matter.

'You have been very ill, Jimmy,' she said.

Page 140

His eyes moved to her face again, and he tried to nod, but found that that was too much trouble too. It was too much trouble to pretend to understand even. Aurora would hold him and prevent his floating out into the fantastical, fairy atmosphere. It seemed right and natural that she should be there. He had quite expected it. But had he? The train of thought was too laborious: he abandoned it. Joy gave him something to drink. She poured it into his mouth, and it ran down his throat. It was good, wonderfully good—-nectar, surely. Had he been told it was water he would have resented the lie with as much energy as he was capable of putting into any thought, and that was just the thin, silken line, next to none at all. As a matter of fact, Joy had given him nothing but water. It seemed to add to his weight, to give some little quality of substance to his being. He thought he might thank her with a pressure of his fingers presently, but the necessary power did not come, and he drifted into sleep.

XX

The Christmas of 1854 was the gayest ever known at Boobyalla; never had Mrs. Donald Macdougal been so prodigal, never had such lavish hospitality been dispensed under Macdougal's roof-tree, and the squatter wore a dour and anxious look as he saw the liquor flowing, and heard the music, and the laughter, and the clatter of dishes, and found himself in collision with his wife's guests in all the passages and windings of his large, wandering homestead. Macdougal, who, in addition to his sobriquet of Monkey Mack, was known as Old Dint-the-Tin by the sundowners, shearers, and miscellaneous swagmen to whom he sold pints of flour out of a pannikin dinted in to shorten the measure, was not miserly in his dealings with his wife and his children. He was reputed to be mean enough to steal the buttons off a shepherd's shirt for his own use, and yet permitted his wife to indulge in all the extravagances of purple and fine linen, and paid, if not cheerfully—for it was not in his nature to be cheerful over anything—at least without open complaint, for social indulgences that ate up a large part of the results of his miraculous economies in station management, and a sedulous penuriousness in everything beyond his wife, his children, and his few favourite horses.

But on this occasion Mrs. Macdougal had outdone herself, and had exceeded all her previous efforts to shine as a generous hostess. Her aim had been to make Boobyalla the centre of attraction for thirty miles round throughout the merry Yuletide, and for nearly two weeks Donald had gone about with an air of lively trepidation, due to an idea that he was being brought precipitately to ruin by all this wasteful and ridiculous excess. When Mrs. Macdougal's guests came upon her lord and master laboriously casting up sums with a stab of carpenter's pencil on bits of waste-paper, or smooth chips, or even on the walls, they understood perfectly that he was satisfying himself, with accurate calculations, that the shameful increase in the household expenses their presence entailed had not dragged him over the jealously guarded margin between income and expenditure.

Page 141

Mrs. Macdougal's guests did not mind Macdougal in the least, however; the eccentricities of Old Dint-the-Tin were well known to the neighbouring squatters, and from their point of view, as visitors at Boobyalla on pleasure bent, he did not count. They bumped against him in the dark passages of his absurdly disjointed house, and found him on occasions in the drawing-room and the dining-room, but nothing was done or left undone out of consideration for his feelings. If they were content to talk about sheep and cattle, he would converse with them, and he was even capable of enthusiasm on the subject of horses, but evidently had no interests apart from these matters. Nobody outside the family circle had known him to address more than half a dozen words to his wife at one time, and his average remark contained one monosyllable. He behaved a good deal like a stranger towards his own children. Occasionally he went so far as to place a hand on a curly head, with an uncouth show of interest, or to say a few words of kindness; but it was done diffidently, and a close observer might have detected in the man a sensitive shrinking from the idea of bringing his misshapen figure and weird ugliness into contrast with the peculiar beauty of the youngsters. The only human creature about Boobyalla in whose company he seemed to be quite at home was Yarra, the half-caste aboriginal boy, scandalously reputed in the neighbourhood—not without excellent reason, it must be admitted—to be his own son.

We have seen Donald Macdougal, J.P., as he appeared in Melbourne, but that was on one of the few very special occasions when he condescended to 'dress up.' At home on Boobyalla his usual attire comprised a heavy pair of water-tights, old trousers, much the worse for wear more senses than one, hanging in great folds, a dark gray jumper tucked into the trousers, and a battered felt hat, pulled, after long service, into the shape of a limp cone. The only concession to 'company manners' Mack would make was in drawing on a despised black coat over his collarless jumper.

In addition to the peculiarities already mentioned, Donald Macdougal had an extraordinary trick of chewing his tongue, and a most disconcerting habit of allowing his trousers to drift down, wrinkle after wrinkle, till chance strangers fell into an agony of apprehension, and then suddenly recovering them with a with a convulsion of his body that was entirely instinctive.

And yet nobody with a pinch of brains ever made the mistake of supposing Donald Macdougal to be a fool. Old Dint-the-Tin was a wealthy man, and had made his fortune out of the land by exercising a shrewdness that was the envy of half the squatters in the colony, and had no apparent desire in life but to go on increasing that fortune in the same way, although there were some who credited him with a great if secret satisfaction in seeing his wife outdo the wives of his neighbours in the social graces, a satisfaction superior to the gratification he derived from adding to his great accumulation in the Bank of New South Wales.

Page 142

Mrs. Macdougal spent a merry Christmas, if not a New Year. She was extremely fond of company, particularly the company of young people, and that amiable trait was indulged to the utmost. She had drawn her guests from far and wide, and the most superior people amongst the 'squatocracy' had not hesitated to accept her invitations, although there were a few who in her absence occasionally referred to her as the cow-girl, to show they had no intention of forgetting the fact that she was once dairymaid to Mrs. Martin Cargill at Longabeena. But society at this stage could not very well afford to be punctilious in the matter of parentage and pedigree, and Mrs. Mack derived no little satisfaction from the mystery surrounding her birth. Her father had carried her to Longabeena, a child just able to toddle; he described himself as a widower, and asked for work, and it was given him, but a week later he disappeared, leaving little Marcia, and the Cargills never heard of him again.

This Mrs. Macdougal found ever so much nicer than having prosaic parents who could be produced at any moment; it left a wide field for the imagination, and Marcia was free to think herself a misplaced princess, or, at the very least, the daughter of a distressed earl. Naturally, being a sentimental soul, she provided herself with a sufficiently romantic history up to the moment of the disappearance of her nondescript papa; and if she could not substantiate it, there was much satisfaction in knowing that no body could disprove it. That she had been christened with an aristocratic and poetical name like Marcia she held to be convincing testimony of her inherent gentility.

Not a little of the extra merriment of Mrs. Macdougal's Christmas and the happiness of her New Year was due to the fortunate circumstance that she had a lion to present to her guests in the person of the Honourable Walter Ryder. It was Marcia herself who insisted upon giving Mr. Walter Ryder the title of quality; he merely implied that at the most he was a man of good family, eccentric enough to prefer the rough-and-ready Australian life to the methodical weariness of the social order 'at home'; and when his hostess laughingly insisted on not being deceived by his plebeian pretensions, he gallantly submitted.

'Give me what title you please, Mrs. Macdougal,' he said; 'you are my queen.'

Mr. Ryder had done Macdougal of Boobyalla a great service in rescuing him and his sovereigns from the revolver and the predatory fingers of Dan Coleman and one of his gang, and was always welcome to Boobyalla. To be sure, Macdougal was not to be expected to know how much Coleman had been paid for providing Walter Ryder with this opportunity of ingratiating himself with a prominent squatter, the proprietor of a large sheep-run. The Honourable Walter arrived at the station a week before Christmas, riding a fine gray horse, and carrying with him the paraphernalia of a gentleman. His clothing was cut in the latest possible London style, and he was splendidly equipped. He lamented the one thing Australia could not produce, a satisfactory valet.

Page 143

’My profound objection to democracy as a principle arises from the fact that the levelling process destroys our perfect valets,’ he told Mrs. Macdougal.

‘Oh yes, it does, does it not?’ she answered brightly. Possibly it was to provide for his deficiency in this respect that after a few days’ residence on Boobyalla Mr. Ryder was at no little expense and trouble to win the good graces of Yarra, the half-caste. Yarra was a remarkably clever tracker, and uncommonly cute for his years; but within a fortnight the new comer had secured so powerful an influence over him that the boy had confided to one of the gins:

‘That plurry pfeller good man him. Mine die alonga that pfeller!’ meaning that he would cheer fully have given his life for Ryder, which was a great deal, coming from the child of an undemonstrative race.

Yarra had been ordered by Mrs. Macdougal to consider himself Mr. Ryder’s servant during the latter’s stay at Boobyalla, and as there was always a danger of a man of the Honourable Walter’s inexperience being bushed if he rode alone, Yarra followed him on many of his long rides into the ranges, and helped him to explore the gorges and secret recesses of the heavily-timbered hills; but as a rule Mrs. Macdougal accompanied the Englishman, and then Yarra’s services were not required. On occasions Miss Lucy Woodrow made a third, riding a hardy little chestnut mare her mistress had placed at her disposal.

These parties were usually very merry, for Lucy had been transformed into quite a daring Bush-rider, and Mrs. Macdougal, accustomed to the use of many horses since her babyhood, could sit anything in reason with the ease with which she reclined in her invalid chair when her languishing mood was upon her; while Ryder, to repeat Monkey Mack’s compliment, rode ‘like a cattle thief.’

Ryder’s horsemanship and his interest in horses formed something like a bond of sympathy between him and his host, too. Macdougal never walked a hundred yards from his own door; he rode every where, and rode hard always. Mike Burton’s description of him was quite accurate in this respect. He no sooner got across a good horse, or behind one, than he seemed to become possessed with a sort of frenzy of speed, and rode and drove like a madman. He had killed many horses, and once a fine animal died under him, leaving him about fifty miles from home, with one pint in his water-bag and he was nearly dead himself when at length he succeeded in dragging his misshapen limbs to one of the huts on the run. When Ryder first saw Mack on a galloping horse he was reminded of a goat-riding monkey he had seen at a fair in his youth, and had a convulsive disposition to laughter; but he learned to respect the horseman who pushed a spirited animal through timber at a speed that an ordinary rider rarely indulged in on an open road.

Page 144

The Honourable Walter was at some little trouble to win the good graces of his host; he admired his horses with unaffected enthusiasm, particularly Wallaroo, the beautiful bay entire that had excited Mike's admiration, reputedly the fastest animal in the colony, and Macdougal's pride and joy. He even consented to be educated on the points of cattle, and to absorb useful information in homeopathic doses about the various breeds of sheep; but Mack never at any time seemed grateful to Ryder for his kindly condescension, and the affliction under the influence of which Mack indulged in strange and disconcerting gymnastics with his tongue rendered conversation with him something of an ordeal, even to a man of Ryder's insensitive character. Mack's tongue seemed to become too large for his mouth at times, and then he obtruded it, rolled it first in one cheek and then in the other, chewed it, and finished with an amazing gulp, implying that the troublesome organ was at length effectually disposed of.

'He's been like that as long as I've known him, and I met him first on the Liverpool Plains in New South twenty years ago,' said Martin Cargill of Longabeena to Ryder. 'He seems exactly the same man now as then.'

'Yet these little peculiarities did not make him impossible in the eyes of the fair,' answered Ryder. 'He has a charming wife.'

'Oh yes but he had heaps of gold.'

'Enough to gild that dome on his back!'

'And a girl had not many opportunities of picking and choosing in the Bush here ten years ago.'

'Besides, the sex is so compassionate, Mr. Cargill; the ladies love us for our imperfections.'

'Have you been dearly loved, Mr. Ryder?' asked an impudent Sydneyside girl of nineteen.

'No, no!' laughed Ryder; 'my opportunities have neglected me terribly!'

Conversation sometimes ran in this vein even at Boobyalla, and when it did Ryder was responsible for much confusion of thought. Conversation in the main dealt with riding-trips, dancing-parties, the stirring incidents of the goldfields, and that prolific subject in all societies and at all times—scandal. Mrs. Macdougal would have been thunderstruck to know that she and her British lion provided the choicest morsels for discussion for some days prior to the breaking up of the party.

The Honourable Walter Ryder had been a great social success; he had introduced an absolutely foreign element into the Bush party. His pose of the cynical, dashing, amiable aristocrat, with a cheerful contempt for all aristocratic pretensions, was

admirably sustained. His ready good-fellowship pleased the men; his good looks, his facility in adopting a deep interest in his companion for the moment, and his flow of spirits, delighted the women; and yet it not infrequently happened that his conversation was designed more for his own edification than for the entertainment of his hearers. It seemed to Lucy Woodrow that the man only half concealed a sort of mephistophelian contempt for the people towards whom he still contrived to maintain a semblance of cordiality.

Page 145

The interesting Englishman was certainly very attentive to Mrs. Macdougal, and Mrs. Macdougal was certainly very much flattered and disturbed by his attentions. The gossip that had sprung up, from which the principals, and Lucy, Mr. and Mrs. Cargill, and Macdougal alone were excluded, was, to some extent, founded on fact, and the guests left the house reluctantly, confident that interesting mischief was brewing at Boobyalla.

For all this, Ryder's attitude towards Marcia in the presence of her guests had been merely a piquant travesty of that of an adorer. He had offered her gallant homage with a humorous reservation. Perhaps he had reckoned on a keener sense of humour than the guests were possessed of. At any rate, they preferred to put a rather serious construction on all they saw. But Mrs. Macdougal alone had good reason for regarding her lion in a serious light; she alone saw him in his other guise, that of the passionate man whose passions burnt behind a cold face—pale as if with the pallor of a prison that could never leave it, handsome with a quality of suggestive beauty most certain to appeal to a simple, romantic woman. Already Walter Ryder had infused a new strain into Marcia Macdougal's character—terror, the terror that is akin to love, had endowed her with a womanly gravity. Though the other guests had been gone a fortnight or more, Ryder still remained at Boobyalla.

Lucy Woodrow was deeply interested in Ryder. He treated her as a comrade, an equal, and she could not help noticing the difference in his tone toward her and that he had adopted towards the others, nor could she help being flattered by the implied compliment. She was exempt from his raillery. All along he inferred that she understood him, and accepted his veneer of jocosity and insincerity at its true value.

'What a hypocrite you are!' she said one afternoon, as they rode in the shadow of the range. The children on their ponies were cantering ahead.

'I a hypocrite!' he exclaimed. 'Why, I have not pretended to a single virtue.'

'No,' she continued laughingly, 'you are a hypocrite of the other sort. You pretend to be cruel, and callous, and careless of all that's good—a cynic and a mocker. But I have found you out: you are really gentle and kind—an amiable hypocrite.'

'Miss Woodrow, you are taking my character away.'

'Pish! the disguise was too thin. Why, the children have penetrated it. So has poor Yarra. They love you! You are brave—you rescued Mr. Macdougal from the Bushrangers. You are generous—you do not try to make him appear contemptible because of his afflictions, as some of the others have done. You are gentle—I see it in your bearing towards the little ones. You are kind, and Yarra is devoted to you.'

'And yet I swear there are no wings under my coat.'

’Often, when looking at you, I wonder at your resemblance to Mr Done; and I wonder most when I find you expressing a vein of thought I believed to be peculiar to him. It makes me think that there is something in common between you, aside from your physical likeness, if only a common wrong, or a common sorrow, that has coloured your characters.’

Page 146

‘It is hard to hide anything from those divine eyes,’ he said gravely.

‘I have guessed rightly?’

’Believe me, if I ever make confession, it shall be to one quick in sympathy and merciful in judgment as you are.’ There was a strain of deep emotion in his voice, and as he reached towards her she gave him her hand, and he pressed her slender fingers gently and gratefully, continuing with feeling, and in the manner of one whose superior years gave him the privilege: ’Lucy, you are as good as you are beautiful, and in all sincerity I say I have never seen a woman one half as beautiful as you appear in my eyes at this moment.’

He had given the girl an impression that she was helping him, that her sympathy was precious. In her innocence she was deeply stirred, and yet glad at heart. She was silent for some minutes, and then said:

’Do you know, I think you sometimes underestimate Mrs. Macdougal’s sensibilities.’

‘In what manner?’

’I think you hurt her without being conscious of it. Her sense of humour is not keen, and I know she is pained when you least suspect it.’

A ghost of a smile stirred about Ryder’s mouth. ’I would not pain her for the world,’ he said. ’She is a kindly little woman, and her hospitality is charming; but you must admit she is droll. What are my faults?’

‘Forgive me if I seem to be treating you as a pupil.’

’There is no one on earth to whom I would rather go to school.

’Well, then, you must not laugh at Mrs. Macdougal.

’But, really, is one expected to take those extravagantly romantic poses seriously?’

‘They are meant seriously.’

’The eyes and sighs, the pensive melancholy, the little maladies, the mysterious missing family? You must not tell me this is not burlesque.’

’I am sure you know it is not. Mrs. Macdougal has dreamed so much rubbish, and read so much more, that all this humbug has become part of her nature, and one has to be a bit of a humbug one’s self and humour her out of kindness In her girlhood there was no escape from the loneliness and stupidity of the Bush but in dreams.

‘My manners have been abominable. I shall mind them now.’

The evening of that day was spent in the garden before the homestead. The day had been hot—there had been Bush-fires. The smoke hung about, and the big moon floated like a great round blood-red kite above the range. Ryder was sitting by Mrs. Macdougal on the garden-seat; Lucy played with the children on the grass till it was their bed time, when the three romped indoors together. Mrs. Macdougal turned her eyes upon Ryder timidly, expecting the usual change in his demeanour. She had used all her little arts on this man—the foolish, simple devices with which she had bewitched the captain of the Francis Cadman, and with no more guile in her soul. Suddenly she discovered the danger, but not before he had turned her comedy into a tragedy. He overawed her, dominated her; she dreaded him, and yet adored him as a splendid hero of romance.

Page 147

He moved nearer into the shadow of the honey suckle and seized her hand.

‘Marcia,’ he said in a low voice, ’I can pretend no longer. I am sick of the farce of treating you as a child before these people, while all the time my heart hungers for you. I love you, Marcia!’

‘For pity’s sake—for pity’s sake!’ she said, struggling weakly.

’You know I love you. You have known it all along. Oh, my queen, how could I help loving you—a rose in this wilderness? Marcia, Marcia, love me! By God, you shall!’ He kissed her again and again.

She ceased struggling. ‘I do love you,’ she said. ’I don’t care—I don’t care; I love you! Oh, how can I help myself? I have been mad, but I love you! I don’t care; I love you!’

XXI

It was February, and the Honourable Walter Ryder lingered at the homestead. He had broached to Macdougal an intention of buying the whole of the next season’s wool-clip at Boobyalla, and carrying it back to England with him. He thought it might be a profitable investment. He had talked of going, but was pressed to stay; and meanwhile the change in Mrs. Macdougal was so marked that Lucy had often commented on it to Ryder. A real romance had come into Marcia’s life—a terrible one, she thought it—and her poor little foolish dreams were swept away. They had been innocent enough, those fanciful imaginings of hers, and had given her some joy. This reality filled her with agonies of apprehension. She was never free of terror, and found herself studying her husband’s impassive face, wondering what was behind those dull eyes, fearing the worst always.

Ryder had been most attentive to Lucy Woodrow during the last two or three weeks. He accompanied her and the children on their daily ride, and he had taught Lucy to shoot with both fowling-piece and revolver. She was a good pupil, and enjoyed the sport. Her facility gave her a peculiar pleasure that was sweetened by his praise. He still greeted her with studied deference, and in his transient moments of melancholy he spoke feelingly of a life’s sorrow.

‘There was a wound I thought would never heal,’ he told her one day; ’but the pain is gone—the memory will go. What cannot a good woman do with the life of a man? But how few of us learn the potency of these sweet and tender hands until perhaps it is too late!’ He bent over her hand, and, turning away, left her abruptly.

Marcia noticed his marked attentions to Lucy, and complained tremblingly and with tears.

‘Nonsense!’ he said; ’there is nothing in it. It is to divert suspicion. I want the people about to think it is Miss Woodrow I love. They must never know it is you, my queen!’ He kissed her cheek. ’And you need have no fear, Marcia. She is devoted to that man Done.’

But at length Ryder announced his intention of leaving. He could put off his departure no longer than a week, he told Marcia, and a few minutes later conveyed the news to Lucy. He was sitting in one of the windows when she came on to the veranda.

Page 148

‘Have they told you I am leaving?’ he asked abruptly.

‘Leaving!’ She was about to take a book from the small table, but did not do so. She turned from him, and stood with face averted, plucking at the vine tendrils. ‘At once?’ she asked.

‘Almost. I fear I have outstayed my welcome.’

‘That is hardly fair.’

‘True, you have been very, very kind. I can never forget your goodness.’

‘You owe me no gratitude. After all, I am only governess here.’

’I owe you more than anyone else—I owe you the happiness Boobyalla could never have given me without you.’

‘You have not told me when you leave.’

‘In a week.’

‘A week! Oh, that is quite a long time!’ Her voice had become stronger, and she passed down the steps and along the garden walk to the children without having turned her face to him. It seemed that she could not trust herself.

He watched her closely, pressing his lower lip between finger and thumb, and a mirthless smile curled the corners of his mouth.

To Marcia’s great surprise, her husband insisted on her arranging another party in honour of their guest, and to give their neighbours an opportunity of bidding him good-bye. To be sure, nothing like the Christmas gathering could be attempted, but the Cargills and two or three other families living within twenty miles were to be invited, and Yarra and Bob Hooke were despatched with the invitations. Hooke had been a shepherd at the five-mile hut till within three days, when a new hand Mack had employed was sent to take his place, and now Bob was acting rouse-about. Ryder had heard of this new hand as a man of atrocious ugliness—in fact, the man had been sent away, Marcia said, because the children were frightened half out of their wits at the sight of him.

Lucy received a letter from Jim Done on the afternoon of the day on which Ryder announced his impending departure. The letter was not a long one, and it lacked the cheerfulness that had characterized Jim’s previous letters to Lucy. It told of Burton’s death, of his own injuries and his long sickness, and of Ryder’s gallant conduct. He was now almost recovered, he said, and by the time she received his letter would be back at Jim Crow with the Peetrees, who had returned and pegged out claims on Blanket Flat,

having failed to do anything for themselves at Simpson's Ranges. Jim admitted that his mate's death had been a heavy blow. 'I had not realized how strong our friendship was,' he wrote. 'He was the best man I have known, and I do not think it probable I shall ever make such another friend.' Done concluded with a fervent wish that he might see her soon. There was the melancholy and the weakness of an invalid in the letter, and it disturbed Lucy greatly. She recalled, with a poignant sense of remorse, how little he had been in her mind during the past two months while he lay struggling for life. She felt that she had done him a wrong, and, scarcely understanding herself, gave way to a flood of tears over the wavering lines, every word of which bore evidence of the enfeebled hand of the convalescent.

Page 149

Later she told Ryder of the letter, and of Done's return to Jim Crow.

'And you did not tell me of his injuries,' she said reproachfully.

'I could not find it in my heart to spoil your Christmas,' he said. 'He was getting on famously when I left Ballarat, and he has a magnificent constitution. I knew he was safe, but felt that you would be certain to worry. You see, it is best.'

'I cannot think so. You were silent because you feared to speak of your own splendid bravery.'

'Believe me, no. It was nothing to pick up a wounded man and carry him to safety. I was silent to spare you.'

'I am grateful for your kind intentions, and more than grateful for what you have done for him. To Mr. Done I owe my life, and I feel that a service done to him is something for which I, too, am much beholden.'

'And for a life that is precious to you I would—' He ceased suddenly, but was careful that she should understand him well.

'A life that was precious to her!' The phrase seemed to have an extraordinary significance. Were the words a test? Her heart beat quickly; for a moment she looked into his eyes. It was as if his whole soul burned in them. Her face paled, a faint cry broke on her lips, and she moved back with faltering feet. He dropped his extended hands with a hopeless gesture, and turned from her. A footstep was heard in the passage.

The party was fixed for the third evening prior to the date of Ryder's departure, and it was a great success. All the resources of a well-appointed station were brought into play for the gratification of the guests. The night was warm; the company were gathered in the big drawing the French window of which opened on to the wide veranda. Lucy was at the piano, providing an accompaniment, and the Sydneyside girl was singing an ardent love song. Yarra paused before Ryder with a tray, on which was a cool drink. In the act of lifting the glass the latter noticed that a uniformed trooper had suddenly appeared in the doorway. A turn of the eye satisfied him that there was another at the French window. He gave no sign of emotion, but leaned forward and spoke in a low voice to Yarra.

'You remember, Yarra, what I have told you. Trooper fellow come now, maybe.' He added a few words in the aboriginal tongue. 'Go quick!' he said.

There was a wait of some minutes, during which Ryder sat sipping at his drink, apparently entirely unconscious of anything but the singing. But presently he knew that he was the third point of a triangle, from the other points of which two regulation

revolvers covered him. He satisfied himself with a movement of his elbow that his own revolver was in its place under his vest.

‘Wat Ryder, alias Solo, I arrest you in the name of the Queen!’ The trooper from the door had advanced into the room. ’You are my prisoner. Stir a finger, and I’ll shoot you where you sit.’

Page 150

Ryder had shown no disposition to stir; he was still sipping at the glass, the coolest man in the room. The other guests looked unspeakably stupid in their open-mouthed amazement. Ryder saw that another trooper had taken the sergeant's place at the door, and that the man at the French window was now on the inside.

The first trooper had advanced to within a few feet of Ryder before it seemed to occur to the latter that he was the person addressed.

'Do you mean me, my man?' he said.

'I do; and I may tell you hanky-panky won't be healthy for you. We've got you cornered.'

Ryder arose quite unruffled, and set down his glass. Looking round upon the guests, he smiled and said:

'This is another of the possibilities of social life in Victoria. Will you tell me who I am supposed to be, and what I am supposed to do?'

'You are supposed to take these on for one thing,' said the trooper, swinging a pair of handcuffs in his left hand.

'Oh, certainly, if it's in the game.' Ryder offered his wrists.

'Behind you, please.'

'To be sure.' With his clenched fists behind him, Ryder submitted to the handcuffs, and then, as he stood manacled, his eye fell upon Donald Macdougal. The squatter was almost at his elbow, leaning against a small table, rolling his tongue under his teeth. The eyes of the two men met, and under the bushy brows of Monkey Mack there was a reddish gleam in which the Honourable Walter Ryder read a baboon-like malignancy, and in a moment the latter realized that in all his plans and precautions he had never made due allowance for the cunning and depth of this extraordinary man; but his face expressed nothing.

'Ah—h!' The sergeant gave a sigh of relief as he dropped his pistol hand. 'That's better.'

'Now,' said Ryder coldly, 'will you tell me if this is a new parlour game, or are these actual troopers who are a little more idiotic than the average?'

Ryder addressed Cargill. He was standing with his back to the piano; the gaping guests formed a semicircle in front of him. Marcia, sitting on a couch, motionless, with cheeks of deadly whiteness, uttered no sound, and her eyes looked like patches of darkness in her icy face. Lucy, standing at the piano, never took her eyes from Ryder. She could see what the others could not see—the long, thin hands of the prisoner slowly but easily working themselves out of the grip of the handcuffs.

’Call it a parlour game if you like, Mr. Solo, but I’m the winner, and I’ll trouble you to come with me.’

’Wait a moment. Macdougal, this farce has gone far enough. As your guest, I demand an explanation.’

Macdougal looked at Ryder in silence for a moment, and then said quietly: ‘They’re callin’ the new man yonder at the five-mile Brummy the Nut; maybe ye mind him.’

‘I do not. I—’

Page 151

He was interrupted by the report of a revolver out in the darkness. The trooper at the French window remained upright for a moment, then fell to his knees, and then forward upon the carpet. For two or three seconds all eyes but Lucy's and Ryder's were fixed upon the window, and there was apprehension in every face. Lucy's eyes were upon Ryder's hands; she saw the handcuff fall from one, saw him swing with a sudden, swift movement of the right arm, and the heavy manacle struck the trooper at his side on the temple, and the man fell without a groan. Then Ryder made a dash for the French window, and was gone before a hand could be raised to stay him. Lucy, who had had some understanding of his plan before he acted upon it, followed him swiftly, closing the windows after him; and she stood there, confronting the people, pale, but with determination in her face and the flash of courage in her eyes. The trooper from the other side dashed across the room, faltered for a moment, perceiving that time would be lost in a struggle with the girl, and then turned and rushed back through the door. The suddenness of all this had robbed the majority of the guests of their wits; they stood as if petrified. The wounded trooper rose slowly from the floor—it occurred to no one to offer to help him—staggered a few steps into the room, and fell again, and lay amongst the guests, his blood dyeing the carpet at their feet. Mean while Marcia had not moved; but now her white face had the expression of one listening with the intensity of an unspeakable fear for the message of death, and the sergeant in command was groping for the door, still dazed from the blow he had received, and almost blinded by the blood flowing from his wound.

Outside two troopers had jumped into their saddles, and were off in hot pursuit of the fugitive, who had galloped out of the thick cover of the orchard on Galah, Ryder's beautiful gray, and was riding at a breakneck pace for the heavily-timbered country to the east. It was a stern chase, and once Trooper Casey came so near to overhauling the gray horse that he ventured a revolver shot; but after that the hunted man drew away, and the troopers lost sight of him in the timber. The pursuit was maintained for about an hour, and then the pursuers came upon Galah trotting quietly back towards Boobyalla, riderless and without a saddle. Imagining that Solo had been swept from the horse by the limb of a tree, the troopers made a long search, and while they sought, Yarra—for it was he who had led the police away on this wild-goose chase—had doubled on his pursuers, and was making a bee-line for the station again on foot. He was found in his bed at home two hours later, cowering under the blankets, pretending an overpowering fear of the shooting and the blood.

Page 152

Walter Ryder, when he passed through the window, sprang from the veranda, and dashed into the garden. A voice called to him to stand in the name of the law, and a revolver bullet clipped his shoulder, but he ran on until the thick growth of trees and shrubbery quite covered him, then, turning sharply to the left, he hid in the hollow of an old gum-tree, the creeper overgrowing which offered a perfect screen. From here he uttered the mopoke's call, repeating it twice. He had made himself familiar with all the advantages the garden and orchard offered a hunted man ere he had been a week at Boobyalla. Ryder remained in this hiding-place for some time. He heard the thunder of Galah's hoofs and the cries of the troopers. Yarra had timed his break from cover to a second. When the sound of the chase died out in the distance, Solo walked quietly to the corner of the orchard opposite to that from which the black boy had started, where a horse was standing. This was Wallaroo. The saddle had been hastily thrown on to the entire's back, and the bridle was looped over a post. Ryder fastened the girths, buckled the bridle securely, and, mounting the horse, walked him to the slip panels, keeping well under cover of the trees. When about a quarter of a mile off, he stirred Wallaroo to a canter, but kept to the track thickly seared with new hoof-prints, so that it should be impossible for any but a clever tracker to follow him. After riding for about three miles, he bore to the right along the course of a small creek, and made his way into the ranges up a deepening gorge, the sides of which were clothed with heath and scrub, and ribbed thickly with the trunks of tall gums as straight as lances, shooting high into the air, and spreading their branches in the moonlight over two hundred feet above him. He turned from this gorge into a narrower ravine, which widened into a gully. Ryder continued for another half-mile to where three or four gigantic rocks thrown together formed a sort of natural stronghold with a rampart of white gums. Here he dismounted. Having rolled a boulder from a niche in the rocks, he drew out a rope, and with this tethered Wallaroo. Then, after removing the bit from his mouth and loosening the girths, he left the horse to graze.

The niche in the rocks was well stocked with food, and contained a rug, a bottle of brandy, several small parcels of ammunition, two revolvers, a few other articles, a miner's 'rig-out,' and the false beards Ryder had been in the habit of using as disguises.

Having removed the suit he was wearing, Ryder bathed and dressed the wound in his shoulder as best he could. He put on the digger's clothes, and, wrapping himself in the rug, lay under the sloping rock on a couch of dry bracken, and slept as if in a comfortable bed and at peace with the world.

The sun was throwing oblique rays into the heath on the side of the gully when Ryder awoke. He found his bridle-arm very stiff and painful, and dressed the wound again. He breakfasted on biscuits and smoked fish, and drank water flavoured with brandy. The greater part of that day he spent collecting fodder for Wallaroo, and leading the horse about to those spots where the grass was most luxuriant. He was waiting with absolute confidence and the greatest composure. The vicissitudes of his life had taught him patience.

Page 153

At about a quarter past ten that night Ryder was sitting on the rug with his back to the rock, smoking reflectively, when a voice called almost at his elbow:

‘Hist! Yarra bin come, boss!’

‘Good boy!’ Ryder replaced his revolver on a convenient ledge, and as Yarra appeared before him, grinning in-the moonlight, he added a few words of thanks and of praise in the native tongue.

‘What happen by Boobyalla?’

‘Mine bin chase it that feller all day.’ Yarra pointed at Solo, and his white teeth glittered like tiny mirrors. ’Track him longa trooper plenty far.’ He pointed beyond Boobyalla ’My word, Yarra make it big one damn fool that trooper.’ The thought of the manner in which he had tricked the police tickled the black boy, and he emitted a yell of laughter that startled the Bush sleepers for a mile round, and filled the trees with movements and murmurs of complaint. Ryder, knowing the susceptibilities of the race, to gratify the boy laughed too.

‘Yarra plenty clever,’ he said.

’My word! Yarra follow track all away topside Shepherd’s Scrub. Go this way, that way, make much plurry humbug. Say: “This feller gone lame, limp it bad. Some time he creep by scrub, lie down.” Trooper go search it scrub all day, nex’ day, nex’ day. They catch it that fellar by’n-by.’ Again he pointed at Ryder, and again his laugh echoed in the gorge. ’Mine tink it trooper search him scrub plenty long time. Boss tink I go hunt by scrub to-morrow, mine come sit down longa here.’

All of which meant that Yarra had been employed by the troopers to follow the track of Ryder, and had led them as far astray as possible, and left them with the impression that the fugitive was wounded and lying in hiding in Shepherd’s Scrub, a dense ti-tree growth to the north-east of Boobyalla, extending for two or three miles.

Ryder rewarded his accomplice with a nobbler of brandy and a cigar, and the black sat smoking with a grand air, while the former explained that he would remain where he was until his arm was in a more serviceable state, trusting to Yarra to keep him apprised of what was going forward, and to warn him instantly danger threatened. During the last few hours the idea of inducing Lucy Woodrow to visit him there in the Bush had been stirring in Ryder’s mind, and he reckoned upon turning his wound to good advantage. For the troopers he had the greatest contempt, and his confidence in Yarra was absolute. The half-caste remained with him for about an hour, and then returned into the gorge, and keeping to the bed of the creek picked up his horse, a sober old cattle nag, where he had left him at the foot of the range.

Page 154

Yarra returned to Wat Ryder early in the forenoon of the following day. The trooper the boy shot at the window was being nursed at Boobyalla, the others were away beating the scrub. The half-caste brought with him a wild duck he had trapped, and set about cooking this in its feathers. The two dined together shortly after mid-day, and the sun was streaming into the gully, the air was heavy with the odour of wild musk, and the Bush was as silent as if no life remained in the intense heat. Ryder had risen, and was looking at Wallaroo standing with his nose in the shade of a gum-butt, fighting the avaricious flies with his tail. At that instant a loud report rang along the gully, and Ryder staggered a few paces, and fell with his back to one of the boulders, stunned. A bullet ricocheting from the rock had struck him in the neck. Yarra threw himself forward, face downward, at a space between the boulders. He saw a wreath of smoke in the gully and a slight movement in the thick growth, and fired twice, but the distance was too great for a revolver. The enemy, whoever he was, was armed with a gun. The half-caste listened for a moment, and his black eyes searched the gully. Then he heard the beat of a horse's hoofs. A look of enlightenment came to his face. There was one horseman only; he was riding at a pace which, in such country, threatened death at every stride.

The boy looked at Ryder, pointing back in the direction from which the shot had come.

'That feller mine boss,' he said, and fear tinged his blackness a slaty gray.

Ryder had slipped to a sitting position—one hand held a blood-stained handkerchief to his neck, the other clutched a revolver. He was white to the lips, but his eyes blazed with life and the passion of a wounded lion.

XXII

Ryder knew himself to be badly hurt; he realized that he was in a desperate situation, a situation from which it would require all his cunning to extricate himself. The plans he had formed were abandoned, and even while suffering the first shock of the wound his mind was busy. He had been attacked by one man; his enemy knew he was not alone, and was not sure of the effect of his shot, otherwise he would not have fled. The outlaw felt that he might rely upon immunity from further attack for some time, and meanwhile all the strength and energy remaining to him must be devoted to the task of reaching another refuge. In Macdougal be had met an enemy of a kind he had never before been called upon to deal with. The squatter was indefatigable in pursuit of his vengeance, evidently an expert Bushman, and bent upon dealing retribution with his own hand. Wat Ryder wasted no time in fruitless lamentation over his folly in not having made good his escape while the opportunity offered. Already he had lost much blood. The muscle on the right side of the neck was badly lacerated. First of all, the wound must be dressed. For years he had been prepared for an exigency of this sort, and was never without materials for the treatment of serious hurts. With Yarra's assistance, the

wound was washed with a lotion, closed as well as possible, and then carefully bandaged, without the waste of a moment.

Page 155

Ryder lay with his revolver by his side. He knew perfectly that he might be engaged in a life or death struggle at any moment, and was prepared to die by his own hand the instant the fight became hopeless.

’Go, Yarra; pick up his track; find which way he has gone; come back one minute.’

He knew there was no occasion to warn the half-caste, in whom the instincts of his mother’s people were paramount. Yarra was a child of the Bush; nothing would escape his eye or his ear, and at the same time he would be as swift and as secret as a snake.

While the boy was away Ryder wrote a note in pencil addressed to Lucy Woodrow. Yarra was back within five minutes.

’Him Boss belonga me all right. Him run longa gully, catch up horse by ole man blackbutt, ride longa gorge same debble chase him,’ reported the half-caste.

‘Right, right! Yarra plurry fine feller!’ said Ryder. ’Now we go up over small spur, down by gorge, sit down little stone cave near big splash. Pretty quick you come back, catch Wallaroo, lead him down to the gorge along down the creek. Make a track by the bank some time, turn him in pool where black fish sit down, and ride back up creek again, and tie horse up by big rock same monkey bear. Then to-night you creep down by Boobyalla, knock on Miss Lucy’s window, gib Miss Lucy this letter. No one else must see. If Miss Lucy say yes, when sun jumps up to-morrow you take Wallaroo down by wattle track, gib her horse, come back sit down by me. Yarra catch hold all that?’

Yarra nodded brightly. ‘My word, mine know him all right,’ he said.

‘Yarra always good friend by me?’

‘My word!’

The climb over the spur that divided the outlaw’s first retreat from the gorge proved a terrible task for the wounded man. For some distance the boy followed him, obliterating his tracks; but before the journey was half completed Ryder required all the assistance the half-caste could give him, and he reached the small cave in the side of the gorge, about a mile and a half from its entrance, in an exhausted and feverish condition. There Yarra gave him drink, and, having made him a comfortable bed, left him with a revolver by his side, and returned for Wallaroo and Ryder’s belongings. The boy followed the instructions he had received faithfully, and was with the outlaw again before sundown, watching over him with an interest he had never before felt in any human creature. Ryder knew now that his life depended upon the boy’s fidelity, and that there was only one other person in the world upon whom he could rely in his extremity—Jim Done.

Page 156

We left Done in a poor condition to help any man—lying in Kyley's tent, enfeebled by sickness, clinging to Aurora's fingers as some sort of anchorage in a fragile world. When he awoke again Aurora was still by his side. He grew quite accustomed to waking and finding her there, and in his waking moments for two or three days he clasped her fingers with an almost infantile helplessness. The first stages of recovery were slow, and in them his chief delight was to lie watching his nurse, scarcely conscious of anything beyond. He found her very worn, and she looked old. Few of the qualities that had impelled him to call her Joy remained in this anxious face. She attended to him assiduously; but she was only a nurse, nothing of a lover, and presently he found himself wondering at her lack of emotion, fretting for the absent caress with an invalid's petulance. As his strength returned, Aurora permitted Mary Kyley to assume the larger share of the nursing, and Jim was told what news there was, excepting the truth about poor Mike. It was Ryder who had informed Aurora that Done and his friends were in the stockade, where he had seen them during the Saturday afternoon. Mary read a letter from the Peetrees inviting Jim to join them at Blanket Flat—where they had taken his and Mike's belongings—when he was strong enough to get about. According to Mrs. Ryley's version of this letter, Mike was with the Peetrees.

Eventually Jim was strong enough to sit up for a while, and in the course of a few days Ben helped him out into the open, and the pure, hot sunshine seemed to pour new life into his veins. It was after this that Done missed Aurora. Mrs. Ben said she had gone away for a few days to recruit; but eventually, when Jim was hobbling about, she admitted that she did not know where the girl had gone, and believed that she might not come back.

'But why?' said Jim—' why go away without a word, without giving me a chance to thank her for what she has done?'

'Thank her!' said Mary, with some contempt. 'Are you thinking the poor girl wanted thanks from you?'

'It is strange that she should leave in this way,' answered Done impatiently.

'There's nothing strange in it, man; it's just natural. You never understood how much that girl cared for you, Jimmy. If you did, perhaps you would know what it meant for her to be working herself to a ghost over your bed there while you babbled of love to another woman.'

'I did?'

'Did you? Night and day. It was Lucy, Lucy, Lucy—always Lucy. Lucy with the brown hair and the beautiful eyes—Lucy the pure, and sweet, and good. Never a word of Joy—never the smallest word of the woman who was beating the devil off you, you blackguard!'

‘But I was delirious! Surely——’

’True, you were wandering; but it’s only when a man’s mad or drunk that one gets the truth out of him about women. “There’s not a thought of me left in his heart, Mary!” said the poor girl.’

Page 157

‘She was wrong—wrong!’ he protested.

’Not a bit, boy! ’Twas the pure girl had all your soul. Heavens! and how you rubbed it in about her purity and goodness! Mother of us! let a man be so infernally bad that the very fiend sniffs at him, but he’ll bargain with the impudence of an archangel for the pure girl.’

‘And she went away for this?’

’Sure enough. Aurora’s the sort to hide her hurts. When she can’t fight over them, she’ll not cry a whimper.’

‘That’s true; and I’ve hurt her deepest of all.’

Mary detected the expression of his face with quick alarm. She had said too much.

‘There, there, Jimmy boy,’ she said anxiously; ’we mustn’t be forgetting that Joy’s the strong sort. She’ll come again, fresh and rosy and merry as ever—bet your life on it.’

Jim went into the tent that had been his sick-room, and sat for over an hour in deep thought, and his thoughts were all of Aurora. He missed her—missed her at every turn, and in every hour of his convalescence. As a reward for her love and tenderness, he had afflicted her with the greatest bitterness her brave heart could bear. His eyes were fixed upon the floor, and eventually discovered two oval objects half buried in the hard earth. He stooped to pick them up, and found them to be the halves of the locket that contained Lucy Woodrow’s miniature. The case had been stamped into the floor with the heel of a boot, the pieces were torn apart, and the portrait ground off the ivory on which it was painted. With the fragments of the locket in his hand, Jim pursued a new train of thought, but there was no comfort in it. He recalled Joy’s words: ’I won’t bind the strange man you may be to-morrow.’ Her love had been too strong for her philosophy. What of his? Had he ever seriously considered the possibilities of a life wholly apart from her? His mind flew to Lucy, but by no effort could he devote his thoughts to either of the women who had so deeply influenced him.

It was no longer possible to keep the truth about Mike Burton from the invalid, and Mary broke the news to him as gently as she could, The shock seemed to stun Jim’s sensibilities for a time. As the numbness wore off, a bitter, blind hatred grew in his heart against the men he chose to regard as Mike’s murderers, and he had a ferocious longing for vengeance. Again law and order, the forces of society, had intervened to embitter him. His subsequent sorrow over his mate was deep and lasting. He felt now that although their friendship had been free of demonstrativeness, it had been warmed with a generous sincerity.

Done awakened one day, with some sense of fear, to the knowledge that he was drifting back into a morbid condition. He found he had bred a disposition to brood over his weakness. The loss of Mike and the disappearance of Aurora were becoming grievances that he cherished with youthful unreason. He determined to rejoin the Peetrees at once, and, although far from being his old self physically, began to make preparations for the return to Jim Crow.

Page 158

‘There’s somethin’ I’d like you to be doin’ fer me afore you go, mate,’ said Ben Kyley to Jim one evening.

’Well, you know I’ll do it.

‘I reckoned you would. You see, I’ve been thinkin’ of marryin’ my wife, an’ I’d like you to be bes’ man.’

‘You’ve been thinking!’ cried Mary. ’No, Jimmy, I’ve been doing the thinking: Kyley merely agrees. One of these days we’re going to build a big hotel in Ballarat, and settle down. It won’t be till the rushes peg out, as they’re bound to do in time; but certificates of marriage are getting quite common amongst married people here, and we thought it would be as well to be in the fashion.’ Mrs. Ben laughed boisterously.

‘Well,’ said Jim, smiling, ’a couple who disagree as pleasantly as you do can’t go far wrong in marrying.’

‘The customers at a decent family hotel would expect it, I think,’ Mary added soberly.

’Jonathan Prator married his wife a week ‘r two back, an’ he’s skitin’ about it,’ grumbled Ben.

So Jim remained for the wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Kyley, which was quite a public ceremony. He was Ben’s best man, and he gave the rosy bride the prettiest brooches, rings, and bangles he could buy in Ballarat, and left, the blushless couple to the enjoyment of their honeymoon with his warmest blessing. Mary nearly smothered him in a billowy hug as he was trying to thank them for their goodness.

‘Leave a kind word for my poor girl,’ she said, ’and the minute she comes back I’ll write you.’

’Tell her I shall be a miserable devil till I hear of her dancing jigs on Mary Kyley’s bar counter again,’ said Jim. ’And tell her she wrongs me when she says there is nothing of her in this heart of mine. She is an ineradicable part of it.’

Done found the Peetrees working a fairly profitable mine at Blanket Flat, a sort of tributary field to Jim Crow, and situated about three miles distant from the original rush. Harry stood in with Done, and the two pegged out a claim and set to work; but Jim did not derive the satisfaction he had expected from this return to his friends and his familiar pursuits. His weakness clung to him, and he was subject to pains in the head. His missed Mike more than ever now, and permitted the idea that he had blasted Aurora’s happiness to worry him a good deal. He remembered the blithe heartiness of the girl in the early days of their acquaintance, and the image of the pale, worn face he had last seen haunted him with an abiding reproach. He could not enjoy the life, the scenes,

and the companionship that had delighted him, and believed the capacity would never come back to him.

He had been on Blanket Flat less than a fortnight when one morning Harry thrust his head into the tent.

‘Blowed if there ain’t a lady here to see you, Jim!’ he said.

‘A lady?’ Jim’s first thought was of Aurora. ‘Don’t you know her?’

He stepped from the tent as he spoke, and was astonished to find that his visitor was Lucy Woodrow. She was riding a splendid bay horse, and leading a small, sturdy-looking chestnut, and was dust-stained and tired. Her face was gray with anxiety. She did not smile as he approached her, but held a letter towards him.

Page 159

‘Read,’ she said. ‘He says you will understand.’

‘But, Lucy, won’t you dismount? You are tired.’

‘For pity’s sake, waste no time! Read!’

He unfolded the note, and read:

’*Dear miss Woodrow*,

’I am seriously wounded, and lying helpless. My life is in danger. There is one man who will save me; there is one woman whom I can trust to go to him. You are that woman. I appeal to all that is good, kind, and merciful in you to help me. Believe nothing you have heard. I am the victim of circumstances—circumstances of the most terrible kind. Only be the sweet, tender woman you have always seemed to me. Ride to Jim Done at Blanket Flat as soon as possible in the morning; bring him to me. I know he will not hesitate when he knows that I am crippled in the Bush, and at the mercy of my enemies. The boy will explain the rest.

’Your unfortunate friend,

‘*Walter Ryder*.’

’The half-caste boy at the station, who knows where Mr. Ryder is hidden, brought that to me,’ Lucy said. ’He met me at a gorge leading into the range this morning with this horse. The boy is to meet us at the mouth of the gorge and take us to him. He escaped from Boobyalla when the troopers came, and hid in the Bush. He was seen and shot in the neck, but found another hiding-place, and is waiting for you. You will come?’

She had spoken in a hard, unimpassioned voice, as if repeating a lesson; only her eyes betrayed the intense feeling that possessed her.

‘I will go,’ he answered. ’Hadn’t you better have some tea and something to eat? It is a long ride.’

‘No, no,’ she said; ‘we cannot spare a moment.’

‘I insist.’ He put up his hands to help her. His words were quiet, but his tone was masterful. She looked into his face, and obeyed him. ’Better rest a while now than break down later—and I do not know the way. Harry,’ he called, turning to his mate, ’will you give the horses a drink? You have not pressed them?’ he said to Lucy.

‘No; I was afraid, knowing they would have to carry us back.’

’My mate will change the saddles. I must ride the stronger horse. Meanwhile, get something to eat. We have just breakfasted; there is tea in the billy.’

He showed neither hurry nor agitation, he displayed no feeling, but, watching him narrowly, Lucy was convinced of his great earnestness, and the strain of anxiety that had gripped her heart like a band of steel relaxed. She breathed freely. Part of the burden had gone to him, and he would bear it.

Jim felt himself strong again in the face of this great need. Apart from the tie of blood, he owed Ryder the best service of which he was capable—his very life, if need be—but he did not question the matter, even in his own heart, and it was not till Blanket Flat lay four or five miles behind them that he sought further information from his companion. They had ridden in silence, Lucy overwrought, thinking only of the wounded man hunted like a beast, perhaps dying in the Bush, Jim endeavouring to decide upon a plan of action. The news had not greatly surprised him; ever since Ryder’s declaration of his identity Done had foreseen some such possibility.

Page 160

‘Do you know the reason of the attempt to arrest Ryder?’ said Jim, breaking the long silence.

’The troopers called him Solo. I have heard of a notorious gold robber of that name. Mrs. Macdougal says a new shepherd called Brummy recognised him.’ She gave Done a concise account of the arrest and Ryder’s escape. ‘That is Wallaroo you are riding,’ she said in conclusion, ’and Mr. Macdougal is furious over his loss. I believe it was he who shot Mr. Ryder.’

‘If Ryder dies, I’ll kill Macdougal!’

Lucy turned sharply, and looked at Jim. He had spoken the words in a tone sounding almost casual, curiously incongruous with their grim significance. She knew that he meant what he had said, and her heart sank.

‘You would not be so mad,’ she said.

‘Let us push on,’ he replied, disregarding her comment.

Lucy had experienced no difficulty in finding Jim. Since his visit to Boobyalla she had been three times to Jim Crow with parties on horseback, and knew the country well.

They reached the mouth of the gorge at about eleven o’clock, and had ridden only about two hundred yards along the bed of the creek, when Yarra arose from a clump of scrub-ferns at Lucy’s side.

‘Come longa me,’ he said. ‘Boss Ryder plenty sick.’

Yarra had left the outlaw two hours earlier. Ryder was then tossing feverishly on his rough couch. The small cave in which he lay was situated some thirty yards up the side of the gorge, and the hot morning sun reached it early, converting it into an oven of stone. The wounded man was suffering acutely; his wound had become a burning agony that had no longer a limit: the pain of it penetrated his whole being. Soon after the black boy’s departure Ryder ceased to toss and turn, movement only increasing his torment. He now lay very still on the floor of the cave; his eyes had a feline lustre in the dim light, his face was as white and hollow as that of a corpse, saving for the fever spot that burned in either cheek. Gradually his mind was drifting from his danger and his sufferings—it was fashioning strange images, mere dreams, but startlingly realistic. From the first one or two he reverted to sanity and to a fleeting sense of his position, and then the images trooped in again, the visions reappeared—beautiful visions of coolness, and sweetness, and shade that, it seemed later, only came to tantalize him. He was now a soul in hell, tortured with the sight of clustering green trees and flowing streams. Through all these dreams one sweet sound prevailed. He recognised it at length: it was the music of falling water—beautiful, cold, clear water, falling in thin

sheets from the high rock and breaking into snow on the edge of the deep stone basin. He lifted himself upon his hands and listened. Yes, there was a waterfall below him, so near that he might almost reach and dip his fingers into it, and he was set in flame that lapped him round, licking

Page 161

his face, dipping its forked tongue into the hollows of his eyes, penetrating to his heart, and coursing in all his veins. He was mad to stay there and suffer, when he might slip from the grip of the fiend, and lave his limbs in the pool and drink from the cascade. Ryder dragged himself from the cave, upsetting the water the half-caste had placed near his bed as he did so. The water ran over his fingers, but he did not heed it. Outside he raised himself to his feet with the help of a tree, and, staggering a few paces down the slope, pitched on his face, cutting his mouth badly on the stones. The wound in his neck opened, and the blood oozed from the bandages, smearing his hands as he dragged himself along.

It was like some wild beast with a mortal wound in its breast slowly crawling to the water to die. Every few yards he thought the stream was reached and dipping his mouth to drink, cut his lips oh the granite. He had come to the level ground banking the creek, and was almost at the edge of the basin, when a figure appeared on the brink of the waterfall above him. The figure looked hardly human, bent down, watching Ryder's movements in the attitude of a curious ape.

Macdougal sprang down the rocks with an agility in keeping with his apelike appearance, and interposed between the creeping man and the water.

Ryder turned aside, and again Macdougal interposed. Three times this happened, and the squatter had a grin on his small terrier's face; he was deriving malicious amusement from the bewilderment of the fever-stricken wretch at his feet. In his left hand he held a revolver.

Ryder raised a hand, and, clutching Monkey Mack, made an effort to regain his feet. The other helped him, and clinging to his enemy for support, the outlaw looked at Macdougal. The latter thrust his face forward, and again there was a red gleam under the shadows of his heavy brows.

'Ye know me, man,' he said.

Ryder was staring with eyes in which there was a dawning of consciousness, and, steadying him with one hand, the squatter dipped some water in his hat, and dashed it in the other's face.

'Ye know me!' he said with fierce eagerness. 'Ye know me! Man, ye must know me—-Macdougal! Look at me. Ay, ye know me well!'

There was recognition in Ryder's eyes; they were intent upon those of his foe, and, clutching him by the shoulder, Macdougal continued:

’Well ye know me, and well ye know what I mean to do by ye. I’m about to kill ye, Mr. Walter Ryder, an’ no harm will come to me for the killin’. Man, man, but it’s a sweet thing to kill your enemy, an’ to be paid well for the doin’ of it! Ah, I’m right sure ye know me now. I would na’ have ye die by another hand, for ’tis me ye wronged most. I know my wrongs, ye foul villain, an’ it’s in my mind to carry your carrion head to Melbourne for the money they’ve set upon it. Ye mind me! ye mind me! Good! good!’

Page 162

Macdougal's face was literally convulsed with the fury of his hate; he spat at Ryder as he spoke, and then, with the swiftness and the strength that had marked them in health, the outlaw's fingers fastened upon his hairy throat. The long, thin hands clamped themselves upon his neck, and for a moment Monkey Mack was helpless in the agonies of suffocation. Then his left hand pointed the revolver at Ryder's ear; there was a sharp report, and the outlaw fell limply, and rolled back upon the flat water-worn rock, his shattered head to the stone, his arms out thrown, his lifeless face turned up to the blue sky.

XXIII

Monkey Mack stood for a few seconds gazing down upon the dead man, unconscious of the fact that at the moment his shot was fired Lucy Woodrow and Jim Done had come suddenly upon the scene around one of the huge boulders with which the gorge was strewn. He was recalled to himself by the exclamation of horror uttered by the girl, and discovered Jim, revolver in hand. Turning, he fled up the right side of the gorge, where the timber offered good cover. Jim raised his revolver, and took deliberate aim at the flying figure, but Lucy seized his arm and bore it down, and, clinging to him, she cried:

'No, no! for God's sake, not that!'

Jim tore himself from her with bitter words, and the next moment they saw Macdougal riding furiously along the side of the gorge, swinging his apparently maddened horse through the thick timber with marvellous dexterity. Done uttered a cry, and ran for the horses, and Lucy followed him, calling piteously. She saw Jim spring upon Wallaroo and turn his head down the gully, and, knowing his intention, snatched the revolver from Yarra's hand and fired at the stallion. The shot took effect in the horse's neck, and he plunged forward, throwing Jim heavily, and, rolling on his side, lay half submerged in the water of the creek.

Done was stunned and shaken by the fall, and it was some minutes before he quite recovered. Then, turning upon Lucy in the blind fury that filled his soul, he said:

'You have saved that foul murderer, and while he lives I swear I'll never forgive you!'

She made no reply, but followed Jim to Ryder's side, trembling in every limb, with a bursting pain at her heart and a feeling of utter desolation upon her. Done knelt by the dead outlaw, looking into the white face, and remembered standing as a boy gazing into another dead face wonderfully like this, the face of his mother. He felt no sorrow; there was room in his soul only for his black wrath. For some minutes he remained kneeling, with set teeth, his hands clenched, his blood hot with rage. When he arose Lucy was by his side, but her eyes were bent upon the dead man.

‘You stood between me and my brother’s murderer,’ he said.

She looked at him vaguely, as if she had not heard aright, and passed a faltering hand across her eyes.

Page 163

‘Your brother’s murderer?’ she said.

’The man lying there is my brother. For no crimes for no wrong against man or woman, his life was made a horror to him. And this is the end, butchered by a foul beast.’

‘Don’t!’ she murmured. She put out her hands appealingly, and continued in a choking voice: ’I can bear no more. All my strength is gone. For pity’s sake, no more, no more!’ She turned from him, and, falling to her knees, sank her face upon Ryder’s breast, and gave way to a fit of sobbing that shook her from head to foot. Her attitude was one of complete abandon; one hand lay upon the cheek of the dead outlaw, suggesting an ineffable caress.

Done sat upon a rock, watching her without understanding. Yarra, who had stolen near to Ryder’s body, crouched upon the rock, staring intently at the face of his friend. Presently Jim noticed that Lucy was lying inert, and he lifted her to the pool and bathed her forehead with the cool water. Yarra brought a pannikin and a bottle containing brandy from the cave, and Jim poured a little of the spirit between the girl’s lips. Lucy revived after a few minutes, and lay for a time in the shade before she was strong enough to walk.

‘I must go,’ she said with a strange listless ness.

‘Take the boy with you,’ Jim answered. ’He will see you safely to Boobyalla.’

‘And you?’ she asked.

‘There is something for me to do here.’

She looked at the body, and said, ‘Yes, yes, of course,’ but the only expression in her face was one of utter weariness.

He helped her on to the horse. She did not thank him. No words of farewell were spoken, but as the horse moved away he said:

‘Contrive to let Yarra bring me a shovel.’

‘Yes.’

’At least the brute beast shall not have the price of his head

‘No.’ She repeated the word quite mechanically. ‘No, no!’

Done returned to his brother. He lifted the body into the shade, and composed the limbs, and then seated himself and gave his mind over to bitter reflection. Ryder’s face exerted a strong influence upon him. In death it had assumed a delicacy almost

effeminate. It was the face of a saint and an ascetic. What was most evil in him had been grown in the forcing-house of vice and crime society had set up, and for being the thing it had made him society had butchered him like a mad dog. Jim recognised Monkey Mack only as the instrument of society. His logic may not have been perfect: his mind was in no state to deal with ethical nuances; he saw only the ruined life, remembered what Ryder had endured, and, above all, that he had been an innocent man, crushed, tortured, brutalized into an enemy of the law and the existing order. He felt himself capable of taking up his brother's fight. In his heart he was resolved to seek out Macdougal and kill him. That much must be done. He never questioned his capability for murder, and it is probable that had the chance come to him in cold blood his spirit would have failed him.

Page 164

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Yarra returned with pick and shovel, and Jim had already selected the spot for Ryder's resting-place, beside a great boulder above the waterfall. There he started to dig the grave.

'Him brother belonga you?' asked Yarra.

'Yes,' said Jim.

'Good feller,' continued Yarra, and his black eyes gleamed maliciously. 'Boss belonga me kill him. You kill mine Boss?' Perhaps it was the remembrance of the many kicks and cuts he had received at the hands of Monkey Mack that inspired the impish eagerness in Yarra's face, perhaps his affection for the dead man moved him.

Jim Done looked at the boy curiously. 'Boss belonga you sit down by Boobyalla?' he asked.

Yarra shook his head. 'No fear,' he said. 'Yarra stop 'way pretty quick when Boss bin there.'

'Suppose Yarra catch up track of Boss belonga him, come back when sun jump up, tell me.'

'My word! Budgery that! Mine tink it Boss yabber-yabber longa trooper.'

Yarra set off at once, and Done continued his work. He was determined that the grave should be deep enough to protect the body froth burrowing animals, and secret enough to save it from human brutes eager for the price on Solo's head. This task was not complete when Yarra returned, his eyes ablaze with excitement.

'Hell bin jump up, mine tink it!' he cried. 'Boss belonga me sit down there all right. You come!'

'You know where Macdougal is?'

'My word! Come longa me.'

Jim took up his revolver and followed the half caste, leaving the body between the sheets of bark with which he had fashioned a rude coffin.

'Boss close up here,' said Yarra as they scrambled up the side of the gorge, after following the creek for about a quarter of a mile. The boy proceeded with out caution, and presently they came upon a saddled horse lying under a big white gum. The animal' neck was broken; evidently it had collided with the tree when at a gallop.

‘Boss make big smash up here,’ said Yarra. He pointed to a huddled, shapeless heap lying amongst the scrub-ferns at a distance of about twenty feet.

Done stood over the body of Macdougal, and felt for a moment a resentment against the Fates that had robbed him of his revenge. The squatter had dreaded the probability of confederates coming to the assistance of the outlaw, and his ride for safety had been absolutely desperate. He lay within a quarter of a mile of the waterfall, and had been killed on the spot. His head was crushed and hideous. Done turned from the sight with a shudder.

Page 165

Jim buried Ryder by the light of the moon. He spent the night in the gorge, but slept little, and Yarra, who had all the superstitions of his mother's race, crouched close to the white man, and his teeth chattered with fear the whole night through. He had conceived the idea that the spirit of Macdougal had taken possession of the gorge, and for the future the place must be a haunt of terror to him. After daybreak, with the boy's assistance, Done hid all traces of the new-made grave, and by this time he was grateful for the food Yarra brought from the cave. Breakfast strengthened him greatly. He had eaten nothing for close upon twenty hours, and the exhaustive experiences of that time told heavily upon his enfeebled frame. As a result of his night's reflection and the judgment that had come with cooler blood, he was determined to visit Lucy at the station. Yesterday's bitterness towards her had been real enough, but he assured himself that it was the effect of the extraordinary excitement worked in his brain by the events of the day. This morning there was upon him a physical and moral apathy: the reaction left him without interest. The invalid lassitude possessed him again, and he stood over his brother's grave for a few minutes, without feeling any recurrence of the resentments that had so recently blazed within him.

Lucy met him in the garden; she was still pale, but showed no sign of physical weakness.

'I treated you brutally,' he said abruptly. I am sorry; I was mad with rage.'

'I know; I understood then. You know I am sorry for you.'

'You saved Macdougal for my own sake, not for his,'

'Yes. Innocent or guilty, your brother was an outlaw, Legally, Macdougal was justified in killing him, but if you kill Macdougal it will be murder. Ah! that terrible thought has gone from your mind?'

'Yes; Macdougal is dead.'

'Dead!' She caught his hand, and looked into his face with terror. 'You have killed him!'

'No. His horse must have collided with a tree as he galloped down the gorge. Yarra found him.'

'Thank God vengeance was not left to you!'

'It is best. I have buried my brother. The whereabouts of his grave must be kept secret.'

'Tell me where he lies.' She spoke with eagerness. 'I swear none shall know from me!'

Done was impressed by her emotion, and the picture of her sobbing figure prostrate over the body of the outlaw was recalled to his mind. 'Under the great round boulder above the waterfall to the left, just where the shadow falls at noon,' he said. 'Better never speak of his death even. I have warned Yarra, and I think he will be faithful.'

'You can trust me.' She paused for a moment falteringly, and then continued with an effort and in a low voice: 'I must respect the grave, for in it my heart is buried. More than my heart,' she continued with passion—' a part of my very soul. I loved him!' She had made this confession, feeling that it was her duty to let Jim know that the tenderness she had felt for him had been swept away in the tide of an overwhelming love for the other.

Page 166

Whatever Done's feelings may have been, neither face nor voice betrayed him. 'Good-bye,' he said, and turned away.

She followed him a few paces, and seized his arm.

'You are not going with unkindness in your heart?' she pleaded.

'No,' he answered. 'I am very sorry for you.'

'I want your friendship always.'

It is yours.'

He held her hands in his, and noticed that there were tears upon her cheeks. He was certainly sorry for her; it was pitiful to think that her new happiness had been wrecked in this way, but he could not overcome the coldness that was about him; and so they parted on the spot where a few months earlier Jim had said good-bye with a heart full of love and longing.

XXIV

A *bitter* time followed with Jim Done. He had rejoined Harry Peetree at Blanket Flat, and continued working there; but his strength returned slowly, and the joy of life had fled from his heart again, leaving him more miserable than he had been as a youth in his native village. In those days his resentments helped to sustain him; he took pride in the spirit with which he faced the enmity of the people, and not a little comfort came to him from the egotism he had cultivated as a refuge from the common contempt. Now the fighting spirit was gone all hatred had gone with it, and his self-confidence had degenerated. For a few weeks after Ryder's death he made a deliberate effort to stir himself into a state of passionate revolt, dwelling long upon the barbarous sufferings his brother had endured, drawing upon his affection for Mike Burton to stimulate his fading emotions; but he failed to lift himself out of the slough of despond into which he had fallen.

Jim fled from his nurses too early, and the trials he subsequently endured served to retard his restoration. He had pretty good health, without either strength of body or spirit. Half an hour's work at the windlass wearied him, and this weariness irritated him with a dull, abiding anger. He spent much of his time when not at work lying on his bunk. The life on the field was not different from that which had delighted him at Diamond Gully; there was the same cheerfulness amongst the men, the shanties flared at night, and the diggers roared, and gambled, and drank with no less enthusiasm. He alone was changed.

These moods and the manner of life he was leading fostered a most unhealthy habit of introspection. He was for ever examining his emotions. He thought much about Lucy Woodrow, and of the love he had borne her, but without sorrow for the loss of her. He tried to account for the fact that there was no grief in his heart on Lucy's accounts whilst keeping Aurora jealously in the background. He was unconsciously dishonest to himself in these self-examinings, and one day this dawned upon him. He laughed over the discovery, laughed aloud at himself, but the amusement was grim.

Page 167

‘So, then, it is Aurora I need after all,’ he said in satirical soliloquy, ’and my soul has been playing the hypocrite these few weeks. What a marvel of constancy is man! Lucy is lost to me, and secretly the baffled heart sneaks back to the other love.’

Behind all this was a fretful longing for the past happiness to which the new country, the new conditions, Aurora Mike, and his own abounding vitality, had contributed. He shunned the conditions, and was angry because the object eluded him. Done, in his sick desire to know himself ceased to be truly himself. Had he been content with the fact that he loved Aurora and needed her—needed her love, her beauty, her fine joyousness and splendid vitality—the rest would have been easy.

He had written from Ballarat to Mike Burton’s family in New South Wales, and at about this time there came a letter from a relative, asking his assistance in Melbourne to secure the money lying to Burton’s credit in the bank. Jim went to Melbourne, and a quiet trip and the change improved him considerably. When he returned again there was a letter from Mary Kyley, It was brief:

’*Dear Jimmy*,

’We are at Tarrangower. Joy is back with us, well and strong again, and as pretty as a picture; but the mischief is she doesn’t forget the boy who isn’t fit to kiss the boots she wears—meaning your self, you scamp! ’Tisn’t a far ride! Maybe you’ll come one of these fine Sundays.

’Your middle-aged friend,

‘*Mary Kyley*.’

Jim spent nearly three days over that letter, and then determination came suddenly on top of much contrary argument. He would go. No sooner had he made up his mind than a consuming eagerness to see Aurora seized him. All other considerations were lost. He must go at once, take her in his arms, plead with her with all the fervour of his heart, compel her with every argument love could advance, beseech her with all the humility of the conquered to be his wife.

Now his love of Lucy appeared as a mere aberration. His overwhelming eagerness for life, for new faces, scenes, sensations, had whirled him from the true path of his happiness. Thank God, it was not too late! Joy alone was his true mate, his true love, the real need of his being, and he had never loved her as now. The passion came back upon him like a dammed torrent. His impatience made his mate open his eyes in grave wonder.

‘I want to reach Tarrangower before noon to’ morrow, Harry,’ he said. ‘Can it be done?’

’You could cover the distance in ’bout five hours on a decent horse. But what’s struck you, ole man?’

’The idea that I’ve been playing the melancholy fool. I’ve been questioning life, bargaining with it like a suspicious huckster —suspecting, doubting, rejecting, instead of opening wide my arms and taking the good to me wherever it offered.’

‘I dunno what you’re drivin’ at, Jim; but if it means you’re goin’ to cheer up I’m all-fired glad to hear it. You’ve been as miserable as a dingo in a springer since Eureka.’

Page 168

‘It means that, Harry. Can we get horses?’

‘We—meanin’ me too?’

’Yes; you’ll come with me? I don’t know the lay of the country, and I must go.’

’Oh, I’ll go fast enough. You can get horses from Croker, but they’ll cost you a bite.’

This was on Saturday. Jim was in Tarrangower an hour before noon on Sundays The first digger they met directed them to Mary Kyley’s tent. Mary was busy preparing dinner, but dropped everything, and rushed at the visitors, half’ smothering Jim in a motherly hug.

‘Murder! you’re looking peeky and thin, Jimmy!’ she cried.

‘Never mind me, Mrs. Ben; I’m all right. Where’s Joy?’

‘She’s gone for a bit of a walk in the sun.’

‘Could I find her?’

‘Deuce take your impatience! This isn’t flattering to me!’

’Harry will comfort you. I want Aurora, and I want her badly. If she doesn’t want me, you’d better have left me to die when I had the good chance down there at Eureka, Mary Kyley.’

’That’s good to hear. On my soul, I like the ring of it! Keep round the bend of the hill to the left. You’ll see her among the saplings.’

He found her within a few minutes. Seeing her in the distance, he ran like a schoolboy, and arrived at her side breathless. She was sitting on a log; her hat was at her feet. She was radiant with health and colour again. It seemed to him that she had a peculiar affinity with the sunshine. He sank on his knees, seizing her hands, speaking nothing, seeking a verdict in her face. She slipped her hands from his and clasped them about his neck, and her face sank down to his.

‘Oh, ma bouthal, you have come back to me,’ she murmured.

’Yes, I’ve come back, Joy he said hoarsely.

‘And with the true light in eyes.’

‘With my soul full of love for you, my Joy.’

‘And the other?’

’There is no other! There never was another! There was a childish waywardness, a summer madness—God knows what! But I know now Joy, that you are mistress and master of me, that without you I am worthless. I want you, my darling.’

‘You have me!—you have me, Jim! Every beat of the heart of me!’

She pressed her face to his, and their first kiss had not the rapture of that kiss. In it mingled the old sweet emotions, and new ones born of sorrow that were sweeter still.

‘I only understood one side of my love for you,’ he said presently. ’I had to be taught the rest in a hard school.’

‘I knew you would come back to me, sooner or later. You have come soon.’

‘You knew?’ He looked at her wonderingly for a moment, but the surprise passed. It only seemed strange that he had not recognised all along how inevitable was his return. ‘Now that I have come I go no more,’ he said. ’I cannot spare you from my side. I want the ties. I would clamp you to my heart with iron if I could.’

Page 169

’Arrah! ‘tis a happy girl I am, Jimmy,’ she whispered. ’Hush! d’ye hear the song in heart?’

He laughed at the brogue, and pressed his lips amongst her thick hair.

‘I want you for my wife,’ he said.

She clung to him closely in silence for a moment and then he raised her gently and they walked back to the tent, hand in hand.

Nearly a year later Mr. and Mrs. Done were in Melbourne together when the Petral sailed for England. Amongst the ship’s passengers were Mrs. Donald Macdougal, her two children, and Lucy Woodrow. Mrs. Macdougal, a wealthy and attractive widow, had sold Boobyalla, and intended to make her home in England. Lucy was still her companion, and, bidding them farewell, Jim was glad to know that the girl was well and not unhappy.

Jim and Aurora followed the rushes for some years after their marriage, and when they settled down in a substantial house at Ballarat, Done long regretted the canvas walls and the stir and gaiety of the tented fields.

By this time Ballarat was a prim town of many churches and strong Wesleyan proclivities, and Eureka had been justified by the concession of nearly all that the diggers fought for. One-armed Peter Lalor was a staid Parliamentarian and a stout Constitutionalist now, and the grave in which Micah Burton and the other rebels lay buried was an honoured spot. But by this time, too, new interests had been born into Done’s life, new existences had been incorporated with his own, and he had a quaint fellowship with the youngsters, for in his heart remained a sneaking delight in the folly that is the scorn of fools. There were people who called Joy a hoyden at forty, but she retained the invincible soul of the woman who laughs.

THE END