CHAPTER XII.
BILLY AND THE "HATTER."

"He traced with dying hand 'Remorse,'
And perished in the tracing."  
J. G. WHITTIER.

SIXTY miles in a southerly
direction from the place
where Inspector Puttis met
with the adventure related
in our last chapter, the
figure of a man is reposing
beside a silent rocky pool,
in the heart of a dense jungle.
The tropic vegetation around
him is part of the same
straggling line of "scrub-
country" that covers the great,
rugged shoulders of the coast-
range of Northern Queensland
with a soft green mantle of
indescribable grandeur and
beauty. Enormous fig-trees (Ficus), with gigantic,
buttressed stems, tower on all sides into the hanging
gardens of climbing ferns, orchids, and creepers that
swing above in mid-air, and provide the dark, moist
soil beneath with a perennial shelter from the sun’s rays.

Save where a brawling brooklet has cut a rugged pathway for itself through the dense undergrowth, or a hoary monarch of the forest has succumbed to age and insect foes and fallen to the ground, no road through the matted growths around seems passable but for the smallest animals. Yet it is in these gloomy wilds that some of the tribes of Queensland aboriginals find their only safe sanctuary to-day, from the white settlers who have driven them from their old homes in the open country at the foot of the mountain chain. It is midday, but the green shadows of the leafy canopy overhead would render the reading of a newspaper difficult work. But although so dark, the forest is not silent. Its great pulses throb and murmur with the pleonastic signs of tropic life. There comes upon the ear the thousand tiny voices of insects and of birds, swelling and dying in a soft-toned lullaby chorus, which, like the murmur of the coast-waves ten miles to the castward, is never ceasing.

It does not require a second glance at the lonely figure at the little rocky pool to ascertain that it is that of an aboriginal. He is dressed in the ragged remains of a coarse woollen shirt and trousers, both of which garments are so torn with the thousand thorns of the thickets their wearer has just traversed that the wonder is that they still cling to his thin and emaciated body.

Presently the black raises himself from the ground, where he has been reposing at full length upon his back, with his arms extended at right angles to his
body, after the fashion of aboriginals who have undergone excessive fatigue, and totters towards the little water-hole. First examining the sand upon its banks for footmarks, he next proceeds to bathe his bruised and bleeding limbs. The man before us is Billy, the late Dr. Dyesart’s “boy,” and he is almost in as bad a plight as when we saw him on the eventful morning by Paree River’s side, when the explorer saved the wounded child from the uplifted axe of the squatter’s tracker. Billy is now a young man of twenty-four years of age, well-built, active, and handsome for an aboriginal; but the privations and trouble he has lately undergone have pulled him down considerably. After refreshing himself at the pool, he sits down on a fallen tree, and, feeling in his pockets, smiles to himself as he finds that he still possesses a pipe, tobacco, and matches. He is too fatigued to search for food yet awhile, and here is something to stave off the feeling of hunger for a time. Odd as it may appear to those of our readers who do not know Australia intimately, Billy, although a native, and born a *warragal*, or wild native, was almost as helpless as a white man in this “scrub” country, as regards finding the means of sustenance. Take an aboriginal from the semi-desert interior of Australia, and place him in the coastal jungles of the north-eastern shores of the great island, and he is hardly more capable of getting his living there than a European, who then saw the “bush” for the first time, would be under similar circumstances. The *fauna* and *flora* were all new to Billy; even the snakes were different. This was bad enough, but, in addition, he had only just escaped from remorseless enemies, who might even now be
again upon his tracks. The dependent life he had led for sixteen years with his old master was much against him, now that he was thrown upon his own resources. Much of his late life had of course been in the “wilds,” but they were very different to those that now formed his hiding-place. And, besides, there had generally been flour galore for “damper” and “Johnnie-cake” making, and always plenty of powder and shot as a dernier ressort with which to procure a meal.

The young man sits smoking and thinking for a while, and then falls to digging away at the rotten wood upon which he is seated,—a small, toothsome luncheon of fat, oily grubs rewarding his operations. Suddenly he stops, and withdrawing the pipe from his mouth listens intently. His marvellous powers of hearing have detected a distant sound that, falling on the tympanum of a European’s ear, would have become jumbled up and lost amidst the confusing buzz of flies and other myriads of tiny noises around him. What the sound is caused by Billy cannot tell, but it is a stationary one, and in a different direction from that by which any of his pursuers are likely to approach. It may be natives chopping down a tree for honey, but it is almost too sharp in tone for that. After listening awhile the young man rises, and, having determined to ascertain the cause of the phenomenon, begins to crawl down the bed of the little rocky creek near by in the direction of the curious sounds.

Ragged fragments of basalt, straggling tendrils of sharp-toothed lawyer-vines, and other impediments, make his progress slow and painful; but after creeping along the half-dried-up course of the torrent about a quarter of a mile, where hundreds of mosquitoes and
Leeches combined, in a sort of guerilla warfare, to attack the black's arms, legs, and face, he at last finds himself on the edge of a cliff, above one of those curious, circular, crater-lakes that abound in one part of the great uplands of the wild coast-range.

Black walls of basalt rise more or less perpendicularly around the dark, indigo water at their feet. Here and there the ancient lava has crystallized into prismatic columns, or weathered into picturesque battlements and projections, which stand up, like the ruins of some old abbey, above the feathery palms and undergrowth that struggles down the precipitous cliffs in places in avalanches of sunlit emerald or shady o'erhangings of brown and purple.

The dark mountain tarn is some two hundred yards across, and opposite to where the stream, whose bed has hitherto been Billy's road through the jungle, joins it, the surrounding wall of cliffs seems to fall away, as far as one can make out in the shadows, as if the waters of the lake there found a means of exit.

Cautiously peering through the prickly palms and brushwood, our black friend endeavours to find an open space through which he can proceed on his way; but so dense is the mass of vegetation on all sides that there appears but one road to take, that offered to him by the lake itself.

It speaks well for the superstitionless training Billy had received at his late master's hands that he at last determined to take water, as a means of continuing his journey towards the sounds that still, intermittently, make themselves heard above the various voices of the forest. For little in nature can surpass
the awful, supernatural look of these black, silent jungle lakes, and there was something particularly “uncanny” about the appearance of this one. And when, in addition to this, there was the certainty of those dark waters being the abode of more or less numerous swimming snakes, also the grim possibility of some frightful veengnaan—the local Australian edition of a Scotch “water-kelpie”—lurking in those gloomy depths, we may safely say that it showed Billy to be possessed of a cool courage of no ordinary sort when he determined on trusting his fatigued and wounded body to its inky bosom.

Quickly making up his mind, he wriggles through the springy mass of steaming vegetation upon the edge of the cliff before him,—losing quite a number of square inches of his fast-disappearing garments in the process,—and emerges from the shadows into the fierce mid-day heat of a tropical winter day.

A drop of twenty feet only has to be made to reach the silent waters at this point, for the storm-creek has cut through the brim of the crater basin a dozen feet or more; and Billy is just about to make the necessary dive—as the prickly vines around offer no friendly chance of descending by their means—when he pauses to listen once more.

There are two sounds now audible above the ordinary murmurings of the forest. The clink! clink! of the noise he has followed now comes clearly upon the ear, and he recognizes it as proceeding from the pick of some prospector or miner working a creek or gully below, and beyond the lake. There is a cheerful ring about it that strikes a pleasant chord of remembrance in the mind of the poor, hunted
wretch who now hears it; for it reminds him of happy, hopeful days with his old master. But the other sound that is upon the air, and whose purport Billy recognizes as easily as that of the unseen worker's blows,—there is no mistaking those musical whisperings that are just audible, and seem to come from that broken mass of piled-up grey and purple rock that towers above the scrub a little distance off upon his right hand. The "banked-up fires" of Billy's savage nature burst up into an energetic blaze as he hears the voices of a party of natives arranging themselves into a half circle, with the intention of surrounding and capturing some prey they have discovered. Billy correctly guesses the purport of these signals, but does not understand the exact meaning of the words, for he knows little or nothing of the coastal languages. What the natives on the rocky hill have in view is evident: it is the busy worker in the gully beyond. Billy forgets his fatigue as he glances round and satisfies himself that he has the start of the hunters, and then plunging into the water, with marvellously little noise considering the height from which he has descended, swims after the manner of a dog rapidly round the lake, keeping close to the cliffs on the side nearest to the approaching blacks.

The natives of most countries situated in the southern hemisphere, ere foreign civilization has crushed them in her deadly embrace, are good swimmers, but some of the inland tribes of Australian aborigines are perhaps able to produce the best of these,—men who can beat even the marvellous aquatic feats of Tongan, Samoan, and Maoris. The blacks of some portions of the central wilds have a fish-like proclivity for
swimming and remaining for a long time under water that is simply marvellous.

In the muddy water-holes of the great, intermittently-flowing rivers of Northern Australia, we have seen aborigines successfully chase the finny denizens of the deep pools, and bring them otter-like to the shore in their white-toothed jaws. And many a hunted black has saved himself from the cruel rifle of squatter invaders of his native land by pretending to fall as if shot into a river or water-hole, and remaining, apparently, at the bottom. They manage this artifice in various ways: sometimes by swimming an incredible distance under water to a sheltering weedy patch or bed of rushes, where they can remain hidden; but more often by plastering their heads and faces with mud, and remaining, sometimes for hours, with only their nose above water, in some corner where floating leaves, grass, or the like, afford a temporary blind to baffle their relentless foes.

Billy, although by no means as perfect a swimmer as some of his countrymen, showed great skill in the way in which he noiselessly moved through the water to the opposite side of the black lake, and hardly a ripple disturbed its placid surface, above which his dark, glistening head only thrice briefly appeared during his swim.

Arrived at the point he had started for, the young man slowly raises his face again into the hot sunshine behind the leafy cover of a fallen mass of enormous stagshorn ferns, and carefully reconnoitres the summit of the opposite cliffs for any enemies who may be watching him.

None are in sight, so Billy leaves the water and
proceeds to climb the rough side of the old volcano crater, and as the rocks are lower and less precipitous than at the place where he dived into the lake, he soon reaches the shelter of the scrub once more. A kind of rugged giants' staircase, which the overflow from the lake has cut in the ancient lava covering of the mountain, now leads Billy down into a wide, wild-looking gorge, about two hundred feet below the surface of the dark tarn above. Through the centre of this deep gully, and flanked with a dense growth of gracefully festooned trees, runs a clear, silver stream, with a cool, refreshing, rushing voice, amongst the smooth, rounded bounders in its course. Taking its rise in some limestone formation in the unknown depths of the jungles beyond, it has painted its rocky bed of a pine white with a calcareous deposit, that stands out in strong relief to the sombre hues of the overhanging cliffs that here and there jut out boldly from the verdure on either side.

Each recurring wet season sees the whitened boulders swept off towards the sea-coast by the angry brown waters of the "flushed" river, in company with the like that has collected during the interval since the previous rains, and then the fierce torrent, gradually settling down once more into the bubbling little stream as we now have it, sets to work again to paint a fresh strip of white through the twilight forest glades.

Kneeling by the side of one of the chain of snowy pools that stretches into the misty vista of graceful palms and dark-leaved trees, beneath the afternoon shadows of the gorge, is a strange-looking figure, quite in keeping with the wild surroundings,—a thin,
elderly man, with a ragged, unkempt beard and deeply bronzed and furrowed face, shaded by the most dilapidated of soft felt hats. The spare figure that Billy is now watching is covered with clothes so old, patched, and repatched that one would hesitate to pronounce an opinion as to which of the frowsy fragments formed part of the original garments. A certain yellow tone of colour, something between that of a nicely browned loaf and the lighter tints of a Cheddar cheese, pervades the “altogether” of the old man, for the iron-rust and clay-stains of years of lonely toil amongst the mountains have dyed both skin and rags of one common colour.

A thin but muscular left hand holds the outer rim of a brown, circular iron pan,—called by miners a “prospecting dish,”—and presses its other edge against the ancient’s open-bosomed shirt, so as to keep the vessel firmly in position, as the keen old eyes examine its contents for the cheering yellow specks with a small pocket-lens.

Billy stands looking at the old prospector for a minute, and rightly guesses that he is one of those mining recluses, called “hatters” in Australia, some specimens of which class our dark friend has met before. In fact, Billy’s curiosity as a miner himself makes him nearly forget the approaching natives, in his eagerness to ascertain if the dish now being “panned off” shows the presence of the precious metal in the locality. But this hesitation on his part is not for long. Billy has retained his European raiment at some considerable inconvenience in his flight through the scrub, for the same reason that chiefly prompts Australian aboriginals to put such
value upon the sartorial signs of civilization, and now he is to reap the fruits of his forethought.

Many an Australian bushman will shoot a native at sight, without compunction, if in puris naturalibus, and it is a fact that many make it a rule to do so when meeting a "nigger" alone in the bush; but the same individuals would hesitate to pay this attention to a black sheltered in that badge of servitude, an old shirt or ragged pair of inexpressibles whose wearer may possibly belong to a neighbouring squatter or police inspector.

Billy trusts now implicitly to his torn clothes to serve as a flag of truce till he can get a hearing from the man whose life he is probably about to save; and careless of the fact that the old miner has a revolver hanging in the open pouch at his belt, and that a fowling-piece lies by the pick within a yard of the thin, hairy right arm, he girds up his tatters and commences to whistle loudly as he makes his way over the hot boulders towards the curious, propensic figure by the stream-side.

The old prospector turns suddenly as the shrill notes of Billy's musical trilling echo along the rocky sides of the glen, and, dropping his dish, snatches up the brown old "Manton" by his side.

"Hold on, boss!" shouts Billy, thinking for the instant that perhaps he had been too rash after all, in leaving his shelter amongst the rocks before holding a parley with the stranger.

"Hold on, boss; you'll want your powder for war-ragial blacks directly, and better not waste it on 'good fellow' like me."

"Who the devil are you? Move a step an' I blow
your brains out," responds the old man, lowering the piece, however, from his shoulder.

"I'm white fellow's boy," explains Billy, sitting down on a boulder in order to show his faith in the miner's good sense, and also to give that dangerously excited old individual a chance to examine him and cool down. "I'm white fellow's boy, and I see black fellow coming after you. They make a circle to catch you. See, I have swum the lake to bring to you this news. I was hidden when I saw them first. They will try to get me now as well as you; you must let me go with you."

"Where's your boss?" asks the old miner, glancing round on all sides for any signs of approaching foes.

"My boss is dead. His name was Dr. Dyesart, Dyesart the explorer. Perhaps you've heard of him? But you had better clear before the Kurra (vermin) reach us."

The old "hatter's" eyes gleam suspiciously at Billy as he speaks again.

"Yer may be a good nigger. But yer too durned well spoken fur a nigger fur my thinkin'. I knew Dyesart once, and I'll soon find out if ye're trying ter fool me. But here, take the pick an' dish, and go on ahead of me down past the rock there."

Billy picks up the utensils mentioned, and, summoning up all the remainder of his strength, totters along the bed of the stream in the direction indicated by the skinny finger of the dirty old solitary, who comes shuffling along after him.

The part of the ravine the two men are now entering is even wilder than that where they first became
acquainted with each other. The ground sinks rapidly, as the increasing noisiness of the brawling streamlet indicates, as it leaps from rock to rock on its way, as if rejoicing upon its approach to freedom and the sea. Some way down the gorge, the steamy haze of a cataract climbs up the cliff sides and blots out further view in that direction, and the soft thunderings of falling waters come up the gully at intervals, as the evening breeze begins to stir the topmost branches of the stately trees.

Great black cliffs tower skywards on the left-hand side, and their grim fronts yawn with numerous caves, the cold husks of what were once enormous air-bubbles in that awful flood of molten rock that in the far-off past poured down these mountain slopes from the Bellenden Ker group of ancient volcanoes.

A few more words have passed between Billy and the ancient "hatter," which have apparently fairly satisfied the latter as to the goodness of the dark-skinned younger man, when the clamour of shouting voices behind them makes both turn round.

The sight that meets their eyes is by no means a pleasant one. Halfway down a part of the cliffs that the two men had passed only a minute or so before, a party of natives has just arrived, all of them naked, and carrying long spears, probably with the intention of cutting off the old digger's escape down the gully. These sable hunters, seeing that their quarry has, for the time, escaped them, are shouting to their friends up the gorge to join them, for a fresh effort to surround the object of their hatred and suspicion.

"Only just in time, boss!" exclaims Billy, his white eyeballs glowing like coals from their dark setting of
swarthy skin, as he watches the rapid movements of the enemy, who are moving along the summit of the cliff towards them. "Those devils got you safe enough, s'pose they'd kept you up there till dark," pointing to the open part of the gorge.

"But where will you camp? I'm tired. In fact, just 'bout done. I have walked many miles to-day, and have eaten little since three days."

"This is my camp," answers the "hatter," climbing up to one of the aforementioned caves with an agility that a far younger man might have envied. "We can keep out of the niggers' way here." And the old man coolly began to collect some sticks and leaves that lay about the entrance to the cavern, in order to start a fire, just as if two or three score of howling savages, all thirsting for his destruction, within a couple of hundred yards of him, was a matter of every-day occurrence to him, and therefore one of no importance.

Night falls quickly, and outside the cave the darkening forest begins its night chorus of many voices, day-choristers retiring one by one. The mountain teal whistle and "burr" in answer to each other; owls and night-jars scream and gurgle in the trees; boon-garies (tree-kangaroos) squeak and bark to their mates, as they leave the branches for a night stroll in the scrub; and every crevice of the caves gives forth its dark legions of flitting bats, some of enormous size, who vociferate shrilly, with ear-piercing notes, as if thousands of ghostly slate pencils were squeaking in mid-air on an equal number of spectre slates.

Inside the cave, which is much larger than its small, porthole-like entrance might lead one to imagine, the
two men speedily make themselves as comfortable as they can under the circumstances. There is ample room for the fire that soon lights up the concave roof of the cavern with a cheerful, ruddy glow, and the smoke rolling out of the doorway keeps the place clear of mosquitoes, who are getting pretty lively outside already.

The old "hatter" has used this retreat as his camping ground for the last few days, whilst prospecting this part of the upper waters of the unnamed creek, that can be heard in the darkness flowing past his temporary abode, and a small but sufficient supply of flour, tea, and sugar is to be seen carefully suspended from the stalactite-like projections from the ceiling of the cave. This provender, with the remains of a couple of pigeons, half a dozen wild turkeys' eggs and some *cookey* nuts give promise of a good "square meal," at last, to the exhausted and half-famished Billy.

"Yer've done me a good turn, and though yer are a nigger, yer welcome ter what I've got here," remarks the grey-headed old gold-seeker after a long silence, during which he has disinterred some of the afore-mentioned viands from an anti-wild dog pyramid of stones in one corner of the cave.

"Them blarmed devils outside hain't seen a white face up here afore I'm thinking, and I guess they'll not bother us till morning. What do you think, Charlie, or Jackie, or whatever yer name is?"

"My name's Billy, boss," replies our dark friend, who is endeavouring to keep himself awake by frantically chewing some of the sodden tobacco he has discovered in his pocket. "I think these fellows throw
spear into cave by-an-by, p'r'aps. I think best keep up here,” pointing to a buttress of rock that, projecting from the walls of the cavern, provides a substantial shield against any missiles flung in at the cave-entrance. “But I know little of these fellow-blacks. I come from the flat country, this time, out by the Einsleigh River way.”

“Ugh,” grunts the old man in reply, and telling Billy to “have a ‘doss’ (sleep),” whilst his namesake, the billy, is boiling, the “hatter” proceeds to cut up a pipe-full of very foul-smelling tobacco, looking thoughtfully at the fire meanwhile.

Billy, on his part, is not slow to avail himself of his host’s invitation, and sinking down upon the cold rock floor goes immediately to sleep.

If it should appear, to any of our readers to border upon the incredible, that two men should thus calmly sleep and smoke in the face of danger, that to one inexperienced in the wilder phases of bush-life would appear to demand the utmost vigilance, we can only reply by offering as our defence, firstly, the old saying that “truth is oftentimes stranger than fiction;” and, secondly, that in this scene, as in each of our main incidents, we have endeavoured to sketch from memory a faithful if humble representation of an actual occurrence, in preference to indulging what latent talents we may possess in the walks of imaginative scene-painting.

Mais revenons à nos moutons. The old “hatter” sits silently smoking; sometimes glancing upwards towards the roof of the cave, where the almost obliterated representations of white and red hands—the work of previous aboriginal occupants of the retreat—
are still discernible, and at others fixing his ferret-like, bloodshot eyes upon the dark, hardship-lined face of the slumbering Billy, as the firelight dances upon its swarthy surface. Nothing appears to disturb the well-earned repose of the two men, save a small black snake that comes wriggling in to enjoy the warmth of the blazing branches, and meets with a warmer reception than it had anticipated. Then the billy at last splutters out its welcome signal, and the old digger and his companion proceed to indulge that taste that has made Australians the greatest consumers of tea, per head, in the world.

"Them Myalls (wild natives) don't seem to mean business to-night," observes Billy's host, when the silent meal is finished, as he hands our black friend a piece of "nailrod" with which to charge his evening pipe.

"I think they wait, boss. Watch an hour, perhaps two or three, then throw spears." Billy leans forward as he speaks to heat a piece of tobacco in the embers, in order to soften the flinty morsel, and thereby facilitate the operation of cutting it into shreds.

"I think those beggars," jerking his black thumb towards the darkness outside the cave entrance, "I think those beggars come by-and-by. "Urraurrnna (take care); I think they come presently."

Then both men relapse again into silence, each engaged with his own unpleasant thoughts. The "hatter," although somewhat favourably prepossessed with Billy's appearance, and glad of a companion for the time being, has that instinctive distrust of a "nigger" common to most Australian bushmen. He does not care altogether for the presence of his new
acquaintance in the cave, and even considers, for a moment, what would be the easiest way of getting rid of him, and making him seek another shelter for the night. But the feeling of gratitude to Billy for the service he has rendered that day finally prevails, and the old man determines to hear the "boy" further and explain his appearance in the gorge before he acts.

Billy, on his part, although naturally of a sanguine turn of mind (as indeed all his race are), and little given to ruminating upon the sorrows of to-morrow, is trying to puzzle out a plan of future operations, whose main object is to discover the nephew of his late employer. He notices the half-concealed, suspicious glances of his dirty old host, and is almost tempted to offer to seek other lodgings, when the latter breaks the silence once more.

"'Spose you're a runaway nigger? Station or police?"

"Yes, boss, I'm a runaway. But I've never worked on station. Always with the doctor. All my time mining and cooking for the old man."

"Thought yer was," grunts the old prospector, taking his pipe from between his yellow teeth for an instant; "noticed the way yer carried the pick, and guessed yer knew something about 'breaking down a face.'"

"Yes, I can do that much, anyhow," remarks Billy quietly.

"Well, that bein' so, lad, I ain't the man as would turn dog on a poor beggar, let alone a miner, be he black or white. I ain't built that way." The old man stops speaking to listen to a slight noise outside the cave for a moment, and then continues: "If yer
like to camp here longer me till I've done this gully, yer can. But just sling me a yarn about how yer came to this hole in the ranges." The speaker turns towards the fire, that has burnt itself low, and commences to rake it into renewed brightness. As he does so, his head and right arm leave the shelter of the projecting rock before-mentioned, and come between the luminous background of flames and the cave entrance.

Then Billy's prognostications are fulfilled; for some natives, who have been silently watching for an opportunity to attack the occupants of the cavern, immediately take advantage of the appearance of the old digger, and the fire embers are scattered right and left by three spears, which, however, luckily all miss their human target.

The two men leap to their feet, and Billy, snatching up the old "hatter's" shot-gun, without waiting a moment to ask the permission of its owner, glides noiselessly into the darkness, and is lost to the view of his startled host. Presently the latter proceeds to collect the scattered fire-sticks, and adding to them the spears, which he breaks up into pieces, he relights his pipe and waits for the return of his guest. Half an hour passes in silence, and then two loud reports, followed by the rain-like pattering of bouncing shot about the entrance to the cave, and the screams of a number of agonized voices, proclaim the successful accomplishment of Billy's plucky plan of retaliation upon the enemy outside.

"No more trouble to-night," observes that individual, with a complaisant grin, as he presently returns into the cavern, striking the butt of the gun
he carries, as he walks, so as to give a jangling signal of his approach to the man by the fire, who, revolver in hand, might otherwise mistake him for an enemy. "Shot guns better at night than a rifle for this kind of work. The beggars have all cleared. None killed, I think."

"All the better, lad. All the days I've knocked about the bush, I've never shot a black yet, though I've seen a many bowled over. But they warn't bad in the old days, as they are now. These beggars here, though, are a bit koolie (fierce); and I don't blame them. They don't like to see a white face,"—the old man's countenance was about the tone of colour of a new pig-skin saddle,—"they don't like to see a white face hereabouts, for the scrub's the only place in this part of Queensland where the poor beggars ain't hunted."

The night passes without further cause for alarm, and next day, and the one after, and for several weeks Billy remains with the old prospector. And the latter, being a sensible man, and finding himself thus brought into contact with a mind in no ways inferior to his own,—albeit housed in corporal surroundings of that dark tint that has hitherto placed the unfortunate aborigines beyond the pale of civilized law in Australia,—soon makes a companion and partner of Billy, instead of treating him as a mere animal, as has hitherto been his custom with those black "boys" he has had occasion to employ.

Moreover, in our dark friend the ancient "hatter" finds his ideal of what a model "mate" should be,—strong, cheerful, plucky, frugal, and, above all, lucky. And sometimes, as the strange pair smoke their
evening pipes together in the fire-lit cave, and the thoughts of the "boss" go flying back into the dim vistas of memory, and the cruel swindles perpetrated upon him by this and that white partner of his younger days are re-enacted in his mind's eye, he cannot help contrasting them unfavourably with his present mate, whose coming departure, although he is "only a nigger," the old man begins to dread with a fear that surprises himself.

"Swelp me," the poor old solitary soul sometimes ejaculates to himself, as the chilling thought of once more being a lonely "hatter" in these awful wilds goes like an ague-shiver through his spare and bended form, "I suppose I'm getting too old for this kind of work; and if I had had a mate like Billy when I was young I would have been doing the 'toff' in Sydney by this time, like that rascal Canoona Bill that swindled me on the Crocodile, and not have had to work up to my knees in water, with the pan and shovel, at my time of life."

But it is not approaching age or failing bodily strength that is the cause of this change in the old miner's feelings, as he tries to persuade himself it is, for he cannot find it in his mind to confess he feels any attachment or affection for a "nigger." It is something very different that begins to make him feel disgusted with the idea of a return to his solitary mode of life.

Billy's new friend, like most of his class of old "hatters," became disgusted with the world owing to having been unfortunate in his choice of partners, and now that he at last finds one to suit him, his view of life becomes correspondingly fairer than heretofore.
"Billy!" one evening said the old man,—who has lately informed our black friend that he is known at Geraldtown and Herberton by his patronymic of Weevil,—"Billy! you ain't told me yet how you come to clear out from the station where you left the doctor's letter. What station was it?"

Billy, who is shaping a new pick-handle by the light of the fire, does not reply for a minute or two. When he does look up at the lean figure on the other side of the flames, he betrays a little of that sulky, spoilt-child demeanour generally exhibited by members of his race when recounting any occurrence that has been a source of annoyance to them.

"I ran away, boss, because they try and get me to show them the way back to where I planted the doctor. Mister Giles, who owns the station—"

"Who?" Old Weevil leans across the smoke towards Billy. "It warn't Wilson Giles, were it?" he asks in a low, hoarse voice, looking at the black with ill-concealed anxiety.

"Yes, Wilson was his front name. D'you know him?"

The old man withdraws into the semi-obscurity of a shadowy pile of firewood against which he is standing at the question, much like a sea-anemone shrinks into its rock cleft before an obtrusive human finger.

"Yes, I know him," growls the old man in the darkness, exhibiting an amount of hatred in the tone of his voice that makes Billy look in the direction of the wood stack with open eyes and mouth. Weevil, however, does not appear likely to be communicative, so Billy presently continues: "The doctor's last words almost were, 'Don't let any one know where
you left me save my nephew;’ and so it wasn’t likely I was going to tell the first man as asked me. Was it likely?”

“Burn him! No!” ejaculated Mr. Weevil, in parenthesis.

“Giles tried me with one thing and then another. Offered me anything I liked, at last, to take him to the grave. Thought I was only like a station black, I suppose!” and the speaker scrapes angrily at the wooden handle between his knees, with a black splinter of obsidian (volcanic glass) that he is using as a ready-made draw-knife.

“Then Giles has a talk with his niece,—she bosses it at ‘Government House’” (is mistress at the head-station),—“and she says ‘Flog the nigger! flog him!’ And a house-gin who belongs to my Mordu Kapara (class-family), which is Kularu, hears all this as she sets cloth in the parlour. She come and tells me. Then me run away. Then me turn wild beggar again!”

Billy, who by this time is gesticulating excitedly with his hands, curiously relapses, slightly,—as he always does when highly agitated,—into the remarkable “station-jargon” to which we have already had occasion to refer.

“Me run and run. An’ Giles, he borrow the big dogs with the red eyes and thin flanks (bloodhounds) from Billa Billa station.”

“I know ’em,” interrupts old Weevil; “that fellow on the Mulgrave’s made a good thing out of breeding them for the squatters.”

“Well, boss, I made for the scrub. But I get tired, and the stinging-tree blind me, all but. The
dogs come up close. I hear them howl, and the men calling to them. But the big dogs badly trained; they go after young cassowary, and I drown my tracks in a creek, and then 'possum' (hide in a tree) all the day."

After Billy has thus graphically given his account of his marvellous escape from the clutches of Mr. Giles, the conversation turns upon the subject of going down the creek to the nearest township, which we will christen Meesonton, after a well-known Australian explorer living in the district.

"We'll both go as far as the low scrub range, over the Beatrice creek," observes old Weevil, "and yer can work the old sluice there I was telling yer of yesterday if them cursed Chinkies ain't found it. I won't be more nor a week or so away. I wouldn't advise yer," continues the old man, "ter show yer face near the store yet awhile. That beggar Giles is well in with the perlice, and they'd knab yer like enough."

So very early next morning Billy and the old miner set out; just about the time when that earliest of early birds, the crow, has begun to think it time to commence his matutinal robberies, and long ere the sun has risen to dry the fern and scrub sufficiently for any natives to be out hunting who might notice the two men's departure. By midday our friends have followed for eight miles that only road possible through the dense jungle,—the rough, white bed of the merry little creek. Here, after a rest and a smoke, the men left the stream and clambered up the dark, clayey banks, when they found themselves on a broken, open piece of country, across which they.
steered, Weevil leading, in a north-easterly direction, passing numerous little trickling creeks trending eastwards on their way. Here and there the recent footprints of aborigines were to be seen in the rich, volcanic soil; and once Billy detected the voices of natives, but said nothing to his companion about it. Late in the afternoon, after crossing some level tablelands, thinly covered with scrub, several large gunyahs (native dwellings) were discovered, and, as the evening began to look stormy, the two men took possession of one of the largest of them. These huts were similar to beehives in shape, like those of the village on the Paree river that we described in Chapter VIII., and were substantially thatched with fern fronds and that coarse kind of grass that grows in the open spaces in the scrub called "pockets" by northern bushmen. These "pockets" are treeless spots circular in form, and generally half an acre in extent, and are used by the aborigines for boovers (native tournaments) and dances. One of these native Champs de Mars, on the upper Barron river, covers quite fifteen acres, and is also a perfect circle.

It was still dark, the next morning, when Billy and old Weevil started once more on their journey; and the latter, in consequence, fell into a two-foot hole near the gunyah in which they had slept, and found himself lying on a mass of loose, rattling objects, which his sense of touch quickly told him were human skulls,—the remains, doubtless, of by-gone picnics of the good people whose village the two men had appropriated during the previous night.

Pushing onwards, our friends spent the first half of the day in climbing rocky peaks, and crossing the
dark, rugged sources of creeks, wrapped in their primeval gloom of frizzled, intricate masses of thorny vines and dangerous stinging-trees; and, after making only three miles in six hours, were forced to rest awhile in a ragged gully, walled in by grey slate cliffs, and strewn with glistening blocks of white and "hungry" quartz.

The stinging-tree, which we have twice mentioned in this chapter, is worthy of a few remarks, for it is perhaps the most terrible of all vegetable growths, and is found only in the scrub-country through which Billy and his friend are now forcing their way.

This horrible guardian of the penetralia of the Queensland jungle stands from five to fifteen feet in height, and has a general appearance somewhat similar to that of a small mulberry-tree; but the heart-shaped leaves of the plant before us differ from those of the European fruit just mentioned in that they are larger, and because they look as if manufactured from some light-green, velvety material, such as plush. Their peculiarly soft and inviting aspect is caused by an almost invisible coating of microscopic cilia, and it is to these that the dangerous characteristics of the plant are due. The unhappy wanderer in these wilds, who allows any part of his body to come in contact with those beautiful, inviting tongues of green, soon finds them veritable tongues of fire, and it will be weeks, perhaps months, ere the scorching agony occasioned by their sting is entirely eradicated. Nor are numerous instances wanting of the deaths of men and animals following the act of contact with this terrible _lusus naturae._

Billy and Weevil make more progress during the
afternoon, the country being more level and the scrub less thick; but, although both men are inured to fatigue and discomfort of all sorts, they are forced to camp early, after doing another six miles. Ragged, weary, and barefooted,—for even the most imaginative mind could hardly recognize the flabby pieces of water-logged leather that still adhere to the men's feet as boots,—the two travellers fling themselves down on the dry, sandy bed of a mountain torrent, and scrape the clusters of swollen leeches from their ankles, which are covered with clotted blood, and pick the bush-ticks and scrub-itch insects from their flesh with the point of the long scrub-knife the old digger carries.

As our friends are engaged in this painful but necessary toilet of a voyager through the Queensland scrub, a wild turkey comes blundering by in all the glories of her glossy, blue-black feathers and brilliant red and yellow head,—not the Otis Australasianus which is known to southern settlers as a "wild turkey" and is in reality a bustard, but a true scrub turkey (Telegallus).

Billy is not long in tracking the footprints of the bird back to its enormous mound nest. For this ingenious feathered biped, like her smaller contemporary the scrub hen (Megapodius tumulus), saves herself from the monotonous duty of sitting on her eggs by depositing them in a capital natural incubator, formed of rotting and heated leaves, which she collects into a pile, and arranges so as to do the hatching part of the business for her.

A meal of turkey eggs and roasted "cozzon" berries, whose red clusters are to be seen hanging
from parasitic vines upon the great stems around in plentiful profusion, and then the men retire to rest upon their wet blankets, beneath a great ledge of granite, upon whose surface some aboriginal artist has delineated in different colours the admirable representations of immense frogs in various attitudes.

But trouble commences with the morrow; and when old Weevil raises his stiff and patch-work form from the hard couch upon which he has passed the night, he finds Billy, gun in hand, watching something on the dim summit of the cliffs opposite their camp.

"Sh!" observes that individual, without turning his head; "plenty black fellow all about here. D'you see that beggar's head?"

"Bust 'em!" yawns the old digger, stretching; "they won't interfere with us. Let's have tucker, and 'break camp' as soon as we can."

The frugal repast is soon silently completed, but half a mile down the creek, where the aborigines have constructed an ingenious weir, armed with conical baskets in which to catch what fish may pass that way, Billy and his companion find a small army of copper-coloured natives collected on the opposite side of the stream, who wave and beckon to the two travellers to return whence they came. Their gesticulations and fierce yells not having the desired effect, a series of signals are given by them to other natives in ambush on the jungle-fringed precipices that rise with lycopodium-tasselled ledges above the heads of the intruders.

"We're in fur it now!" grunts the older man, who has done some prospecting in New Guinea, amongst
other places. "Them yellow niggers is Kalkadoones, and as like Papuans as may be; and they're devils to fight. Keep close under the cliff."

Billy guesses the mode of attack which the old digger's experience teaches him to anticipate, and which prompts his advice to his mate to seek the shelter of the rocks as much as possible. The wisdom of this precaution is soon seen. For when our friends are fairly started on their way past the rapids in the gloomy gorge, the natives commence hurling down great boulders of conglomerate. These would speedily have crushed the adventurous twain below, had they not been sheltered by the overhanging base of the precipice, which was worn concave by the river's action during floods. As it was many of the rocks bounded horribly close to the men's heads.

"I can't use my gun here, that's sartin," presently observes the old man, as he puts fresh caps upon his old companion of many years. "We'll have to clear them beggars off before we go any further." Then springing from his shelter with his rags and tangled grey locks flying in the air, Weevil makes for a rocky reef that juts out into the river, which is deep at this place, with the idea of peppering the enemy from this point of vantage.

But the Fates are against him, and sable Sister Atropos snaps her weird scissors on poor old Weevil's thread of existence. A shower of stones descends upon the wild-looking figure as it hurries towards the river, and the old miner falls an uncouth, bleeding object upon the strand, groaning heavily.

Happily, the gun has escaped destruction, and by its aid Billy, who rushes forward to defend his friend,
performs prodigies of valour that on a field of civilized warfare would certainly have gained him some such coveted distinction as the Victoria Cross.

A hurried shot at the yelling figures that are clinging to the trees overhanging the edge of the cliff in an appalling manner, and one of them comes spinning down with a sickening thud upon the rocks below. A second wire cartridge sent in the same direction is equally successful, and another of the enemy tumbles forward on to a jagged rock that projects from the precipice; while his friends, horrified at the sudden illness that has thus overtaken two of their number, stop short in the middle of a diabolical yell of triumph, and clearing off are seen no more.

Billy bathes the crushed features of the old man, whose stentorous breathing shows how badly he is injured, and the cold water revives him somewhat.

"I'm busted in my inside, lad," he murmurs raspily. "Gimme me pipe. I can't see to— How blind I'm gettin'!"

After a pause, during which he has tried to smoke in vain, he asks to be raised in a sitting posture.

"Billy," he says, when this is effected, "you're a good boy. I'm goin' fast. Listen ter me afore I chuck it up altogether. Me legs is dead already."

The dying man has a crime upon his soul, and dreads to take the secret of it with him into the unknown which he is about to enter, so he fights gamely against the dissolution that is fast approaching till he has told it to Billy.

"Remember what I tell ye, lad. 'Twas I as stole Wilson Giles's only son. Giles had ruined my life, and (gasp) I tuck revenge. I marked the boy blue..."
star an' W. G. on near shoulder. Then I cleared out
an' tuck him (gasp) ter Sydney."

Silence for a time follows, after which the expiring
flame of life flickers up, and the last words Weevil
speaks on earth are gasped out.

"God forgive me! Intended to return boy after a
Goo'-bye, ole man. Let's have 'nother—— (gasp).
Oh God! Jane! Jane! come back ter me!"

The old man stretches out his wounded hands as
he wails the last sentence in tone of wild entreaty,
and Billy feels, by the suddenly-increased weight in
his arms, that he is holding a corpse.
CHAPTER XIII.
CLAUDE'S LETTER TO DICK.

"We have at various times had stories told us of the treatment the blacks are subjected to in the bush, and it behoves the Government to make strict inquiry into the whole question. By the way, where is the Protector of Aborigines, and what has he got to say in the matter?

"Oh it's only a nigger, you know;
It's only a nigger, you know;
A nigger to wallop, a nigger to slave,
To treat with a word and a blow.

"It's only a nigger, you know;
A nigger, whose feelings are slow;
A nigger to chain up, a nigger to treat
To a kick, and a curse, and a blow.

"It's only a nigger, you know;
It's only a nigger, you know;
But he's also a brother, a man like the rest,
Though his skin may be black as a crow."

"BACCA."

From the "Lantern," South Australia, 1889.
MOUNT SILVER,
August 8th, 1889.

MR. RICHARD SHAW, Te Renga-renga, Drury,
New Zealand.

EAR DICK,—In my letter to the 'Mater' I have set forth all those of my experiences, up to date, that I consider of most interest to the gentle female mind, and have omitted certain others of a more painful character. For you, old man, I preserve the honour of participating in the 'noble indignation' which at present suffuses the soul of 'yours regardfully,'—the outcome of my present surroundings of many most un-English institutions. For my pericardiac region is sickened and disgusted with certain 'goings on' in this fair colony of the British Crown, and I would fain burst into poetry—after the Whittier style—only that I am well aware that my knowledge of the properties of the hexameter is considerably less than my acquaintance with those of the lactometer.

But ere I launch into these matters, I will roughly sketch out my doings since I posted my last letter, which I wrote at the pretty, sand-surrounded, and 'quite too awfully' tropical little port of Cairns.

"Australian hospitality is proverbial, but I have to withdraw myself as much as possible from the
‘here’s-a-hand-me-trusty-fren’’ kind of thing, as I find it means participating in an unlimited number of ‘nips’ of ‘stringy bark,’—a curious combination of fusil oil and turpentine, labelled ‘whisky,’ or of a decoction of new and exceedingly virulent rum, much patronised by the inhabitants of these sugar-cane districts. However, whilst arranging the necessary preliminaries for my journey at this little inland township, I have made several acquaintances. One, a Mr. Feder,—the manager of a German-Lutheran mission station about fifty miles from here,—who, it appears, knew my Uncle Dyesart some few years back, and may prove useful to me in my search after Billy. I have also come across an Inspector of Police, by name John Bigger, who, although I have certainly not returned his advances with much warmth, for I think him a silly old swiper, is everlastingly thrusting his companionship upon me; and, although he is apparently doing his best to make my stay here agreeable, one can have too much of a good thing, especially when the said good thing suffers rather from ‘furor loquendi,’ in other words, is a confounded old bore.

“This inspector introduced himself to me as a friend of one Inspector Puttis, whom he says was a friend of uncle’s. This Puttis sends word that Billy has disappeared from Murdaro station; but as I never mentioned the fact that I wanted to find Billy to any one here till after I received this message, I am rather at a loss to understand it altogether.

“Now my other acquaintance here—the missionary cuss I mentioned—curiously re-echoes the last words in uncle’s letter, namely, to distrust the police. And
in faith I believe they're a bad lot entirely, although I suppose there are some exceptions.

"It is partly in consequence of this that I have not accepted an invitation to go shooting with the inspector to-day, and am writing to you instead.

"My old miner-friend got bitten by a large poisonous black spider at Cairns, and is hors de combat. So I have been obliged to leave him behind for a time with Don, who is turning out a grand little fellow. These two will follow me to Mount Silver next week, when I shall start for Murdaro station immediately. I am not wasting my time in the interim, although I itch to start, but am making myself acquainted with the ways of station-life and mining matters in this wild part of the world. If Billy arrives at the mission station, as Mr. Feder thinks he probably will, I shall be communicated with at once. But 'how do I manage without my little henchman Don?' you'll be after asking. Well, that brings me to the main subject matter of this epistle. I have a second 'boy Friday' now; and what is more, he's black as a crow, and, moreover, I bought him. Yes, in the year of our Lord, 1889, in the civilized street of a town in an English colony, I followed the custom of the place, and purchased the little black specimen of humanity that is now amusing a party of his aboriginal friends, over there by the town well, by imitating with a piece of stick the way I brush my teeth of a morning, which operation I noticed has amazed him muchly, and is probably indulged in by few of the whites about here. "I travelled alone as far as this place, being anxious to get on here; and my obliging host—who talks broad Scotch, although he is by two generations a
colonist—advised me to get a 'boy,' as all black servants, regardless of age, are called here, to look after my two horses. Well, to cut the story short, I paid £2 for little Joe to a carrier whom 'mine host' informed of my wants. Joe is a great help, and according to the unwritten law of the place,—which appears to be supported by what little pulpit power they have here,—my 'boy' is, in this free land, my property, body and soul.

"Yes, coming here from New Zealand one feels as if he had somehow descended into the slave countries of Mrs. Beecher Stowe, and the odd part of it is that its very existence is unknown in England, neither in Sydney nor Brisbane to any great extent. But these places, it is true, have their own little white slaves 'always with them,' as my experiences amongst the newsboys, when I got little Don, has taught me.

"Although I did pander to the local custom, against which I am speaking, in buying Joe, I trust to do something good for him to cover this sin of mine, and will bring him back to New Zealand with me.

"Any one who boasts of being the 'free-born son of an Englishman' cannot look coolly on at the treatment of the unfortunate blacks up here in Queensland. The poor wretches one sees forced to work by brutal squatters, carriers, 'cockatoo' settlers, and others, have no hope to cheer them like those mentioned by your old American poet-friend, John Greenleaf Whittier:

"'O'er dusky faces, seamed and old,
And hands born-hard with unpaid toil,
With hope in every rustling fold,
We saw your star-dropt flag uncoil.'
"No, the (five) star-drop flag of Australia, heralding the (three) star drop (whisky) of the advancing army of locust-squatters, brings no hope, or mercy either, to the poor devils whose ancestral domains become their fields of unceasing and 'unpaid toil.' All the horrors depicted by Mrs. Beecher Stowe, all the sorrows sung of by the immortal Whittier, are rampant around me as I write. And it seems that it is in vain that the immorality of the horrible traffic is thundered into the ears of the various Governments—who after all are but the representatives of the squatter-kings—by various southern papers from time to time. Read the following first-rate article upon the subject, by Mr. Rose, the editor of the Brisbane Courier, the boss paper of the colony, which appeared on September 16th, last year.

"Communications that have lately reached us from the north show too clearly that our people have not yet been educated to the recognition of the human rights of the original possessors of Australia. A correspondent forwards descriptions of atrocities of alleged frequent occurrence in the northern districts, the bare recital of which is enough to make one's ears to tingle. Nor are we allowed the common consolation of ignorance or sentimentalism or exaggeration on the part of our informer. For our correspondent is a well-known pressman, who has done a bit of exploiting both in Australasia and New Guinea, who admits that he has himself shot natives who would otherwise have shot him, and of whom we can readily believe that, as he says, he is "not particularly prejudiced in favour of the natives or very soft-hearted." He even tells us that he is not himself a religious man, and yet
declares that he would not think the future commonly assigned to the wicked by religious people as too condign a punishment for atrocities that have come within his knowledge. His indictment touches mainly the districts lying between Cairns and Georgetown, where, he says, the blacks are being decimated, and by Government servants in the shape of black troopers and their masters, whose "dispersion" of the aborigines in particular localities has simply come to mean their slaughter. He speaks of men being kept for the sole purpose of hunting and killing the aborigines; he gives instances of their camps being surrounded, and men, women, and children massacred for killing cattle, when, through the white man's presence, they could no longer find game; and he tells in detail one story of the extermination of a camp simply because some blacks had been seen passing a mining station where nothing had been stolen for months. Roundly he charges the "grass dukes" and their subordinates with "murdering, abducting children for immoral purposes, and stockwhipping defenseless girls," and he condemns "each Government that comes into power for winking at the slaughter of our black fellow-subjects of the Queen as an easy way of getting rid of the native question." The Northern Miner asserts that this picture is not overdrawn, and that the atrocities mentioned have even been exceeded. It refers to squatters branding blacks, keeping harems of black gins, and finding their slaughtering record no bar to advancement to high office in the State. The black trooper system is, in the view of this paper, legalized murder, which reckons the life of a bullock of more account than that of a score of black fellows.
We do not vouch for the truth of these serious charges; but, if true, the horrible demoralisation of such a system on blacks and whites alike it is difficult to over-estimate; and cry exaggeration as we may, it is clear that enough remains to call for the immediate and earnest attention of the Government. Sir Thomas McIlwraith will earn the gratitude of the colony to all time if he will but exert himself for the aborigines of Australia—whose country after all we have simply taken from them by force—as Sir Samuel Griffith exerted himself for the kanakas. Surely there is as much call for a Commission of Inquiry in the one case as in the other. The recently inaugurated society for the protection of the aborigines has its work cut out for it, and has not been formed a moment too soon. We hope that the statements we have referred to will waken our people to the fact that there is a much louder call and a great deal more room for this kind of protection than is commonly supposed. We must add that the *Northern Miner*, referring to the circumstance that the Americans have tried to stay the extinction of their aborigines by granting them large reserves, scattered all over the western states, pleads, and surely with reason, that a similar course should be followed with ours. We can do it more easily now than it can be done in future generations. Most of their vices, and the very thefts for which they are so terribly punished, come from the contact with the whites into which they are driven by want, and an occasional outburst of not unnatural vengeance. If the Aborigines' Protection Association will add this to the otherwise admirable programme of their operations—if indeed it is not already practically included—
published by us the other day, and set themselves vigorously to carry their plans into effect, they will earn the gratitude alike of whites and blacks, and aid in removing a stain which will otherwise blot and burn into our future history.'

"Mr. Feder, my missionary friend, who gave me this newspaper clipping, says that Thaddeus O'Kane, the proprietor-editor of another influential paper, the *Northern Miner*, has taken up the subject warmly at various times, but with little or no good resulting therefrom.

"But although I know that,—

'The age is dull and mean. Men creep,  
Not walk; with blood too pale and tame  
To pay the debt they owe to shame,'

and that this community is too much enfeebled by its tropic habitat to make an energetic move against the shocking system that its landholders have introduced, even if it wished to do so, yet I am at a loss to understand why that spirit of the age, Trade Unionism, has not risen against this slave business. Surely Labour, whose power, at any rate, in the southern parts of Australia is immense, must be aware of the benefit that must accrue to white workmen if the 'unpaid labour' of the blacks, now forced to work by squatters and others, were made illegal. Chinamen and kanakas are hounded down by the *Australian* working-man with a certain amount of reason, for beastly immorality, combined with Oriental diseases, are things to be avoided in a young colony, where all men should be healthy voters and thinkers. But why should the 'horny-handed' keep silent when the paths of labour
are clogged by the slave system,—which obtains, I believe, over a large and growing portion of Australia,—and yet shriek wildly when coloured labour of another sort competes with them at a wage only a little less than that demanded by whites?

"Before I close with some of my 'personal experiences,' I want you to note the missionary side of this question. You know I'm too disgusted with the greedy way various missionary societies have gone in for land-grabbing and land-dealing in New Zealand to be much of a philo-missionist, and we both know something of mission work in the South Seas, and that too much humbug and too many tares among the wheat—

'Of generous thought and deed were sown;'

yet I feel very friendly towards the little circle of men who have taken up the cause of the unfortunate natives of Australia. The Revs. J. B. Grible, R. J. Flanagan, Fyson, J. Flierl, and my friend Feder here have made a hard fight for it; and a most dangerous and unthankful position these men occupy, in the midst of squatters and squatter-commissioned police who watch their every action. As it is, the fund secured to preserve and protect the natives is apparently almost entirely derived from Europe, and half of that amount I believe from Germany. Are these natives worth preserving? Well, when the colony of Victoria a few years back—as I see by a Government report—adopted a new system of education, the first school obtaining one hundred per cent. of marks was the RAMAH YUCK School of Aborigines, Gippsland. This, I believe, is a fair sample of what
can be done with the 'niggers' if properly handled, and all agree that the northern blacks are a finer race than those of the south; and, speaking of my personal acquaintance with them, I can say they compare in intelligence very favourably with our 'noble savage' in New Zealand; in fact, are, I think, much 'cuter.' Now, at the risk of making this letter too long,—and if so you can take it in instalments,—I'll just give you some of my 'personal experiences' to show you to what an extent slavery and murder obtains in Queensland.

"I had been introduced a few days since to cockatoo-squatter, who holds a small run within thirty miles of one of the civilized (?) municipalities in this district.

"'Come out and stop a few days with me,' he said, 'and if you want any native curios, or a skull or two, as you're a scientist, I'll see if Sergeant Bedad can come up with his "boys." No end of sport, can assure you.' I thought he was making a grim joke,—but you will see. A town councillor who was going my way, to visit a gold-mine up on the ranges beyond my destination, offered to show me the way. We started together, and, after about two hours' ride, as we were entering a piece of scrub, Mr. Councillor pulls out a long-barrelled revolver from his dust-coat pocket, and motions to me to be quiet. Thinking he saw a wild pig or cassowary, I let him go on by himself a bit.

"'I saw two niggers here, last time I was passing,—last week,' he explains as I overtake him,—'they were getting grubs out of that rotten tree, by the bush-layers there; but they cleared off before I could get a fair shot at them.' I needn't tell you, old man,
that I was astonished at what my companion said; and, getting off my horse to see if he was 'having me,' found the print of the niggers' feet in the black soil, the hole in the rotten tree which they had made in searching for grubs, and lastly, the most circumstantial piece of evidence to prove he was not joking, but terribly in earnest, the bullet-hole of the shot he had fired in a tree stem close by.

"Arrived at the little station, I was introduced to Mrs. Cockatoo-squatter. She was a tall, dark, lady-like person, with something particularly gentle and woman-like about her, that was very charming after the specimens of the weaker (?) sex one generally sees up this way. But she was the next one to startle my new-chum anti-slavery notions. She had no children of her own, but was possessed of two little child-slaves, who, she informed me, the local sergeant of Black Police had kindly 'saved for her' out of a camp of blacks he had destroyed four miles down the river. I saw the remains of the ingenious fish-weir erected by these unfortunates one day when out for a ride. These blacks had apparently never injured any one; but, as Mrs. Cockatoo informed me, with a gentle smile, 'they were always singing or making a noise of some sort, and disturbed the cattle,' which liked to stand in the shallows near the camp, in preference to merely taking a drink at the steep banks of the other parts of the river frontage. ‘The niggers frightened them; besides, the blacks are always a nuisance.' So the camp was surrounded one night and ‘dispersed,'—the meaning of which word, in this part of the Queen's dominions, I have already explained to you.
"These child-slaves, whose baby-love for each other was most touching, were naturally very pretty, as most of the native children I have seen are; but they were sadly neglected, and very cruelly treated. Their sole garment consisted of an old sack, stiff and coated with dirt, the bottom of which was perforated with three holes, one for the head and two for the little black arms. Although only six or eight years of age, these children had to chop up the firewood used in the house, fetch the water from the river, etc., and were often cruelly beaten for trivial offences. In fact I left the station, after spending three days there, chiefly on account of the painful sight always before my eyes of the cruelty inflicted upon these unhappy little 'niggers.'

"Mrs. Cockatoo told me a pleasant story, too, the first day I was at her house, illustrating the 'annoyance' the blacks had been to her husband and herself, 'till dear Inspector Nemo cleared the niggers off the hills' that surround the run. 'It was January, I think,' she said; 'yes, the end of last January. I hadn't had Topsey and Turvey (the two slave-children) very long, and I was cleaning some fish that we had got out of a net we sometimes run across the river at the old fish-weir. Bob (her husband) was away, and there were only two white men near the house. They were fencing round the dog kennel there. Bob hadn't got the dogs then,' my fair hostess added, turning her gentle eyes towards the two magnificent bloodhounds which were sunning themselves by the 'lean-to' door, and whose use I was afterwards to learn.

"'Well, I was at work, just as I am now,' she went
when I chanced to look up, and I saw two old niggers coming up from the river, and walking across the paddock towards the house. Bob had told me not to allow any niggers to cross the run or "come in" (come and work as slaves) to the station; so when they came near I told them to go or I'd shoot them. They, at least one of them did, kept on saying, "Me very good boy, me very good boy," and "Me velly hungey," and they wouldn't go away. So I got the gun, that one with the broken stock,—Bob broke it finishing an old rascal of a nigger, last time he was out with Inspector Nemo,—and I told them to go, but they knelt down and wouldn't go. So I had to shoot them, and get the men to throw them into the river. Bob said I had done quite right, but I'm afraid you don't think so.' This amiable couple, for they were really amiable and good-hearted in every other respect than their treatment of niggers and animals, had destroyed by poison, shooting, and hunting with 'the dogs,'—whose 'score was only four at present,' Mrs. Cockatoo informed me, laughing,—about thirty or forty aborigines in the six years since they had taken up the small run. Mr. Cockatoo reminded me, in his conversation, much of that old Periander, the tyrant of Corinth, we used to read about at school, who, you will remember, although as cruel and devilish an individual, perhaps, as ever sat on a throne, yet patronised the Arts, was fond of peace, and said 'that not only crime, but every wicked and corrupt thought, ought to be punished.' He was one of the 'seven wise men,' too, I think.

"Both my friend the cockatoo-squatter and Periander of old evidently are examples of sufferers from that
horrible disease, *cerebral hyperæmia*, that Dr. Junelle, whom I met on board the boat coming up the coast, and whom perhaps you recollect at Mercer, told me of. But this letter is far too long to be ever all read by a lazy old fellow like yourself, so 'so long,' old boy.

"Yours till death,

"CLAUDE ANGLAND.

"P.S.—By-the-bye, how is the little iron-grey filly shaping? I mean the one out of the three-quarters-bred mare I got from Matata. She ought to jump well. She's by that big chestnut horse, Saint Patrick, as I suppose you know."
CHAPTER XIV.

HECATE AND HEBE.

"Wise wretch with pleasures too refined to please,
With too much spirit to be e'er at ease,
* * * *
You purchase pain with all that joy can give."

Pope.

T is an hour after sundown at Murdaro station. A few lights twinkle here and there about the dusky quadrangle of low-roofed buildings, ere shadow and silence bring to a close another workday.

The giant curlew screeches impatiently to his dilatory mate at intervals from the bush hard by; the dingoes wail mournful signals on the distant sandstone ridges; and at the other side of the star-reflecting water-hole, beneath the dark group of Deadfinish gum-trees, the native station-hands and fat house-gins, their labours over for the day, can be heard crooning out their evening chants.
In the drawing-room of "Government House" the blinds and curtains have been drawn across the windows, and the light of a couple of silver-plated oil lamps shows that the apartment boasts of an amount of fine art decoration and luxurious furniture quite unusual, even in the salon aux dames of a "large" squatter's household.

Wealth has joined hands with taste under the direction of a graceful female mind, and beneath the shaggy, rush-thatched roof of the station building, that is really little better in external appearance than an English barn, an oasis of elegance, a "holy of holies" of refined surroundings, has arisen in the desert.

Give a cultivated human mind carte blanche to furnish a room after its own ideas of beauty and fitness, and it is marvellous how a picture of itself will presently be reflected in the polished completeness of the undertaking.

Character can be read in the furnishing of a room as easily, perhaps easier, than by means of handwriting. Any trained upholsterer of long experience will tell you this. A tradesman in this walk of life knows almost intuitively, after conversing with you for a few minutes, what kind of "fixings" you will most affect. Of course where "the coat must be cut according to the cloth" these remarks do not apply in such force, any more than a Napoleonic mind would discover itself to the expert in reading-character-by-hand-writing in an epistle scratched with the stiff, unexpressive point of a needle.

Goethe intimates that a man's true character can be capitally tested by ascertaining what are the things
which he considers ridiculous; and perhaps it will assist us to understand Miss Mundella's if, bearing this rule in mind, we note the appearance of the station drawing-room, late "parlour," which she has so charmingly transformed since taking over the keys of her uncle's establishment. She was not the kind of young lady to follow the absurdities of those ephemeral fashions that, from time to time, appear as plague spots to desecrate the refined interiors of even the best houses in Melbourne and Sydney. No absurd "fallals" in the shape of dusty, velvet-covered soup-ladles, forks, gridirons, rolling-pins, and the like, hung upon the walls of this young lady's audience chamber.

This latest of fashion's most offensive follies is much in vogue, as we write, in modern Australian houses, and the practice of dragging the kitchen into the drawing-room is surely to be deplored.

Doubtless the practical mind of our fellow-colonists found it useful in some cases, hence its origin. These silken effigies of culinary utensils were doubtless originally found to be fitting surroundings for the central point of attraction,—the red-faced female, likewise clothed in velvet, squatting upon the sofa; which lady's antecedents have been more associated with frying fat than burning midnight oil, and who plays her modern part of "missus" or "me lady" before company with less nervousness than she would otherwise do, were she not surrounded by the fetishes of her past career.

In Miss Mundella's drawing-room everything is reposeful, chaste, and in harmony with the idea of elegance and refinement. From the soft-toned,
tapestry-like wall-paper to the white marble statuette of Marguerite that stands before the Queen Anne mirror upon the mantel-piece, all is unobtrusive yet beautiful. A few first-class water-colour examples of Gulley and Atkinson, also some well-executed plaques, hang upon the walls. A graceful palm hangs its fronds over a rare Etruscan vase in one corner, and numerous little gems of Dresden china and Venetian glassware—the gifts of various admirers—assist towards forming a picture whose altogether is delightful, whose every detail is a work of art.

Miss Mundella, dressed in a directoire gown, of some soft, silken material of an amber colour, fringed with black lace, which costume admirably suits her dark complexion, is seated at a little rosewood secrétaire, and the soft, pink light from the ornamental shades of the lamps upon the centre table casts a glorifying touch of colour upon her calm and handsome features.

On the other side of the big table her uncle, Mr. Wilson Giles, is sitting awkwardly upon a low-seated chair, twirling his thumbs, and thinking regretfully of the good old days when he was allowed to enjoy an after-dinner cigar in this very room,—a ruthless edict against which proceeding has gone forth since his niece has taken the reins of power into her able fingers.

"Well, Lilith, what is it?" asks the nominal master of the house, "what is it you have got to say? Whatever it is, let's have it over quick, so as I can have a smoke on the verandah."

"Have your smoke first, uncle, if you like; but please change your coat before you come in here afterwards. You know I don't object to tobacco; but you
know those English girls, who are coming over from Simon's to-morrow night, and I want to have one room in the house, at any rate, that doesn't smell like a taproom."

Mr. Giles is not an adept at repartee; but it occurs to him to remark, in retaliation, that, unless his niece smokes herself upon the sly, there must be several rooms in the house free from the odour of the fragrant weed. He also means to ask that lady how she knows what are the true characteristics of a taproom, but his cutting sarcasms do not arrange themselves with sufficient facility for him to give them vocal form ere Miss Mundella again speaks.

"You asked me, uncle, to consider two or three schemes you mentioned to me for getting rid of the monetary responsibility that rests upon your shoulders with regard to the P.Ns. you gave to Dyesart."

"Well, what d'you think of 'em?"

"Well, uncle, I really don't see why you need trouble yourself further in the matter, now that you have placed the—er—arranging of affairs with me. But I will tell you, just to show you how little you understand this kind of business, why your ideas would not work out satisfactorily; like that remarkably risky one you tried in Sydney, and of which, perhaps, you have not yet heard the end."

Lileth adds this last sentence as a sort of cold douche, to extinguish any rising indignation her previous words might have aroused.

Giles reddens, forces his eyes out from his head a bit, and, gasping, presently returns to his normal state of weak submission.

"If the notes," Miss Mundella continues, "are to
be found where the doctor's body lies, wherever that may be, and are payable to bearer, Mr. Puttis, or any one we might send, might—I do not say would—be able to cash them for themselves, or at any rate raise money upon them. Possibly whilst trying to do this they might be asked to say how they became possessed of them, and what lawyers call *mala fides* might be suspected. Then you would probably get into trouble as well as they."

"Well, then, what d'you propose?"

"I find, also," continues the young lady, without noticing the interrupting question, "I find also that the destruction of the notes would not clear you from your liability. For by this Act of Parliament, 17 and 18 of Victoria,"—turning over the leaves of a new edition of "Byles on Bills,"—"by section eighty-seven, 'it is provided that, in the case of any action——'

"Oh, cut it short, Lilith!" exclaims the sufferer on the low-seated chair. "Will it do to destroy the notes instead of the nephew? That's what I want to know."

The squatter's niece continues, as if no interruption had occurred, "'In the case of any action founded on a Bill of Exchange, Promissory Note, or other negotiable instrument, the court or judge——'

"Oh Lord, what are yer driving at?" groans Mr. Giles.

"'Court or judge has power to order that the loss of such instrument,—now, listen to this, uncle,—' the loss of such instrument shall not be set up, provided an indemnity is given, to the satisfaction of the court, or judge,—or a master, against the claims of any other persons upon such negotiable instrument.'"
Although the fair young lawyer's powers of facial command are nearly perfect, she has much ado to refrain from smiling at the muddled look of the red-faced man opposite to her.

"Don't you remember how these notes were drawn? On demand, or at sight, or bearer?" she asks.

"I'm jiggered if I do," returns Mr. Giles. "There was some talk about—of my making the notes come due at a certain time; then Dyesart, he up and says 'that might prove awkward to you, make them on demand after a certain date.' And then—but I forget how we fixed it up at last. Don't exactly 'recollect'."

"At any rate, uncle," says Miss Mundella, rising and moving towards her relative, with the dignified grace an empress might have envied, "at any rate, we can be sure of this, that if this nephew finds the notes, or even has a knowledge that you ever obtained money from his uncle under a written contract to return the same, you will pretty certainly have to pay up. I feel sure this was the meaning of Dyesart getting young Angland to come all this way up here. I can't see what else it can be. By-the-bye, I have young Angland's photograph here. Would you like to see it?"

"How the dev——" begins Giles, but correcting himself continues, "How the goodness did you come by that? You're a wonder! Swelp me if you're not."

"Oh, I made my arrangements," answers Lileth in her rich, contralto voice. And this is all the young lady deigns to reply.

Holding the photograph in her firm, white hand all the time her uncle is looking at it, Miss Mundella
continues: "And now, once for all, uncle, you will please leave the whole matter to me. You will spoil my plans, possibly, if you interfere. You can assist our mutual objects, however, in this way: you can refrain from drinking too much whilst young Angland is here. You are horribly indiscreet when you have had too much. And another thing, be ready to take any hints of mine, and don't cross me in anything I propose."

Just as the low, steady voice closes its melodious utterings, the door of the drawing-room is flung open, and a white, fluttering female figure appears upon its threshold.

It is that of an exceedingly pretty young girl, petite and (strange to say in this part of the world) rosy. A wondrous mane of golden-yellow hair falls about her dimpled cheeks and symmetrical neck and shoulders in such profusion that she has the appearance, as the lamps in the room shine upon her, of being surrounded with an aureole of silken rays of light. In fact, as she stands in the framework of the doorway, before the dark background of the passage, hesitating whether to disturb the two people in the room, her figure for all the world might be that of a miraculous picture of an angel of light, about to come to life and interrupt the machinations of those evil-minded plotters before her, who glance up anxiously at this interruption to their interview.

"Oh, papa, I'm afraid you're busy. I didn't mean, truly, to interrupt you. Shall I run away?"

"No, my dear, not at all," responds Mr. Giles, rising, and evidently glad to thus close the tête-à-tête with his dark-browed niece. "Come on to the
verandah, Glory, and talk to me whilst I have a cigar. There’s nothing more to say, I suppose, Lileth? I leave all to you.”

“No, uncle, nothing more,” replies Miss Mundella, adding, “Don’t keep dear Glory out too long in the cold. She’s not fever proof, and the cool evenings here are dangerous to people from the south. You’ll come in, dear, presently, and give us a little Mendelssohn before supper, won’t you?”

“Oh yes, Cousin Lileth. But can’t you come on to the verandah with us? Oh my!” Miss Glory Giles adds excitedly, as her bright glance falls upon the photograph of Claude that Lileth has allowed to remain upon the table. “Wherever did you get that? So good, too. He’s not here, is he? Oh! he’s a perfect darling, and saved poor Fluffy and me from—oh! such a terrible lot of larrikins. And what’s his name?”

There is no knowing how long Glory would have continued her avalanche of excited encomiums and questions relative to young Angland, had she not been interrupted by her father. For the young lady before us is the damsel whose blue eyes created such havoc in our hero’s breast during his short stay in Brisbane, and she is now pleasurably regarding the sun-picture of her “own hero,” as she always calls Claude when relating the story of his prowess to her school-girl friends, not knowing his real name. And what better name would young Angland have desired, had he only known the honour thus done to his memory?

At the rather anxiously expressed request of Mr. Giles, his daughter, who has just left school for good, relates, without reserve, the whole story of her
adventure near the Brisbane Public Gardens. Holding Claude's photograph all the while, she winds up her breathless recital by repeating her former questions.

Miss Mundella, knowing that her uncle will expect her to take the initiative and smooth down this awkward discovery of Glory's, that bids fair to prove a complication of the conspirators' scheme against Claude, has quickly determined what course to pursue, and immediately marches her wits forward against the new danger.

"I may as well tell Glory all about it," Lileth observes, turning her dark eyes up to Giles, and signalling to him to keep silence with the nearest approach to a wink that she has ever condescended to employ.

"This young man, Glory dear," she goes on, smiling upon her fair cousin, and placing her hand upon Miss Giles's shoulder, "is the nephew of Dr. Dyesart, the explorer, of whose death we were speaking during dinner. He will, possibly, be here before long, on his way to attempt the discovery of his uncle's grave. Mr. Angland, for that is the nephew's name, was staying at the same hotel in Sydney with my brother Abaddon,—Cousin Jack you used to call him. My brother, finding that Mr. Angland was coming up here, sent me a photograph of him. I don't know how he got it. I suppose it was given to him. Now, you're not a silly school-girl any longer, and I think I can trust you with something I am about to say. Can I, dear?"

"Oh yes, Cousin Lileth. But," hesitatingly, "but it's not anything bad you've heard about Mr. Angland, is it? If it is, pray don't tell me, please.
I always want to be able to think of him as a hero."

"Well, dear," answers Miss Mundella, laughing softly, as she recognizes in this confession of hero-worship the characteristics of a simple mind that her own powerful will may some day find it profitable to employ. "Well, dear, you can still continue to do so, as far as I know to the contrary. It's nothing against Mr. Angland, but just this. You know my brother Abaddon is just a little wild. He has been so long up here, you know; and when he went for his holiday to Sydney, he got—well—rather 'rampageous.' I think is a good word to express what I mean."

Mr. Giles, standing a little distance from the two ladies, wonders what on earth his niece is about to evolve from her inner consciousness.

"Now, Glory, I'd rather," continues Lileth, "I'd rather you did not inform Mr. Angland, if he comes here, that we are any connection of Abaddon's, for I believe my brother got into serious disgrace with your hero in Sydney."

"But his name, Lileth? Mundella's such an uncommon name."

"Oh, well, you see your Cousin Abaddon is so afraid of people taking him to be a Jew. He's so sensitive to the rudeness of people, although he's brave as a lion; so he always goes by the name of Smith when away from here. In fact, it is really absurd how few people, even about here, know his real name. I believe poor Abaddon, from what I can make out in his letter, took too much to drink one night, and insulted Mr. Angland dreadfully."

"Poor Cousin Jack," murmurs Glory to herself,
as, recollecting the Brisbane affair, she thinks of the sight Abaddon's face must have presented shortly after his having insulted Mr. Angland.

"Is that all, Cousin Lileth?" she asks aloud.

"Oh, then I'll never mention a word about the photo or about Mr. Abaddon Smith. Ha! ha! how funny it sounds, don't it?" The young lady laughs merrily.

"I only hope Mr. Angland,—ah! isn't that a nice name?—I only hope he will have time to stop here and have some tennis. He and I against you and Mr. Cummercropper, what fun! But he's sure to rush away again. All the nice people do," she adds, pursing up her pretty lips at the thought. Then suddenly turning to her father, she seizes his arm, and laughing and talking all at once, she drags him off to the cool verandah, where she lights his cigar for him, and chatters away about her most amusing recollections of the charming southern capital she has just left.

Mr. Giles and his fair daughter have not long been seated in the cane chairs on the verandah, when the tattoo of an approaching horseman comes to interrupt their conversation.

The fox-terrier, Spot, who has been sitting silently in the darkness by his master's chair, sleepily watching the red cigar end, as it pulses alternately bright and dull, rushes out to investigate matters; and presently all ten of the canine dependents of the station folk join in a vari-toned vocal notice of the advent of the equestrian.

At this moment Miss Mundella joins her relatives.

"That's Jim back from the muster at Bulla Bulla, I expect," remarks Mr. Giles.
"No, uncle," says Lileth in a low, strange voice, "it is Mr. Claude Angland."

Mr. Giles starts in his cane-chair, as its creaking back testifies in the shadows.

"Now, how can you possibly tell? You can't know that much, at any rate."

"I can't tell how I know, but it is he," answers his niece in the same tones.

Glory does not say anything, but stands up ready to catch a first glimpse of the stranger, whoever it may be.

A few minutes more and Miss Mundella's predictions are fulfilled; and ere a quarter of an hour has elapsed our young friend Claude is sitting down to supper with the station folk, after being formally introduced to all present, including Mr. Cummercropper, the high-toned and love-sick station storekeeper, by Miss Glory Giles as "My hero,"—a title which Angland in vain attempts to show he does not deserve, but one that enamoured youth intensely enjoys all the same.

Claude had felt his heart beat quicker as he "saw the station roofs,"—the place from which his uncle's last letter had reached him. A thousand emotions poured through his soul. Anxious thoughts were amongst them. He was about to meet people of whom, somehow, he had vague suspicions. Would he be welcome? Would he be even safe?

But now, as he sits next his fair-haired young goddess, a very Juventus of youth and vigour, amidst the pleasant and jovial conversation of his new friends, in a brilliantly-lighted and elegantly-furnished room, a new set of thoughts comes to oust his lately sombre
ones. He finds himself the honoured and welcome guest of an hospitable and charming circle; and although Claude is not generally accustomed to wear his heart upon his sleeve, his happy revulsion of feelings is inclining him to a dangerous revelation of his private concerns, when something occurs to sober him suddenly and put him once more upon his guard.

Claude’s conversation has been mainly with his host and that gentleman’s charming daughter. Mr. Cummercropper spoke only when the Arts were mentioned, and then rather incoherently. Lilith was silently watching and studying the new-comer, only putting in an odd word here and there, where courtesy demanded it. Presently the subject of music is discussed, and Glory, amongst other new songs, speaks of “Killaloo.”

As the name of this remarkable ballad is mentioned, Claude’s thoughts rush to the midnight scene upon the viaduct with a sort of graveyard chilliness,—the air whistled by the elegant desperado at his side, the blue-white electric lights upon the rink. Angland becomes serious at once.

Miss Mundella here, at last, joins in the conversation, and at some length condemns certain of the caprices of modern musical taste, which is a favourite theme of hers. Going on to speak of certain newly-published ballads that call forth her unfavourable criticisms, she mentions the crickets (Gryllus), which, according to Mouffet, are objects of commerce in certain African tribes, and are sold about, as canary birds are amongst Europeans, to the inhabitants, who like to hear their amorous chant.

“Their chirping would be irritable to the ears of
persons trained to more melodious sounds," Lileth concludes by saying, "but the caprice of those African blacks is not one whit stranger than that of those who enjoy some of the more modern drawing-room songs."

Mr. Cummercropper gazes in weak-eyed rapture at his dark-eyed enchantress as she speaks, and inclines his large, pink ears unto her. He is even about to second her remarks. But he gets no further than, "Yhas, bai Joave," when he accidentally drops his eyeglass into his wine, which misfortune entirely upsets all his ideas, and renders him hopelessly nervous during the remainder of the evening.

After glancing at the unhappy storekeeper, as he clumsily fishes for his "glass eye" in the ruby-coloured Dalwood, Miss Mundella turns towards Claude, and finds him regarding her curiously.

"Pardon me," he says, as he observes that Lileth is for the instant somewhat disconcerted by the look she has seen in his face. "Pardon me; but we have surely met before. I am nearly certain of it. Will you kindly assist my ungallant memory? I confess I am puzzled to know how I could ever forget. It is hardly likely you will remember the circumstance of our meeting, when I——"

Claude suddenly ceases to speak. His features become set and firm, and slightly paler than before. Memory has come to his aid, and the bridge scene in Sydney is enacted over again in his mind's eye. All but Angland and Miss Mundella are amusing themselves with Glory's little dog Fluffy, which is begging for cheese rind.

Lileth leans forward and softly speaks,—

"Your thoughts seem unpleasant ones, Mr. Angland."
I trust that the memory of any previous meeting, if we have met, is not associated with them."

Claude again regards the grand face turned towards him observantly as he replies,—

"I thought I recognized your voice. But I made a foolish mistake. And to tell you the truth, the sound of your voice brought to my mind some very unpleasant recollections. I see I have aroused your interest. You will then pardon me if I explain under what circumstances it was that I last heard a voice so much resembling yours. I was assaulted in Sydney, a month or so ago, by two men who attempted my destruction. One of them, forgive my saying so, somewhat resembled you. But it was the tones of your voice, which are exactly like his, that at first puzzled me."

"You are certainly not very complimentary, Mr. Angland," responds Miss Mundella, smiling, without betraying in the least the agitation which almost renders her incapable of playing her part; "but I forgive you. And you must tell me, to-morrow, all about your adventure with my badly behaved 'doppelganger' in Sydney. Come, Glory!" she adds gaily to her cousin, as she rises to say "Good-night."

"We shall have to be up early to-morrow, if we are to meet the Miss Chesters at the Red Billabong. Schlaf wohl!" And the two ladies retire, leaving the men to wind up the evening with their cigars.

**Midnight.**

Of all the persons beneath the roof-tree of Murdaro head station house during the first part of that night,
Mr. Cummercropper was the only one who was successful in wooing "the gentle sleep," and it was not till early morning that slumber slid upon the souls of the remainder of the party.

For Claude, his host, and the two fair cousins, "each and severally" have their excited brains full of a reeling panorama, called into action by memory and thought, which it is far beyond the power of slumber to extinguish.

Mr. Wilson Giles's better feelings are fighting a losing battle with the more selfish promptings of his nature, which are supported by the heavy artillery of his niece's arguments.

The grateful memory of Dyesart's kindness in the hour of need; the evident affection and esteem—possibly the herald of a warmer feeling—which his daughter evinces for young Angland; the risky nature of the game that his niece urges him to continue; are all arguments in favour of a laissez faire policy. But on the other side there is the uncomfortable thought of losing the fruits of his life's labour,—the run that he has purchased with hardships innumerable; with blood, murder, and selfishness. Moreover, Lilith knows too much about his concerns now. Her thumb is turned downwards, and the victim of the scheme must be sacrificed.

Giles groans as he thinks how much he hates his niece. He conceives her to be a true Jew at heart,— remorseless and unswerving in her purposes. And who knows better than he, Giles, what Hebrews are. When his gay, wild-oat sowing youth was beginning to wane, had he not felt the white, unforgiving but smiling fangs of members of the race tearing at his
throat? Ah! how well he had retaliated upon the first of them who came within his power. Giles rolls over in his bed as he chuckles a hard, dry gurgle of laughter, as he calls to mind how he had schemed and schemed, and, sacrificing his sister in his revenge, had married her to Lileth's father, with the successful intention of ruining him. But his wandering thoughts always hark back to the same conclusion,—Lileth must have her way.

Meanwhile, Claude in his room tumbles about restlessly, as he thinks, alternately, of the strange likeness between the dark-eyed lady he had met that evening and the assassin of the arches, and of the fair-haired angel into the heaven of whose presence he had so strangely ascended.

Two o'clock, ante-meridian, strikes the carriage clock in Glory Giles's bedroom, which adjoins that of Miss Mundella. And ere the deep music of its coil-bell vibrations have faded in waves of dying sweetness into silence, the charming occupant of the apartment is wide awake.

All is silent in the house, and the golden-haired maiden lies deeply thinking within the cozy sanctum of her mosquito-curtained couch. Glory had heard the last part of the conversation between Claude and Lileth. It had, of course, considerably interested her. But it was not till the young lady had entered into the quiet of her own room, that she had thought of there being any connection between the murderous attack upon her admirer in Sydney and the photograph incident of the previous evening.

Glory remembers the promise of secrecy exacted from her by her cousin Lileth,—whom she looks
upon more in the light of a step-mother than a girl-
companion only a few years older than herself,—and
dreadful thoughts begin to shape themselves.

The merry little girlish brain is not given to much
labour in the tiresome direction of induction-drawing.
But where female interest is highly excited, there
arises into being a more active means of interpretation
than that employed by the more solid brain of the
male human when solving similar problems. This
power—called by men “jumping at a conclusion”—
tells Claude’s inamorata hearer that “her hero” is in
danger at the hands of her dark-haired relative, now
slumbering in the next room.

Slumbering? No! For there is a light in there;
and presently the green-baize door, that opens from
one bed-chamber to the other, swings noiselessly back­
wards, and Miss Mundella appears holding a lighted
taper in her hands.

She wears her dark morning dress, and, after
addressing Glory softly, to ascertain if her cousin is
awake, and receiving no answer, she moves silently
out of the apartment and down the passage.

An hour afterwards one of the station “boys”
rides off with a letter from the shadow of the quiet
buildings.

This is the burly Cape York native called Carlo,—
the executioner of “Government House”—and as he
has been enjoined, by Miss Mundella herself, to hurry
over his appointed task, he is not likely to tarry on
the way.

The mysterious rider’s iron-grey steed—one of the
famous Satan’s daughters—is pawing the ground as
her rider, who has dismounted, is fumbling at the
HECATE AND HEBE. 249

fastenings of the home-paddock gate, which opens on to the unfenced run, when he becomes aware of a white figure approaching him.

The aboriginals are great believers in ghosts, and the black horseman is about to fly in terror, when his marvellous powers of sight—good almost in the darkness as a cat's—tell him that it is the "little Marmie-lady" (the master's daughter) that is before him.

"Carlo!" exclaims Glory, in the breathless voice of one who has been running, "do you know who I am?"

"Iss. Mine know um, allite, Missee Gorrie," replies the "boy."

"Well, then, tell me where you are going?"

"Oh! mine go look longer bullockie, Marmie. Plenty fellow Oberthree sit down longer Bulla Bulla 'tation."

The black means to inform Miss Giles, whom he submissively calls Marmie, or Mistress, that he goes to look for a number of bullocks—branded with the station mark of O B 3, which he calls "oberthree"—which have wandered on to the next run.

"You tell big fellow lie, Carlo!" exclaims Glory excitedly. "You take letter; you take book-a-book alonger station."

Click, click, click! The black hears the ominous, metallic rattle of the chambers of a revolver, as the fair hands thus emphasize the demand that follows:

"Miss Lileth give you book-a-book for Inspector Puttis. Give it to me!"

The unfortunate native hesitates for a moment, not
knowing which way to retire from out of range of the two fires between which he finds himself: the terrible retribution that will fall upon him if he proves false to “Missee Lillie’s” orders threaten him on one flank; on the other is the present danger of being shot if he does not surrender what he had strict injunctions to deliver into the police officer’s own hands at Bulla Bulla station.

The native mind, till trained to think after the European fashion, cares little for the morrow. So Carlo, wisely and quickly, decides to escape the near danger, come what may afterwards, and holds out a white envelope towards Glory beneath the faint starlight.

The little white fingers take the note; and, retiring a few yards so as not to frighten the horse, a match is lit, and the “fair highwayman” examines her plunder. Yes, it is the letter she wants.

“You sit down here, Carlo,” Glory says, “till I come back. If horse want walk about, walk up and down,” waving her hand explainingly. Then, giving the black a piece of money, she disappears. Ten minutes afterwards Carlo has the letter returned to him by the “little Marmie,” and is soon flying over the spear-grass plains in the direction of the next station. Glory returns to her room, by means of the open window, as she left it, and exhausted with her bold adventure soon falls asleep.

If any sharp-eyed detective had, about this time, examined one of the dining-room windows near to which Miss Mundella had written her letter, he would have found a slightly greasy spot upon one of its panes; and, if worthy of his noble profession, he
would have been led by a process of induction to surmise that this mark had been caused by the nasal organ of some smallish person, who had been engaged not long before in what may be correctly termed as "prying into the room."
CHAPTER XV.

THE GHOST OF CHAMBER’S CREEK.

"Mongst thousand dangers, and ten thousand magick mights."

Faerie Queene.

EXT morning, when Claude wandered into the supper-room of the previous night, he found a couple of fat, comely young native women, in short, light-coloured frocks, relaying the cloth upon the table for a second or late breakfast.

One of these girls on seeing Claude toddles up to him, and explains, in the ridiculous jargon she has been taught to consider English, that Mr. Giles and the young ladies have already partaken of breakfast and gone out.

"Marmie bin go out longer Missie Lillie, um Missie Gory bin go longer Marmie big fellow way."

"What name?" she adds briefly, bringing her
beautiful eyes and smiling features to bear upon Claude with awkward suddenness as she puts her question.

In reply Angland bashfully but carefully explains to the gins how his name is usually pronounced by himself and friends; but the girls only grin in return with their pearly rows of teeth, as if they are the victims of suppressed mirth. They are evidently highly amused, and even retail some joke to the diminutive Lucy, who, seeing that something out of the ordinary is going on, has popped her little black head in at the door to listen.

"What name, Marmie?" the smiling "lubras" repeat in chorus.

Whilst Claude stands puzzling over the mystic meaning of the dark fair ones before him, Mr. Cummercropper enters the room, and nodding to our hero—and thereby losing his eye-glass for a few seconds—proceeds to tediously deliver the same message Angland has already received. Claude waits till the aesthetical station-storekeeper has finished, and then begs him to enlighten him as to the meaning of the laughing girls.

"Ha! ha!" chuckles Mr. Cummercropper out of the depths of his high collar. "Bai Joave! not bad, by any means. They don't want to know your name. Picked that much up long ago. 'What name?' means, in this part of the globe, 'Which will you have, coffee, tea, or cocoa, for breakfast?' Don't it, Dina?"

Dina grins a comprehensive smile, and nods her brilliantly beturbaned head in reply to the query; and, obtaining a satisfactory answer at last to her
oft-repeated question, trots her buxom little figure away into the kitchen. After breakfast Claude spends his morning in trying to learn something of Billy; but he is almost entirely unsuccessful, as the blacks about the station are strangely reticent. The disappearance of his late uncle’s servant is very annoying to Angland, and our young friend is really puzzled to know what steps he had better take next. Claude has a lonely lunch, for none of the station folk are yet returned, and Mr. Cummercropper has descended from the art student to the “rational” storekeeper, and has started off in a buggy and pair with a load of “rations” for a far-off out-station; and then, getting a “boy” to fetch his horse in from the paddock, he canters over to an out-station, where he left his miner friend and the two boys the night before.

“Well, lad, thou hast not been successful in thy work,” says old Williams, Claude’s digger companion as he observes that young man’s disappointed face. “And that I were right to camp here I’ll show ye. There’s nowt save ourselves here, for they’re out must’ring ‘weaners.’ So coome inside out of the sun, and I’ll tell thee news o’ Billy.”

Claude watches his lively purchase, Joe, hobble the horse, and then follows Williams into the two-roomed shanty, which is honoured by the name of an “out-station house.” It is merely a roughly-built hut, with walls of gum-tree slabs laid one upon another, and a roof formed of sheets of brown gum-tree bark. The studs of the building, also the rafters and purliens, are ingeniously kept in position by neatly fastened strips of “green hide” (raw leather), and the hard grey floor and colossal chimney-place are composed of the
remains of a number of ant-hills that have been pounded up for the purpose. The material of which these hills are built is a kind of papier mâché, consisting of wood-fibre and clay, and is in much request amongst northern settlers for various structural purposes. The termites, or "white ants," sometimes raise their many-coned mounds to a height of from twelve to fifteen feet, and these "spires and steeples," with the absence of dead tree-stems upon the ground,—another sign of the presence of these insects,—are two of the most characteristic features of the open bush-country of Northern Queensland.

Williams squats down on his hams, bush-fashion, in front of the yawning fireplace, where a camp-oven, suspended over the grey embers, is frizzling forth the vapoury flavour of "salt-junk," and after lighting his pipe proceeds to tell Claude what he has found out from the stockmen. This, to condense the lengthened yarn of the old miner, is just what Billy related of himself, in our presence, to the old "hatter" Weevil in the lonely jungle cave.

"He'll coome back here, I tell ye. For note ye, lad, he camped as long as he could at Murdaro, till they made him clear."

"Yes, I believe he was waiting there for me," responds Claude.

"Now, mind ye," continues the digger, gesticulating with his maize-cob pipe, "mind ye make every nigger round know that yer wants to find Billy, and ye'll hear of him soon, like enough. Now the more ye gets known here the safer fur ye, so wait here till the men get back. Ye can pitch 'em a song after supper and ride home with the head stock-keeper. He'll be
going up to 'Government House' to-night. Moon rises 'bout nine."

Half an hour before sundown a dust-cloud that has been slowly travelling for the last two hours across the plain, in the direction of the out-station, reaches its destination. It is now seen to be caused by the feet of a small "mob" (herd) of cows and unbranded calves. These, after much yelling and an accompanying—

"Running fire of stockwhips,
And a fiery run of hoofs,"

are at last forced down a funnel-shaped lane between two wide fences, called "wings," into the receiving yard of a large stockyard near the house.

Not long afterwards the head stock-keeper and his two white stockmen appear; and the former, after being introduced to Claude, and having indulged in a very necessary wash, sets the example, which is soon followed by the other men, of proceeding to work upon the evening meal. This is placed upon the table by two dark-skinned nymphs, whose airy costume consists chiefly of one old shirt and a pair of smiles between them.

The position these girls occupy in an establishment where all are bachelors may be guessed, and Claude learns, before the meal is over, that they are under the "protection" of the white stockmen, having been "run down" for this purpose some months previously.

"Run away!" laughs one of the stockmen, skilfully supplying his mouth with gravy by means of his knife-blade, as he repeats a question put to him by Angland before answering it. "Run away! No, I
rayther think as 'ow Nancy was the last gal as will ever try that game agin. The black beggars know what they'll get for trying the speeling racket here. Short and sharp's our motter on this here station, the speaker adds, as his savoury knife-point disappears half down his gullet.

Upon Claude expressing a wish to hear about Nancy's ultimate fate, the men become reticent; but Claude learns afterwards on good authority that the unfortunate girl was overtaken whilst attempting to return to her tribe, and was flogged to death before the other native station-hands, "pour encourager les autres."

After the whites have done their meal, the black stockmen are handed their "rations," which consist of the broken viands from the table, and such pieces of "junk" as have become tainted. The whole amount does not seem very much for the eight "boys" after their hard day's work in the saddle, and when they have further sub-divided it with their relatives at the black camp close by, their earnings for the day must appear very small indeed.

Selfishness is unknown between relations amongst aborigines. There is no meum et tuum. A hunter's spoil or a "boy's" earnings are given away immediately upon his return to camp; and the individual who has obtained the good things generally keeps less than his own proper share, being complimented upon this by the women in a low chant or grace during the eating or cooking of the food.

It seems probable, however, that if the right of purchasing their liberty was permitted to the station blacks, and each "boy" was allowed his peculium,
as instituted by Justinian, the first anti-slavery emperor of Rome, this unselfish division of each day's wage would soon become out of fashion. It is, perhaps, in order to encourage this virtuous practice of their station slaves that the Australian squatters have never followed the example set them by the ancient Romans.

The head stock-keeper, whose name is Lythe, but who is generally known upon the station as "the Squire," is a very different kind of man to his two stockmen. These individuals belong to a much lower type of humanity, and are apparently without any education whatever, save a superficial knowledge of horses and cattle.

Born of good parentage in an English "racing county," Lythe is a fair average sample of a certain class of men not very uncommon in up-country Australia. Life's chessboard has been with him an alternating record of white, glowing triumphs, and black disgrace of wild, feverish saturnalia and rough toiling at the hardest kinds of colonial work. A wild boyhood, a wilder time at Sandhurst, a meteoric existence as Cornet in a lance regiment,—with the attendant scintilla of champagne suppers, racehorses, and couturières,—and then he slipped on to a "black square" and became a "rouseabout" on an Australian run. Presently he rises again, by making for himself a bit of a name as a successful "overlander" or cattle-drover, and, becoming rich, moves "on to the white." He is a squatter, takes up-country, loses all, and then becomes an irreclaimable tippler. "Black square" again, and here he is, working hard to "knock up" another cheque,—a well-educated, use-
ful member of society when free from liquor; a wild, quarrelsome savage from the time he reaches the first “grog-shanty” on his way “down south,” till he returns “dead broke” to “knock up another cheque” at the station.

Claude’s hosts at the little out-station—who, like most Australian colonists, are as hospitably minded as their means will allow them to be—do all they can to render his visit to their rough home as agreeable as possible. They even indulge him with a few bush songs, whilst the after-supper pipe is being smoked. One of these, sung in a voice gruff and husky with shouting to the cattle all day, to the air of a well-known nautical ditty, is descriptive of the first “taking up” of the Never Never Land, and has a taking chorus, concluding thus:—

“They sing, my boys, yo! ho!
O'er desert plains we go
To the far Barcoo,
Where they eat Ngardoo,
A thousand miles away.”

At nine o’clock “the Squire” and Claude say goodbye to the others, and mounting their horses, which have been brought up to the house across the dewy, moonlit pastures by a pair of attendant sprites, proceed leisurely in the direction of the head station.

Around the riders stretches the tranquil indigo and silver glory of a marvellous phasmagoria, painted by earth’s cold-faced satellite. And accustomed to the softer beauties of a New Zealand moonlight night, Claude cannot help exclaiming to his companion upon the strange, phantom-like appearance that all the
familiar objects around him appear to have put on beneath the argent rays. Even that most unpoetical object, the stock-yard, where the imprisoned cattle are roaring impatient of restraint, seems, with its horrid carcase gallows, all dressed with a silvery, mystic robe of light, as if transformed into a spectre castle, filled with moaning, long-horned beings of another world.

"Yes, that is so," returns Claude's companion, when our young friend has remarked the curious features of the scene before him. "What you notice is just what is the chief characteristic of an Australian moonlight scene. The only real poet Australia's ever had was Lindsay Gordon. He was an Englishman, by-the-bye, and he has the same sort of weird touch running through all his poems. But it isn't so much to my mind,"—the speaker rubs his chin thoughtfully,—"it isn't that the moonlight is different here to what it is elsewhere, I fancy, so much as it is that Nature herself puts on an outlandishly-awful, God-forsaken, ghastly kind of rig-out, when left to herself in these wilds."

"That's very true," responds Claude, looking at the dreary scene of broken sandstone cliff and dead forest through which their horses are picking their way.

"Now, really, Mr. Angland, what a devilish nightmare of a place this 'outside' country is. Look at those ghostly, white-stemmed gums. I've heard those trees groan like dying men when there was hardly a breath of air moving. Why, there! you can hear them for yourself now. And, like all their kind, at midday they cast no shadow; and therefore might
well be considered bewitched, if we went by the old
standard of ancient European justice, that considered
this infringement of the natural laws the very earmark of Satan's cattle. Look at our deserts, our old
volcanoes, our fishes that run about on the shore like
mice, our rivers of sand, and—but we need not go
farther than our wild animals. What artist—Griset,
Doré, or any one else—ever conceived a more impish
brute than the dingo, or a more startling caricature
of a deer with grasshopper's legs than we find in the
kangaroo?"

The dree wail of some neighboring dingoos upon
the distant hills comes as a sort of unearthly murmur
of acquiescence, as the speaker closes his remarks.

"Why, really," remarks Claude, laughing quietly,
"now that you point it out, there is really something
curiously nightmare-like about Australian nature."
He adds after a pause, "You would be a grand hand
at telling a ghost story."

The two men canter over a smooth piece of country
in silence; and when their horses have again come
within easy speaking distance, "the Squire" asks
Claude if he would like to hear a ghost yarn.

"I'm touchy, rather," goes on "the Squire," "on the
subject of this the only ghost that I have ever seen;
and I give you warning you mustn't scoff at me for
believing in it. I haven't told any one about it since,
—well, it don't matter when. You're not in a hurry
to get to the station, I suppose?"

"Oh, the yarn, by all possible means!" assents
Claude.

But his companion does not hear the reply to his
question, for as he loosens the flood-gates of his
memory there rushes vividly before his mind a long-forgotten scene, like a weird picture from a magic lantern, shutting out all external things,—a scene of moonlit rock and dark, gloomy trees, of sleeping cattle, of wild and awful midnight terror.

But it is only for an instant. Then he pulls himself together, and half unconsciously lifts his hand to wipe away the cold dew that even the memory of that fearful night has called forth upon his brow.

"You must know then," commences "the Squire," after the manner of Master Tommie in "Sandford and Merton," "that, like most new chums in Australia, I wandered about a good deal over this great, sunburnt island before ever I settled down as head stock-keeper at Murdaro. During part of that time I followed the calling of an overlander. An 'overlander,' Mr. Angland,—for, as you haven't any of the breed in New Zealand, I'll explain what that is,—is Queensland-English for a long-distance drover; and a rough, hard life it generally is. Cattle have to be taken long distances to market sometimes from these 'up-country' runs. I have taken several mobs of 'fats' (fat bullocks) from the Never Never Land to Sydney,—a distance of about fifteen hundred miles.

"Now, when my story begins I was 'boss' of a road-party taking fat cattle down to Sydney from Contolbin station on the Lachlan. In fine weather, when there's plenty of grass or herbage, and water every twenty miles or so, a drover has rather a jolly time of it, after he's trained the cattle to camp properly, take it altogether: an open-air life, with just enough exercise to make him enjoy his 'tucker' (food). But, like most lines of life, there are more
bitters than sweets connected with the ‘overlanding’ profession. Sometimes there’s no water for forty, fifty, perhaps ninety miles at a stretch,—for instance, on the Birdsville and Kopperamana track,—and keeping awake for days and nights together, you must push on (with the sun at 120° in the shade, sometimes) taking your cattle, at their own pace, along the Parakelia-covered sand-hills till the next water-hole is reached. And at other times there is too much water, and it is a case of swimming rivers every few miles, or else sitting down for a stream to run by for a few weeks,—riding through mud, sleeping on mud, drinking mud, and eating it too, for the matter of that, for weeks at a time. I’ve done that at the Wyndham crossing of the Cooper more than once. But on the particular trip I am going to refer to, the weather was more what you, as an Englishman, will understand better than most Australians, for it had been snowing hard for several nights in succession upon the Swollowie Mountains, over which our road, from Orange to Bathurst, lay, and the air was almost as cold and chilly as it ever is in the old country.

“I never shall forget the sight that poor old Sanko, one of my native boys, was when he came off the middle watch, the first night we reached the high country. Sanko was a ‘white-haired boy’ when he came off watch to call me that morning, and no mistake about it, although his waving locks and beard had been as black as night the day before.

“No, Mr. Angland, he hadn’t seen a ghost! You’re a bit too fast.

“But he had seen something strange to him, and
that was a fall of snow. And when he poked his head in at the door of the ‘fly’ (tent) and called me, his good-humoured, hairy face was white with snow crystals. He really gave me a kind of ‘skeer,’ as our American cousins call it, for a moment. He looked like the apparition of some one I had known in life. I thought I was dreaming at first; and I had had fever a little while before, and was still rather weak from its effects. I mention this because the scare Sanko gave me may have made a more lasting impression upon me than I thought at the time, and had something to do with what happened the next night. All I did at the time, however, was to tell Sanko not to call the next watch, as the cattle would not shift in the snow. And rolling myself up in my blankets, I was soon asleep again.

“One of the greatest hardships of cattle droving is the watching necessary at night. All sorts of things may occur to frighten them; and when that does happen, off they rush, a resistless flood of mad animals, into the darkness, breaking each other’s necks and legs, and the remainder getting lost. Cows that want to return to where they dropped a calf will sometimes start a mob. The cunning brutes will watch you as you ride past them on your ‘night horse’ on your way round the mob, and then slink off into the shadows, and be miles back along the track by daylight. A thunderstorm is also a frightful cause of mobs stampeding. But the worst thing to be dreaded by the drover is a deliberate attempt to frighten the cattle by cattle-thieves, or ‘duffers,’ as we call them, who used in my time—there’s little of it done now, I believe—sometimes to steal the
larger part of a travelling herd by this means. Well, the plan of these midnight robbers is to watch till your horses have wandered a bit from the camp, and then, getting amongst them, slip their hobbles and drive them quietly away. Then, knowing you can do nothing to stop them, the rascals proceed to startle the cattle by shouting, a gun-shot, or some such means; and you are lucky if you get half your horses, let alone half your cattle, back again.

"It is necessary to tell you all this in order that you may understand my ghost tale.

"These mountains we were coming to, as I knew, had been the scene of several exploits of this kind, and it made me anxious to get through by daylight. There was a very rough lot of Cornish miners working on the hills, in the Icely gold-mines; and, rightly or wrongly, we drovers mostly used to put these midnight stampedes down to these 'Cousin Jacks.' But some of the older cattle-men upon the road, and all the inhabitants of the (then) sparsely peopled district, declared that these occurrences were due to no human interference. They said that the gorge in the mountains, that I should have to pass through to-morrow with my cattle, was haunted by the spirit of a murdered man, whose corpse was 'planted' where he had fallen many years since, with the knife of a treacherous mate still sticking in his ribs. It was this deceased gentleman's nightly constitutionals that were supposed to account for the various disastrous rushes of mobs of cattle in the mountain glen during past years. I had often heard it used as an argument, in favour of those who upheld the spectre-theory, that the camp horses had been found still
hobbled after these rushes,—an oversight of which no experienced 'cattle-duffer' would be guilty. Well, I felt rather anxious about the matter, but as I had arranged my stages so as to camp at the foot of the ranges that night, I thought I should be able to push on over the fatal pass before the next sun went down.

"You may imagine my annoyance then, on the morning when Sanko poked his 'frosty pow' into my tent, to discover that the snow would delay our progress for some hours. The creeks would be 'big' till midday, and there were several reasons why I could not camp another night where I was. I determined, therefore, to push on and try my luck.

"The sun blazed out, and the white, patchwork mantle on the blue-grey hills disappeared as if by magic. But the Fates were against us. First our horses did not turn up till late; then the cows we had with us kept on getting bogged in the muddy billeybongs, and had to be hauled out. And what with one delay and another, I saw the sunset redden the cliffs before us as we crossed Chamber's Creek and entered the pass, and knew that I must camp my cattle there for the night, and no help for it.

"Leaving my men to bring on the cattle and horses, I pricked my spurs into my steed's sides, and made him scramble up the stony track; and, after half an hour's search, found a good place to camp the cattle in a narrow part of the gorge, between two cliffs of gnarled and distorted rock. There was plenty of long grass, and the melting snow had left puddles of water all round amongst the rocks, that in the evening light looked like so many pools of blood.
"Soon the cattle arrived, and I was glad to see that, tired with their scramble up the mountain-side, they were evidently contented with their camp, and seemed likely to remain quiet all night.

"'Not so bad after all,' I said to myself, as I rode back to our camp-fire, after seeing the cattle safely put on camp.

"But the words were hardly out of my mouth when I noticed, in the twilight, a little fence of rough-split shingles, up against the cliff, exactly opposite the cattle. It was the grave of the murdered man. I knew it from having had it so often described to me. We must be then located exactly on the spot where, six years before, a mob of cattle had suddenly been seized with maddening terror, and stampeding over the drover's camp, killing two men in their wild rush, had been lost entirely from that day to this.

"Well, there was no help for it, so I turned my horse's head from the solitary corner in the rocks and rode on towards our fire. Was it fancy or what? I know not, but as I left the grave behind me I heard a sound like a low moan. It was followed by a low, plaintive cry overhead, in the air.

"'Well, this is a creepy kind of place,' I thought to myself, 'but I won't tell the other fellows my fears, but just double the watches to-night.'

"I saw at a glance, however, on reaching the camp, that my four white companions had evidently learned of the close proximity of the grave, and knew the history connected with it. And the black 'boys' had, contrary to custom, made their fire close to ours, a change that I thought it policy not to notice.

"'Now then, Sanko,' said I to that worthy, after
supper, ‘yon and Merrilie sit down allonger yarraman (horses) till I come.’

“The two ‘boys’ went off unwillingly enough,—another unusual thing that I, also, pretended not to observe. Then, knowing that no one would attempt to interfere with the cattle for an hour or two, I lay down by the blazing mulga-branches for a short nap, before sitting up for the rest of the night.

“I had not been asleep ten minutes, I suppose, before I woke to find Sanko tumbling off his horse by my side in his hurry to speak to me, and could see he was in a great state of terror about something.

‘Mine no like it sit down longer horses,’ he grumbled, gaspingly,—his eyes rolling excitedly, as he turned his head right and left over his shoulders, as if in fear of something behind him. ‘Too much the devil-devil all about. Him yabba-yabba, and make it the walk about longer minga (grave) longer white beggar. Mine no like um.’

“I saw that it would be useless to try and get him to go back alone, and there was evidently something that required watching. I, therefore, sent all the whites and blacks off to guard the horses, keeping one of the former with me to mind the cattle. Telling the latter to follow me ‘when he was girthed-up,’ I left him by the fire, and commenced to ride slowly round the cattle, who were mostly lying down and contentedly chewing their end-suppers. The silver light of a true Australian Alpine star-lit night made the bare cliffs above stand out on either hand with an almost phosphorescent contrast to the dark indigo shadows at their feet. One could almost imagine that the rugged rocks had absorbed a certain amount of sunlight
during the preceding day, and were now themselves light-giving in a small degree,—after the fashion of those life-buoys that I'm told they cover now with a sort of luminous paint. The light of our camp-fire warmed to colour a few projecting rocks and the trunks of the smooth, white-stemmed gums, and now and then the soft, purring sound of far-off falling water came up the glen; no other sound but from the chewing cattle, and all was quiet so far.

"Suddenly my horse stopped short, with outstretched neck and pricked ears; then suddenly wheeling round would have dashed into the middle of the cattle, if I had not checked him in time. I could not see anything to frighten him, and the cattle were not alarmed; they, happily, apparently saw nothing strange. Then I noticed that we were close to the grave. It was in deep shadow, but I could not look at it comfortably over my shoulder, and, do what I could, my trembling night-horse would not face in that direction.

"There was nothing for it; so, as I could not finish my patrol in that direction, I turned and rode round the cattle the other way. By the fire, on my return to the camp, I found my fellow-watcher Charley.

"'Look here, boss,' he said excitedly, 'there's some beggar trying to duff the cattle, and make them string this way, so I thought I'd wait here till you returned.'

"'Did you see any one?' I asked.

"'Well, I believe as how I did; but this moke got that skeered, and well—I didn't know how many there might be, and——'

"It was no time to expostulate with Charley for his cowardice and negligence, so simply saying 'Follow
me! I turned and rode towards the grave. The place seemed awfully weird in the starlight, and you could make out little besides the white-backed cattle here and there amongst the shadowy trees, and the great pile of rocks towering upwards on either hand. The air was very cold and my feet felt dead against the icy stirrup-irons. As before, I could not get my horse to pass in front of the grave; that was now in such deep shadow that nought of it could be seen.

"Charley's horse would not come so near as mine, and both of them trembled and snorted with terror; and every moment tried to wheel round and escape from the awful Something that they were watching.

"We sat in our saddles and listened, but there were no sounds but from the reposing cattle, and the squeaking, here and there, of the branches overhead, rubbing one upon another, as a passing breeze swept sighing by.

"Presently the horses became less excited; then, for the first time that night, I was able to get my animal past the grave. I rode round the cattle followed by Charley.

"'You're right, there are duffers about,' I said; and, telling him to keep a sharp look-out till I returned, I hurried off, as fast as the darkness would allow; and, finding the men looking after the horses, presently returned with one of them. We all watched together for an hour; and then hearing nothing I 'turned in,' telling the men to call me when the morning star rose. They did so, and fearfully cold it was when I turned out. I was very glad to hear the watchers report that nothing had happened to disturb the cattle.
"'Them blessed duffers hev found as 'ow we're too wide awake fur em,' said one of the men,—who, I found out afterwards, had slept nearly all through his watch.

"I felt now that the risk of losing my cattle was over for that night, at any rate, and, mounting, rode down to them. Nothing disturbed the first part of my lonely watch; and I rode round the cattle more asleep than awake, I confess, for half an hour or so, when my steed, this time a very steady old night-horse, suddenly showed signs of uneasiness, and I found we were by the grave again.

"I pulled up, and, sitting firm with both hands on the reins and head thrust forward, listened intently. The pale light of the morning star was creeping over the face of the tall rocks. Its light would soon penetrate the shadows at their foot, and reveal the something in the darksome corner of the cliffs.

"All of a sudden there was a little rattle, as of tumbling pebbles, in front of me; and then the sound as of a sack or heavy piece of drapery being dragged over the low split-shingle fence that I knew was there, but could not see. A moment more, and a low, hollow moan came from just where the grave was situated.

"I bit my lip to make sure I was awake, and then, straining my eyes into the darkness, I could just distinguish something, what I could not make out, moving slowly towards me from the shadows.

"My horse swerved round just at this moment, and when I got him back to his old position nought could I see. I confess I was really alarmed now. Old stories of ghosts and wraiths, which I had been
accustomed to consider so much childish rubbish, rushed through my brain, do what I would to keep calm. I pulled myself together, however, sufficiently to determine to wait and see the up-shot of it all. Then the thought struck me that it might only be duffers after all, and nothing supernatural; and I could not overcome the idea that some one was aiming a gun at me in the darkness in front. I rode back once more to the camp-fire, and by that time felt pluckier again, and was thoroughly ashamed of myself. I then took up my position before the grave, determined to find out, single-handed, the cause of all the trouble.

"The blessed star of morning had risen fast since my last visit, and I could now see the outline of the tumble-down fence around the lonely resting-place of the murdered bushman. My horse was trembling as before, but with spur and knee I got him to within thirty feet of the grave.

"The starlight crept more and more into the mysterious corner. I sat and waited.

"Then suddenly I felt my hair raise the 'cabbage-tree' upon my head, and my skin broke into a cold sweat, for there I could see a curious something lying upon the mound, a something that had not been there last evening. Every moment the light grew stronger, and I sat in a helpless state of terror as I became aware of the figure of a man sitting on the grave, with awful, sorrowful face turned towards me, and bright, unearthly eyes looking into mine.

"The apparition was that of a man below the average height, and was apparently wrapped round, as far as I could make out, in a grey, soft, filmy kind of cloak. It was the rotten remains of the blanket in
which he had been buried. He moved not, but sat in awful silence gazing into my very soul.

"My horse trembled violently, but remained rooted to the spot. Then the figure rose slowly, and with eyes still fixed on mine began creeping, or rather gliding, noiselessly towards me.

"Oh, horror! I tried to shout; I could not. My tongue was dry and useless. The awful figure came slowly, slowly on. It was crouching now as if to spring upon me. Oh, heavens! Would nothing save me from that fearful, ghastly face, those awful eyes, that came nearer, nearer mine?

"There I sat in a kind of trance, watching, the thing as it silently approached.

"Then suddenly an awful cry of agony burst forth close by my side; and from the air above, and from the dark wood behind, moans, groans, and hysterical bursts of laughter, shrill and blood-curdling, came in thick and bewildering succession.

"I nearly fainted. And, as the figure came on, and reached a spot where the early morning light fell upon it, I saw that it was a little, harmless animal of the sloth species, called a bear by Australian settlers. Others of its kind were barking and groaning their curious morning cries all round me upon the branches."

"The Squire" having terminated his story, Claude expressed his appreciation of its merits, and then the two men cantered their horses the remainder of the way to the station.

Here, after bidding his companion "Good-night," young Angland discovers that it is long past eleven o'clock; and a black boy, who runs out to take his
horse, informs him that the young ladies have retired to rest, also that Mr. Giles has not yet returned home.

So, after partaking of some supper which lies waiting his appearance upon the dining-room table, Angland goes out on to the verandah, feeling somehow more inclined for a thoughtful half-hour with a Manilla, beneath the stars, than to go to bed at once.

He sits there puffing, thinking first of Billy, then of Glory, and lastly of "the Squire's" ghostly experiences.

"Spot," he calls presently to the fox-terrier, who was sitting near him, in the flood of light that streams forth from the hall door, when he first lighted his cigar. "Spot, I wonder how you'd behave, if you saw a ghost?"

Spot, however, instead of prancing up to be petted, as he usually does when strangers take any notice of him, pays no attention to Claude's remark. So the smoker lazily turns his head round to see if the dog is still there. There stands Spot, having been apparently disturbed by something, looking down towards the dark end of the verandah, with his knowing little head cocked on one side.

"I wonder what he sees," thinks Claude; "the cat, I suppose." But turning his eyes in the direction of the dog's inquiring gaze, the young man becomes grimly aware of the fact that he and the dog are not alone upon the shadowy portico. Seated in one of the great cane-chairs, his widely opening eyes descry a dimly visible figure. It remains silent and motionless.

Claude has studied Professor Huxley's "Physiology,"
and remembers the celebrated case of the plucky "Mrs. A." and her spectral annoyances. But notwithstanding all this, on seeing the unexpected apparition near him, the young man exhibits one of those interesting automatic actions, attributable to what scientists, we believe, call "spontaneous activity,"—in other words, sits up with a start.

But before Angland has time to investigate matters, or even indulge, were he so minded, in any of those eye-ball-pressing experiments recommended by dry fact physiologists to all wraith-pestered persons, Spot had taken the initiative, and with perfect success.

He runs forward, wagging his tail, and jumps up against the chair in which is seated the mysterious figure.

"Oh my!" exclaims a musical girl's voice, the tones of which make Claude's heart beat as blithely as an excursion steamer's paddle-wheel.

"Wherever——Oh! Spot, is that you? Why, you quite frightened me, I declare."

Then the sound of a dear little yawn is heard in the darkness, and soon afterwards Miss Glory Giles makes her appearance, and on seeing Claude motions to him to be quiet and refrain from speaking.

"Oh, Mr. Angland, I've been waiting up to see you, and I really believe I've been asleep," whispers the young lady. "Here, come with me. Be as quiet as you can; for goodness' sake, don't let her hear us."

Claude rises obediently; and, overcome with surprise, is unresistingly led out into the darkness on to the dried-up lawn in front of the house by his charming escort.

"Oh! hide that horrid light of your cigar, please,"
Glory suddenly exclaims, in a low, excited voice. "Somebody might see us. It's too dreadful to think of."

Then, with her warm, balmy breath fanning her admirer's cheek and her little hands clutching at his arm, she pants out to Claude the story of the intercepted letter.

"I've never liked her," Glory exclaims with pretty anger, as she finishes her account of the discovery of her cousin's plot; "but she's dreadfully clever and strong-minded, and poor papa couldn't get on without her, I do believe. But read this paper: it's a copy of the letter. She did not sign it. Ain't she cute? Meet me at the new stable before breakfast to-morrow; I go there every morning to see my mare Coryphée groomed. But I mustn't wait. Good-night!"

The little figure flits away like a fairy ghost into the darkness—silently as a moth—and is gone.

When Claude presently opens the paper that Miss Giles has given him in his own room, he finds the following words scratched upon it in pencil, in a school-girl's unformed hand:

**COPY OF HER LETTER.**

"Burn this directly you have read it. He is here, and is on the eve of discovering all. Send him the message we agreed upon at once; to-morrow, if possible to arrange matters so soon. Delay is dangerous. Burn this NOW."
CHAPTER XVI.

LILETH'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

"Le jour de Gloire est arrivé."

Marseillaise.

It is much later than Claude's usual hour for rising when he opens his eyes upon the morning following his midnight interview with Miss Giles. And he remains in a sort of half-dormant condition, listening to the sound of a rich contralto voice singing a martial air, to the accompaniment of a piano, at the other end of the house.

The young man dreamily endeavors to make out the words of the song, but cannot. Though when it draws to a conclusion he is surprised to hear, as he fancies, in the chorus or refrain a poetical reference to the Christian name of the young lady who has
honoured him with an appointment at the stables for that morning. Claude, thus curiously reminded of his engagement, is not long in making his toilet and finding his way to the trysting-place; but discovering that Glory has not yet put in an appearance there, he returns to the house, and looks in at the drawing-room door to discover who the fair singer may be.

There he finds Miss Mundella seated at the piano. She looks up as she hears the intruder’s footsteps, and, seeing Claude, smiles ingenuously upon him, holding out to him a perfectly modelled hand, and apologising for her absence the previous day.

Lileth is really glad to see Angland, and, odd as it may appear, admires him considerably, although she intends to wipe him out of her way at the earliest opportunity. She feels quite sorry now, as she looks up at him, not for his own sake,—far from it,—but because she thinks what a much more agreeable cavalier he would make than the flap-eared Mr. Cummercropper, who at present fetches and carries for her. And after the manner of the soldiers of opposing armies, who fraternise together during a temporary armistice ere they again fly at one another’s throats, so Lileth is just as glad to enjoy a conversation with her intended victim, as she would be with any other young man who came up to her standard of excellent parts, and these youths were very scarce visitors at Murdaro.

"I hope I have not disturbed you with my playing," Miss Mundella remarks, noticing as she does so the hesitation with which Angland takes her hand. "I generally practice a little of a morning before breakfast. Are you fond of music?"
“Very fond,” answers Claude, gazing with a mixed feeling of admiration and dislike at the proud, calm features of the fair object of his suspicions, as she bends over the music lying on the chair beside her.

“Is it possible such a girl can be a heartless criminal, or at least an abettor?” he asks himself, “or are appearances against her only?”

Then, to break the rather awkward silence, Claude speaks about the song he had heard when he awoke, and requests her to oblige him by singing it once more. Without any foolish affectation of hesitation she immediately complies.

“It is an almost forgotten piece of music nowadays, at least amongst English people,” Lileth says. “I am rather fond of it, probably because it suits my voice.” Then with perfect skill, her splendid face grandly eloquent with the military spirit engendered by the air and words, Miss Mundella sing the grand “Chanson de Roland” of the great Napoleon’s time:—

“Soldats français, chantez Roland,
L’honneur de la chevalerie,
Et répétez en combattant
Ces mots sacrés,
Ces mots sacrés:
Gloire et Patrie !
Gloire et Patrie !”

“Rather an elastic kind of patriotism was that of Rouget de Lisle,” observes Miss Mundella laughingly as she finishes, her eyes sparkling and cheeks warm with the _vive_ she has put into her song; “most of his _chansons_ are charmingly spirited, and he is credited
with fifty I think; but there are some thoroughly imperialistic, others republican, and others again legitimist—all got up for the occasion."

"Yes," answers Claude, as the inspiring music, combined with the fascination of Miss Mundella's presence, renders that young man gradually oblivious of his suspicions, "and he was rather fond of annexing other people's musical ideas, if the German critics are to be believed. You know they say he got his grand Marseillaise hymn from a Deutscher named Holzmann, some time before he wrote his impromptu masterpiece chez Baron Dietrich."

"I have never heard that sin laid to his charge before," remarks Lileth, striking some sonorous chords upon the keys as she speaks. "Are you great on musical anecdotes? I dote on them."

"Oh no. I know little or nothing upon the subject. I'm really afraid I couldn't tell you even Mendelssohn's surname, if you asked it, correctly. But I remember about Rouget because I saw the house when I was at Strasbourg, and more particularly because it was there I heard a very good story, that in my opinion eclipses anything in the way of French wit I've ever heard before or since."

"Oh, will you repeat it to me?"

"Well, I'm rather a bad hand at a story," responds Claude, "but I will try to give you a general idea of the joke, which was attributed either to Rouget de Lisle himself or to some relative of his. I daresay it has been put in the mouths of many other notables as well.

"There was a grand wedding taking place at the parish church, and the charming bride, all blushes
and lace-veil, was tremulously signing her name in the register, when, horror of horrors, she upset the contents of the ink bottle over her wedding robes! All the vestry was in a commotion directly, and the little bridesmaids were like to faint when they saw the horrible black stains destroying the spotless purity of the bridal vestments. What a bad omen! Worse than spilling the salt at the breakfast. Everybody was about to rush forward to commiserate with the unhappy bride.

"But De Lisle's relative, or somebody else's relative, as the case may be, stepped forward, and, smiling on the woeful faces, took all the sting out of the accident; he even turned the mishap into the cause of much merriment, with a singularly happy *bon mot*:

"*'Mais c'est tout naturel,' he said, 'aussitôt que mademoiselle est arrivé au port, elle a jeté l'ancre.'"

When Claude ceases speaking, Lileth shows her appreciation of his anecdote with a low, musical laugh. Then, taking advantage of the opportunity afforded her, she proceeds to give Angland a good dose of the kind of music that she observes has effect upon him; hoping that in the intervals of playing, by a skilfully conducted conversation, to worm a little useful information from him as to his plans, as he warms to her fascinations and becomes confidentially inclined.

"Yes," she says, as Angland finishes a gay description of the little concert given in his honour by the stockmen at the out-station the night before,—"yes, some of these men have naturally really splendid voices. Always in the open air, and wearing no heavy coats to confine their chests, it is not to be wondered at that they have good lungs, at any rate. Miners I
know are proverbially good singers. I have heard several at different times. Your late uncle sang very well, I believe, for example. Have you heard, by-the-by, anything of his boy Billy yet?"

"No," replies Claude, "and I am very anxious to get on with my uncle's—I mean, to find my uncle's grave. But as Billy is not here, and I can't very well get on without him, I suppose I can't do better than wait here for a time, as Mr. Giles so kindly pressed me to do, and see if the boy turns up."

An independent observer, noticing the looks of admiration with which Angland was regarding the young lady by the piano, would hardly have imagined that an immediate withdrawal from her company was what he chiefly desired.

"Oh, pray, Mr. Angland," says Lileth, turning towards Claude, and concentrating upon him all the will-power that a rapid glance of her glorious eyes can convey, "do not desert us just yet. It is such a pleasure to have an agreeable, educated man to converse with again. Any one who has travelled, and who knows about something besides horses and cattle, is quite a rara avis up here, I can assure you. I shall miss you very much when you have to go," adds Miss Mundella, with a sigh.

Claude bows his acknowledgments of the compliments paid him, and the young lady continues speaking in a low voice, looking demurely downwards, and playing pianissimo meanwhile that bewitching Cavatina love-spell of Donizetti's:—

"Believe me, I somehow feel a very great deal of interest in your search. It is so brave, so honourable, of you to take all this trouble merely to visit the
grave of your relative. I fancy few men would care to do that for an uncle nowadays."

Now it is one of the strange things "that no fellar can understand" how most of the best men one meets in every-day life will hasten to repudiate any assertion crediting them with an honourable or unselfish motive for any action they may have performed. It is just as if such a reason for a deed was something to be really ashamed of.

It is an odd but undeniable fact that men often take considerable trouble to make themselves out to be worse than they really are. So Claude, following the general rule, immediately endeavours to prove that he is not so good-hearted—therefore, in a worldly sense, so foolish—an individual as Miss Mundella would imagine. In fact, he swallows the encomiastic bait held out to him by that young lady.

"I am really afraid," he exclaims, "that I cannot claim that it is all affection, on my part, that brings me up this way to search for my uncle's grave. I must confess that there are more mercenary considerations mixed up with my sublimer motives than you kindly would credit me with." And here we have to record a serious mistake Lileth made. For, instead of keeping her quarry under the gentle thraldom of her music, and the attractive warmth of manner which was really more natural to her than her usual appearance of coldness, Miss Mundella began to excuse this "mercenary motive" of Claude's to him in her ordinary conversational tones.

Instantly he awakes, as it were, from the sweet confidential mood into which he has drifted, for the peculiar notes (timbre) of Lileth's voice have again
called up the viaduct scene to his memory; and Miss Mundella can tell by the altered manner in which he speaks, as he rises with some feeble excuse for quitting her side, that she has somehow scared him for the nonce.

But she has gained one little piece of information: which is, that Claude is aware that something advantageous to himself awaits the successful accomplishment of his expedition. "It must be the P. Ns." she thinks, as she leans backward on the sofa after he has left her.

And at breakfast Lileth makes another and rather disconcerting discovery,—namely, that Claude and Glory have some secret understanding between them. And although those young people do all in their power to conceal the same from the dark-browed mistress of the house, her keen glances soon pierce their transparent natures, and she becomes cognisant of the fact, also, that their secret is antagonistic to herself.

* * * * * * * * *

It is towards evening that Claude, who has been away on horseback all day, returns to the head-station, and is lucky enough to find Glory Giles by herself upon the verandah.

"Is that Don, the newspaper boy, you told me about?" that young lady asks, looking at the small, comical figure, who, on the top of a tall, lank mare, is holding Angland's horse by the station gate.

"Yes," answers Claude, "and I will introduce him to you some day before long. You'll find him a first-class youngster. But I can't spare the time to do so now, for, Miss Giles," lowering his voice, "for I've
found Billy, and of course I start directly on my search."

"But the false message?" asks Glory, rising, and looking anxiously up at the young man's face.

"I have received Puttis's kind invitation also," Claude replies, with a smile. "Let me tell you all about it."

Angland sits down by Glory's side, and, hardly taking his eyes off her sad, anxious little face for an instant, notices, with some relief, that the news of his departure is really unpleasant to his fair companion.

"Soon after breakfast," he continues, "that rascal Carlo came to me, and told me something in a mysterious sort of way, which I at length made out to mean that a 'wild fellow black fellow' had brought me something. I followed Carlo to the black camp,—I guessed I could not come to grief only a couple of hundred yards from the station,—and found a 'boy' there, who handed me a piece of crumpled paper, upon which was scrawled some words. They were these, as near as I remember: 'You can trust this boy. He bring you to me.' It was signed 'Billy.'"

"Ah!" cries Glory excitedly, and casting a swift glance down the passage towards Lileth's room, "and what did you do?"

There is something so charmingly attractive in the warm interest which Glory evinces in what Claude is narrating, and her sweet little face blushes so prettily with her emotion, that it is only by exerting all his self-command that Angland can restrain himself from clasping the little form beside him in his arms.

Angland, however, instead of acting thus, and at once destroying the good opinion Glory has of him,
does just the reverse of it, and withdrawing his eyes from the bewitching object of his affections, he goes on speaking:

"I noticed at once that the black who'd brought the letter had a red ribbon tied round his forehead,—which I have often seen police and station 'boys' wearing, as a mark to distinguish them from the wild natives who may be about. I also thought that the messenger seemed to be putting on a good bit of 'side' for a warragal, and I hardly expected that Billy would be hiding at a station, and employ a station hand as his Mercury. So, remembering the letter you intercepted, I guessed that the 'boy' must be a police 'boy' in mufti. So, after reading the note, I thought I would test the messenger by pretending that the letter, which I was sure he could not read, was a message from Puttis. 'Here,' I said, holding out the piece of paper, 'Mr. Puttis say you take me to him. Which way inspector sit down?'

"The black looked up at me rather sulkily, I thought, as if undecided how to answer; then, after a moment's consideration, he mumbled,—

"'Spector Puttis him sit down longer Bulla Bulla station!'

"'All right,' I said, 'you wait here till I come back.'"

"And then?" asks Glory.

"Then I rode off to see my old miner, Williams, and asked his advice. When I got to the out-station I found him most jubilant, for, what do you think?—he had found Billy. Yes, little Joe, acting under Williams's orders, had been scouring the country with coloured handkerchiefs, which he gave to all the
niggers he could find. Each of these had a small message to Billy, telling him where to find me, written upon it.

"Billy saw one of these messages, and—— But I mustn't say anything further about it, Glory,—I mean Miss Giles,— for Williams made me solemnly promise I wouldn't do so to any one."

"He was quite right," remarks Glory. "Give him my compliments, and tell him that I think him ever so clever, and hope you'll bring him here when you return." Then after a pause she looks up and asks Claude a question, with her bewitching little head held sideways towards him, for her admirer's ardent gaze has somewhat disconcerted the little, golden-haired maiden.

"May I ask one thing more? You won't mind telling me that, will you?"

"What is it?" responds Claude, who, to tell the truth, would have gone near breaking his promise with Williams if Glory had demanded him to do so.

"I want to know how you know that it was really Billy that you have found?"

"Well, because I've seen him. We both, in fact, mutually recognized each other, although, as I told you, it is about ten years since I saw Billy in England. He, moreover, showed me an old scar I remembered upon his leg. He looks in very poor condition, poor fellow."

"Mr. Angland," says Glory gravely, "I will try and find out why poor Dr. Dyesart's boy was hunted from here. Papa says, as I told you, that Billy told one of the boys here that he had killed your uncle, and that Billy ran away when he found that the boy had told papa. But papa must have been mistaken. It is all part of some horrible plan of Lilith's." Then
standing up, and giving her tiny right hand to Claude, who holds it as if it were a precious piece of fragile crockery, she continues in a pleading tone of voice:—

"You must not think papa had anything to do with that letter I got from Carlo either. Will you try, just for my sake, to believe that papa had nothing to do with driving away Billy and writing that letter? My papa is rough, and I know you think he's cruel to the niggers,—so did I when I first came up here for a visit, but I didn't notice it after a while. But he's really very good at heart; he really is."

Glory speaks very earnestly; but suddenly, as she remembers that her father was present when Miss Mundella bound her to secrecy about the photograph, her voice falters, and she hesitates whether she ought to tell Claude all or not. But Angland interrupts her thoughts by speaking.

"If your father was the worst fellow going, and had kicked me out of the house, instead of treating me very hospitably, as he has done, I would forgive him, and vote him first class, because of his being your father. And now 'good-bye' till I return."

Claude finds the dreaded moment of separation, now that it has at last arrived, harder even than he had anticipated. There is a curious lump in his throat that renders the farewell words difficult of expression.

Glory, on her part, although she bravely endeavours to appear the cheerful, laughing creature as Claude knew her first, in order to ease his pain at parting, is not successful in carrying out this innocent piece of deception. And, to tell the truth, Claude, although grieved to see her sadness, which this affected cloak of gaiety does not conceal from the eyes of her lover,
yet cannot help taking comfort to himself therefrom. For man's love is a more selfish sentiment than it is generally regarded to be, and differs in this respect especially from woman's, which, if more eccentric in its taste, is certainly more thoroughly disregardful of self-interest than that of the other and more practical sex.

Claude, on his part, feels that what he would like to say to the golden-haired girl, that glances at him with such tender blue eyes, would not offend, perhaps not even surprise, his inamorata. But Angland has a gentleman's strict notions of propriety and integrity, and having already decided in his own mind that he has no right to speak those words that hover on his lips till his present mission is fulfilled, he refrains from doing so.

Of course, whilst transmitting this fact in our history to paper, we feel that our hero will appear very foolish to certain of our readers. He, however, acted as he considered correctly, according to his lights, and no man can blame another for doing that; although they can pity his mistaken ideas of right and wrong to their heart's content, if they feel so disposed. "Good-bye, Miss Giles," he says at last, huskily; "for the service you did me the other night I can never repay you. There is only one thing I would like you to do, and that is, I have no time to write to my mother now before starting, if anything should stop us coming back again from the wilds, would you mind writing to her? It would comfort her to hear from some one whom I've spoken of already in my letters to her."

Then he is gone, and Glory, returning to the house, enters her own room and "breaks down." Lileth, hear-
ing her cousin sobbing in the next room, and having been apprised of the arrival of the false messenger, smiles to herself as she guesses that Claude has started for his last appointment on earth, and mentally congratulates herself upon the successful beginning her scheme has made. But she is somewhat astonished and disconcerted on presently being informed by Carlo that Inspector Puttis's messenger is awaiting Claude's return. Inquiries made of Glory through the door of her room—for having a sick headache that young lady does not appear at the dinner-table—only elicit the fact that Angland has departed, having requested Miss Giles to convey his compliments and adieux to Mr. Giles and Miss Mundella.

Before retiring to rest Lileth indites a long letter to Inspector Puttis, of which the following is part:—

"Your letter plan has missed fire. The boy you sent was somehow suspected by A., and Carlo tells me that he heard your boy confess to A. that you had sent the letter. You can do what you like with your boy, of course, but I hope you will remove all chance of his again denouncing you. I shall send Carlo to you next week, when I hope you will be able safely to dispose of him. Carlo and your boy are both too dangerous now to be about. A. has started, and I had Carlo out after them, and he tracked them some miles towards the Flat Top ranges. He believes that Billy is with them, as they are travelling on the track of some blacks who arrived on the run from the hill country yesterday. Come over here as soon as you finish your western patrol, but beware what you say before Glory Giles; she is not so foolish as she looks, and met A. down south. The two are great compatriots."