CHAPTER XVII.

EN AVANT!

"Boot and saddle, see the slanting
Rays begin to fall,
Flinging lights and colours flaunting
Through the shadows tall.
Onward! onward! must we travel?
When will come the goal
Riddle I may not unravel
Cease to vex my soul."

ADAM LINDSAY GORDON.

FTER leaving Murdaro
"Government House," Claude, in company with his little follower Don, was not long in re-joining his party at the out-station. Here he found the pack-horses all ready, and Williams and Billy just concluding a
lengthy confabulation as to the best route to follow. So, there being nothing to delay the immediate departure of the expedition, a start was called, and some twenty miles travelled before darkness necessitated a camp for the night.

It is now three o'clock A.M. The chorus of crickets that has thrilled through the warm night air since sunset is gradually dying into the solemn stillness of the darkest hour that goes before the dawn.

The stars overhead throb with a clearer light than heretofore, and when some eccentric or sleepless insect breaks the hushed mantle of shadow resting upon the world with disturbing squeak or chirp, the ear jumps and strains into the deep, black silence with an intensity that is almost painful.

Now, through the dark aisles of ebon-stemmed gum-trees, the first white stain of morning begins to blot out those stars near to the horizon, and high above the topmost branches of the tall, gaunt trees the pure luster of the morning star heralds the day.

Round the grey embers of the camp-fire, upon which remains the impress of last night's damper, the figures of the party lie motionless in their tossed coverings of red and blue blankets, and near by stands the billy, containing sodden tea-leaves, where the last man on watch drained the cold tea ere turning in.

Each man's saddle is his pillow, and beyond is a vague litter of pack-saddles, bags, and snaky-looking surcingle; amongst which Don's retriever pup keeps guard against the prowling, cowardly dingoes, whose blinking eye-stars have circled the camp during the dark hours.
Suddenly the hush of night seems broken by the brisk chirping of a small pied-tit, called by Australians a shepherd's companion, and, as if in response to the volatile little creature's busy notes, the morning breeze comes with a soft, murmuring rush, and flutters through the long, pendant gum-leaves as if fair Nature was softly sighing ere she awoke to the heat and toil of another tropic day.

Claude, whose anxiety makes him a light sleeper, is roused by this peaceful réveille and opens his eyes, and then, raising himself upon his elbow, he throws off the blanket that has encompassed him during the night and is now wet with dew, and looks around. In a semi-circle by the camp-fire lie his companions, their limbs outstretched in various unstudied positions of utter repose, and over there, against the widening band of eastern grey, he can see the black form of old Williams, who, mounted and armed, is taking the last watch.

Although only a short time in Australia, Angland has already travelled over two hundred miles with horses through the bush, and has consequently already experienced some of the vicissitudes inseparable to that mode of progression,—straying horses and such “chances of the night” amongst them.

So his first thoughts are common to all equestrian travellers through the interior wilds, namely, “Where are the horses? Shall we be able to break camp early, or must we track some of the brutes back to the last camp?”

But Claude is relieved from much anxiety on that score by reason of the watches that have been kept during the night; so he proceeds to finish a hurried
toilet and afterwards awaken his slumbering companions.

There is always a great deal of vexation, and often danger, in waterless country, attending the loss of horses whilst travelling in the bush, and we pause in our narrative to remark upon a certain marvellous faculty possessed by many Australian bushmen of long experience.

During many years, often for months at a time, these men have listened anxiously for the sound of their horses' or bullocks' bells,—at sundown when they turned in, during their wakeful moments through the night, and with redoubled anxiety in the early morning. It is therefore hardly surprising, taking all this into consideration, that these men gradually get into the habit, if we can correctly designate the newborn power by that term, of still being able to hear the bells, even when fast asleep, in which they resemble Erckmann-Chatrian's murderous innkeeper, in The Polish Jew. But what is far stranger, having done so they can remember all about it next morning; in which they differ from those gifted somnambulistic individuals one reads about who write poetry and solve difficult problems during their slumbers.

Many bushmen will wake up out of the deepest sleep if their bells wander too far away, or if these cease their jangling for too long a period; but those "old hands," who are the particular object of these remarks, will be able in the morning to tell you as much about the wanderings that the horses have made during the previous hours of darkness, as if they had been watchfully awake all night; will unhesitatingly state to the "boys," when these youths go horse
hunting in the morning, where Bob, with the "condaminer" bell, has got to, and which direction Boco, with the goat-bell, took with his part of the mob, when the horses began to feed at two o'clock.

It is still dark when Claude gives the usual bush signal for all hands to wake up, by shouting out "Daylight!" Little Don gives Angland a wide, steady look, till, his wits gathering themselves together, he repeats the word interrogatively, and after sleepily rubbing his eyes, proceeds to put on his boots, thus completing his attire.

Far away across the dark plain, upon the bush-fringed edge of which the party have camped, the faint tinkling of several of the horse-bells can be heard,—blessed sounds; and, more to the left, the thump, thump, of the big "frog" bell on Claude's horse Charlie. Another hour and the buzz of the awakened insect world will drown all sounds more than a few hundred yards away, and therefore it behoves those who perform the matutinal horse-hunting duties of a caravan, such as that which Billy is about to pilot across the desert, to imitate the policy of the proverbial "early bird," ere the daily plague of flies have made their noisy appearance.

So whilst Claude and Williams are preparing breakfast, Billy and the two boys are away after the horses; and these animals, being all good campers, are soon rounded up and unhobbled, and come racing in towards the smoke of the camp-fire, biting and kicking, as if they highly appreciated the delightful feeling of being rid once more of those horrible gyves of chain and leather.

"Say, boss, I want to speak to you bime-bye,"
Billy observes to Claude, after breakfast, as he leans across the saddle of a pack-horse to give a finishing pat to one of the pack-bags before he tightens up the surcingle.

Claude nods a signal that he has heard the remark, from where he is fixing a bunch of hobbles to another horse's neck, and presently intimates that he can give the black youth his attention, by begging him to "fire away."

"You know, boss, I was very sick gin I come up to station," Billy observes in a slow, sulky sort of voice.

"Yes, I expect you were pretty bad when you'd finished your journey from my uncle's grave," replies Claude.

"I bin tell you yesterday," the dark youth goes on, "all about the wild fellows' camp where I stay; where I come from three days ago."

"The village where you've lived since the old digger you were with got killed? Yes, I remember about it. Are we near to it?"

"Yes, boss. Now I think this way. I was very sick when I get this far from where I plant the doctor, and I wonder sometimes if I able to pick up my pad (tracks) after all this time. I remember country near grave; not this way. You see, I was very sick this end of the stage."

"I understand, Billy; but what has that to do with the wild fellows' camp?"

"Just see here, boss, I think I better go to black camp and get two boys—one won't come without a mate. These people very good at the track. They find my old pad, and bime-by, when I come to country I know, boys come back. You like?"
"All right, Billy," complies Claude, "but will you be able to get the blacks to come? They won't like to leave the ranges, especially to go along with white folk. And I don't blame them, either."

"Well, you see, boss, the doctor, he bin to their camp two, no three time, and they like him. He very good to them. When the old hatter get killed by them cussed Kalcadoones, I think to myself, I make tracks back to this camp, and by-and-by doctor's friends come along and I hear of them."

"And I'm very glad you had the 'savez' to do so," responds Claude, patting Billy on his shoulder.

The black's eyes brighten at the praise given him by the master to whom he has begun to transfer those dog-like affections lately left objectless by the death of Dr. Dyesart.

"The wild fellow," he continues, "bin very glad to see me when I come along. There was komorborry, tuckout (plenty of food). I tell them doctor was dead, and me like to live with them for a time."

"Can you talk their language, Billy?"

"No, boss, but there was two runaway boys with them. One, he come from down Boula way," the speaker waves his black arm towards the south-west. "This boy speak my language a bit, and I bin mining with the doctor in his country and know his ."

The speaker hesitates for want of a word, and then gives a number of flourishes with his hands, to express to Claude the masonic-like manual signs by means of which the members of some tribes are able to communicate with each other, to a great extent, without speaking.

"Well, get these boys if you can," interrupts
Claude; "but don't you think you can do without them?"

"No, I think it good to get the boys," replies Billy quietly but firmly.

"How long will you be away," asks young Angland, slightly expressing by the tones of his voice the annoyance he feels at this fresh detention.

"I come back with boys to-night or to-morrow. 'Spose you camp next water-hole—'bout twenty miles. I tell Joe all 'bout it last night. He knows place; he bin there."

"But, Billy!" exclaims Angland, as a thought suddenly strikes him. "Look here, if white fellow send 'boys' to track us they will see your track up to village. You'll get your friends up there into trouble if you don't mind what you're about."

"All right, boss," replies Billy, smiling a smile of superior wisdom; "you see it bime-by."

Both men have for the last half hour been cantering after the rest of the party, who, with the pack-horses, are on in front. Presently Claude's companion signifies his desire that they should proceed less quickly, and then, pulling his horse into a walking pace, Billy throws his reins over his steed's head, and holds them out to Claude. Our hero takes them, and looks on in silence, wondering what the black youth is about to do. Sitting sideways on the quiet animal he is riding, Billy next proceeds to divest himself of his boots and hat, which he fixes firmly to the dees of his saddle, and then producing a pair of queer, mitten-like objects made of emu-feathers, he fastens them securely upon his feet. He now motions Claude to lead his horse under a big gum-tree that stretches its great branches over the
cattle track they are following, and suddenly rising into a kneeling position upon his saddle, he clutches a branch above his head, and lifts himself clear of his horse into mid-air.

"Me leave no track into bush this way," the black cries from his perch, his dark face covered with a big, oily, triumphant smile, and Claude, turning his head as he rides on, sees Billy swinging from tree to tree, like some great anthropomorphic ape, into the heart of the dark forest on his right.

Angland has heard of the feather slippers used by the natives of some parts of Australia when particularly anxious to abstain from leaving any dangerous trail behind them during their peregrinations, but Billy's are the first he has seen. And on catching up to Williams, and telling him of the method in which the black youth has taken his departure, the old miner spins Claude so many interesting yarns about the ingenious devices employed by the aborigines to avoid being hunted down by their native or foreign foes, that he determines to get up an exhibition of some of them when his pilot returns with the two new auxiliaries.

But, leaving little Joe to lead the rest of the party on to the next water-hole, let us follow the dark-skinned Billy on his way to the village. This young man has learned a good deal about the kind of country he is now traversing during the last few weeks, and, moreover, he has journeyed to his friends' hamlet more than once before from about the same point where he has just entered the forest. So he wends his way in a fairly straight course, and is not more than three hours doing the seven miles of rough
travelling that has to be got over before he reaches the vicinity of the Myall camp. After leaving the forest at the foot of the wild range, his way lies for the greater part up the dried-up bed of a mountain torrent, that has cut its way during countless ages through the enormous mass of grey granite of which the mountain is composed. High above the dark boulder-strewn path of the storm-stream, the grim old cliffs rise on either hand, their broken fronts decked here and there with clinging tufts of herbage, and crowned with overflowing wealth of perennial vegetation of the dark forest on their summits. Here and there the outcrop of a quartz reef stretches across the path with great, teeth-like projections of white, flinty rock, and now and again the brown face of what is a waterfall after the rains necessitates a bit of climbing. At last the traveller reaches the crown of the watershed, and follows the rocky ridge of the range northwards for a couple of miles. The forest, that has hitherto consisted chiefly of various kinds of eucalypti, some of which give off an almost overpowering odour much resembling peppermint, now changes its character suddenly, for here is the edge of the basaltic “top-dressing” that covers the bigger lines of ranges, lying to the eastward, with its characteristic vegetation.

Billy, arrived at this point, sits down to rest awhile near a mound of stone chips, which is the sole monument remaining of a past generation of aborigines who once had a stone-axe manufactory here. A number of “wasters” and half-finished adzes, made of basalt, are lying about, and at a future day, no doubt, will grace some museum, when the old chip-heap has been discovered by some prowling ethnologist. Over Billy’s
head swings the flat nest of a king-pigeon,—built, as is usually the case, on the extreme end of a bough,—and thousands of beautiful insects, notably some gigantic green and day-flying moths, are making their erratic, aerial promenades through the glades bordering upon the gloomy jungle.

No white man’s eye could have detected the slightest sign of the track that Billy now commences to follow, but to an aboriginal it is a fairly clear one. Here and there an overturned stone, a broken twig, or a crushed leaf make it patent to the young man that some one has passed this way towards the village only a short time before. This is a cheerful sign for Billy, knowing as he does that so great is the fear that his friends the villagers have of being discovered by the neighbouring squatters, that it was highly probable they might have shifted their camp upon his leaving for the station. Presently the traveller stops and glances at a palm-leaf that is lying across the almost invisible track he is following. It has apparently fallen there naturally, but the black understands its significance, and immediately alters his course. And after a rough scramble down the precipitous sides of a densely scrubbed ravine, he comes to where he can hear the sound of voices below him. Creeping like a snake amongst the dank, humid undergrowth, Billy gets near enough to recognize the sounds as proceeding from the vocal chords of a party of the friends he has come to interview. So he begins a low guttural chant to apprise those beneath him of his arrival.

“Kolli! kolli!” (Hush! be silent!) one of the talkers ejaculates, and the talking ceases immediately. Soon afterwards, without heralding her approach by
the slightest noise, a woman stands before our black friend, clad only in the undress costume of her native shades; and after a few brief words of recognition have passed between her and the new-comer, the former returns to her people below, and reporting "all serene," a united chorus of welcome invites Billy to descend to them.

Had a civilized European been present at the meeting in the merry woods, and had he been able to have understood the meaning of Billy's opening chant and the reply chorus, he might have been forcibly reminded of certain of the musical dramas of the old world.

The happy, beribboned peasant of the operatic stage has for years borne the brunt of many facetious remarks, simply because he cannot indulge even in the most commonplace conversation without surrounding his words with a shroud of fascinating trills. Yet here in the Australian woods and plains we find the untutored savage, like the wild birds round him, doing the same kind of thing, and much given to confabulatory chants and choruses. It truly would seem quite within the bounds of possibility that ere the joyous dwellers in Arcadia had relinquished their independent notions and simple acorn diet before the incoming flood of European civilization, they really did "carry on" in the harmonious manner in which they are represented to us to-day by the gifted authors of modern opera.

But whilst we have been thus sadly digressing from our story Billy has climbed down to the aboriginals in the gully below, and finds he has been following up a hunting party that, having been out all the morning,
is now on its way home. Half-a-dozen men, armed with womeras, spears, and nulla nullas, stand waiting for him to appear. Most of them are resting on one leg, the sole of one foot being pressed against the inside of the other leg at the knee joint, after the local method of “standing at ease,” their spears or a neighbouring branch being used to keep their bodies in a state of equilibrium. One of the men, the runaway station boy spoken of by Billy to Clande, who belongs to the former young man’s Mordu, or class-family, steps forward and welcomes the new arrival by embracing him. Then, after a few guttural ejaculations, the party forms Indian file and proceeds villagewards; three or four women carrying the hunters’ game, which consists of a couple of rock-wallaby and a few bandicoots, bringing up the rear.

As the natives get into the vicinity of the village, they take every precaution to leave no track behind them, and each individual enters the thicket in which the little collection of gunyahs is ensconced by a different route.

It is quite remarkable how the inhabitants of these scrub hamlets manage to travel to and from their habitations, for years sometimes, without leaving anything like a beaten track which might attract the notice of a passing foe.

The huts comprising the village into which the hunters are now entering are of the universal pattern affected by Australian aborigines throughout their great island home. Their form resembles that of a half-spread mushroom or a very squat beehive. But instead of being plastered over with red or yellow clay, as are the domiciles of the natives of the open
country, these gunyahs are simply but securely thatched with palm-leaves.

This common type of dwelling is worth notice as being rather remarkable. One might have expected to have found that the present race of Australian natives, who are unmistakably the descendants of Papuan immigrants, who have intermarried with an inferior and puny aboriginal race, would have copied the well-built houses of their near neighbours and relatives the New Guinea blacks. Both races of people have the same name for the land they inhabit, calling each Daudée, and many of their marriage laws and religious ordinances show a common and probably Indian origin,—the occasional worship of the crocodile (*Sebara*) and snake being a case in point.

Possibly these small houses were necessitated by the absence of the bamboo, which supplied their foreign ancestors with such splendid building material. And the form of the dwellings may have originally been devised to imitate the spinifex-crowned mounds so common upon the sand-hills of the plain country, for to combine the advantages of an elevated position and one of comparative obscurity in a village would be a distinct gain to a community in a savage land from the increased protection they would afford.

A few shrivelled old crones, who are sitting scraping and scratching themselves at the entrances to their several residences, commence a low howl of welcome upon seeing the good things brought by the returning hunters, and presently other men and women appear upon the scene—the latter carrying their fat, bright-eyed offspring in elegantly shaped
wicker-baskets, which are made so as to be conveniently carried in the hollow of the back by bands of plaited grass passed round the forehead. Several brilliantly painted shields for use in native boorers (tournaments) and wooden dishes are scattered about, and a curiously carved stick—a sort of almanac, which is the property of the old man or father of the village—stands in front of a large gunyah at one end of the semi-circle of dwellings. A meal is now prepared by the younger women, consisting chiefly of such dainties as the roasted flesh of wallabys and a big kind of carpet-snake, which has been preserved till tender by being kept under water for some days, with a few side-dishes of grasshoppers, roasted grubs, wild-figs (yanks), and various kinds of berries; and these delicacies being consumed, Billy proceeds to disclose the object of his visit. Whilst speaking, however, he judiciously distributes some brilliantly coloured handkerchiefs to the male villagers, who are chewing an aromatic kind of resin, obtained from a scrub tree much resembling the kauri (dammara) of New Zealand. After a great amount of talk, in which the women join at times, one of the runaway station boys and a tall, long-legged Myall finally agree to return with Billy, and the old father of the little community brings the business to a close by observing, "Vai mollie mounghar,"—intimating thereby that the sun is fast declining towards the mountain tops, and that the men had better start at once.

A touching scene of parting now takes place between the men who are about to join Claude's party and their families. Again and again, when on the point of marching off, do Billy's recruits return to fondle their
children once more before leaving, and it is only by the promise of fabulous wealth—a blanket and tomahawk apiece—that the two blacks are at length persuaded to tear themselves away.

Australian aborigines have always a great affection for their children; these seldom cry, and are never beaten, or indeed corrected, save when breaking any of those sacred laws, regarding the mysteries of which we shall presently speak, in which case terrible, even diabolical, punishment ensues.

It is nearly sunset when at length the three men set off, and after some rough travelling in the dark a clear spot in the jungle is reached, where they rest till the moon rises, when they again push on.

The grey hours of the next morning see Billy and the two other blacks arrive at Claude’s camp, some time having been spent towards the end of their journey in removing all signs of their tracks where they left the bush.

“At last!” cries Claude exultingly, as, a few hours afterwards, he takes a parting survey of last night’s camp, to make sure that nothing has been left behind; “at last I am really en route!”

The rest of the party are gone on in advance. The neighbouring water-hole looks up at the white-hot sun above it with its thousand eyes of water-lilies in their gorgeous robes of white, yellow, crimson, and violet. On the low trees round about numbers of large crows—those scavengers of the wilds—are croaking their harsh cries of impatience: “Augh, augh, ah-h-h-h.” These sable rascals are never absent from an Australian traveller’s camp, and appear like magic when he lights his billy fire. Hardly has Claude mounted to
ride after his companions, when the crows swoop down by the cold ashes to fight and squabble over the odds and ends that lie about. At two o'clock arrives the hottest time of the day,—it is really as warm as any living thing can stand with safety,—and as the expedition crawls along over the burnt-up, reddish soil of the plain, upon which withered tufts of various kinds of coarse grass appear at intervals, Claude feels certain that he has never been in such a thirsty-looking place before. Everything around, trees, grass, and all, looks as if fashioned out of brown paper and sprinkled with dust.

A few dark-brown kites—similar to those that Angland has seen some years previously at curious Cairo and barren Aden—sit panting with open beaks on the hot branches of the stunted quinine and gutta-percha trees, too overcome by the heat even to move as the party rides by, almost within arm's length of them. The country round about, as the horsemen get well out into the plain, is almost a dead flat; the only difference in level being the long, wide, gentle rises which, like ocean waves, cross the shimmering expanse of heated earth from east to west, at distances apart of about a couple of miles. Every kind of animal life is gradually left behind as the travellers push on; not even a kite, or a "gohanna," as old Williams calls the iguana-like lizards that are generally common throughout the bush, is to be seen. The weary horses wade patiently through the dust, which is so fine that it rises into the air on the slightest provocation. The horizon is a level circle of monotonous, grey-brown tree-tops; the middle distance sun-burnt, reddish clay, grass that reminds one of the
harmless, necessary doormat, and dusty tree-stems; and the immediate foreground is hidden in clouds of dust, so fine, so penetrating, that Claude feels his throat to resemble the interior of a lime-kiln before half the day’s journey is done.

This desert country, however, is left behind by the time the dull-red sunset has begun to tinge the pillar of dust raised by the horses of a lovely rose colour, and at last a détourn is made from Billy’s old tracks in order to reach a water-hole known only to the Myall (native) pilots. And Claude blesses his black friend Billy, in his heart, for having procured the guides, as he sees the horses prick their dust-covered ears, and liven up as they sniff the refreshing odour of the little mud-surrounded pool of dirty liquid.

The next few days’ travelling are monotonous in the extreme. Sometimes the party toil over red deserts, whose sterile surfaces offer hardly a mouthful, even of withered grass, for the horses, and where no water can be found with which to refresh the suffering animals. For the country has suffered from a continual drought for two years or more, and the moist mud which still remained in the water-holes that Billy luckily came across, on his late journey to Murdaro Station, has all disappeared.

At other times the horses pick their stumbling way over rough and semi-mountainous tracts of country, that stretch on all sides in an apparently interminable and dreary treeless waste. Here and there, however, little patches of far better country are traversed, where water and dried but highly nutritious herbage is to be found. On arriving at one of these oases when the expedition has been nearly a week “out,” Claude,
acting by his friend Williams's advice, determines to
camp by a rocky pool, fringed with a feathery belt of dark she-oaks. Close
by rises a flat-topped little bit of light-red sandstone covered with euphorbia trees, and, upon the morning after his arrival, Claude proceeds to explore this elevation, taking with him the runaway station boy, who can speak a little broken English, and has introduced himself to Angland by the name of General Gordon.

The view that meets Claude's eyes from the summit of the scalloped and overhanging sandstone cliffs well repays the trouble he has taken in scrambling up their tawny sides. Numerous other fortification-like projections are to be seen on all sides standing up, like weird islands, above the surface of the haze-bounded expanse of rolling desert.

He sits down and drinks in the weird, harmonious picture of desolation before him, and, as he does so, some lines of Pringle, the explorer-poet of South Africa, float into his memory:—

"A region of emptiness, howling and drear,
Which man has abandoned from famine and fear;
Which the snake and the lizard inhabit alone,
With the twilight bat from the yawning stone;
Where grass, nor herb, nor shrub takes root,
Save the poisonous thorns that pierce the foot."

Then glancing downwards over the little patch of verdure round the solitary water-hole, where the grey smoke of the camp-fire and the colour and commotion amongst the moving men and horses formed a little gem of life in the vast setting of deathlike
stillness around, Claude’s thoughts take a serious turn, and he enters into conversation with his companion General Gordon, with the idea of discovering if the aboriginal mind has any notions of a Supreme Being as conceived by Europeans. But although the black has been amongst station civilization for some years, and has even been interviewed by a clergyman of the Church of England upon the subject of his soul, his answer is hardly satisfactory:

“Yes, boss, mine know alle ’bout Gord. Missionary him bin tell me, ‘Gord alle same ole man sit down longer sky.’ Missionary tell me budgerie (good) you yabber (say), yabber, ‘Give it to-day mine damper, give it to-day mine tuck-out.’ Mine bin yabber, yabber, plenty long time; oh, plenty long time. But,” added the speaker in a sulky voice, evidently disgusted with the treatment he had received, “but bale (not) mine get it tuck-out, bale mine get it lillie bit tuck-out.” General Gordon turns to catch and swallow a grasshopper, and then, shaking his woolly mat of hair, further expresses his opinions, in the following remarkable language: “Bale mine think it Gord sit down longer sky. No good de ole man. Him only like it white fellow; no like it poor black beggar.”

Claude ventures to calm the ruffled feelings of the General by suggesting that in a future life black fellows may possibly have a better time of it.

“Yes, boss,” excitedly exclaims the “boy,” his face altering from an expression of injured worth to one of perfect faith in his noble existence. “Yes, bime-by mine bin kick out” (By-and-by I die).

The speaker points eastwards, as his race often
do when speaking of dying. “Bime-by me kick out, then me jump up white beggar. Me jump up stockman. Budgeree (very good), mine like it.”

Claude tries to conceive what the General finds in life worth living for when he can look forward with pleasure to a future life as a stockman, which, in common with most station blacks, he evidently firmly believes in.

Our young friend unconsciously follows the lines of reasoning laid down long since by a celebrated wit, when he finally concludes that it is probably the same with blacks as with whites, in that, “By the time the emptiness of life is discovered, living has become a fatal habit.”

Old Williams now joins Claude upon the hill-top, and, looking carefully round about him on the ground as if in search of something he has dropped, presently deposits himself upon a chocolate-coloured block of sandstone with a grunt of satisfaction.

“Mind where ye sit doone, lad,” he observes to Angland, through clenched teeth, which hold a grimy old maize-cob pipe; “this hill is just the very place for snakes.”

The words are hardly uttered, when the black boy, who is standing behind the white men, suddenly ejaculates a guttural exclamation, and dashes his nulla nulla (a three-foot club of heavy wood) down upon a small branch-like object, lying on a ledge of rock close to where Claude’s feet are resting.

“A cussed death-adder, by all that’s blue!” exclaims Williams, as both men start up, and bending over the cliff observe a little light-brown serpent that is writhing on the rocks below.
"A narrer squeak you've had of it, my son," the old miner observes, wiping his brow with the back of his hairy hand. "If you'd happened to move your foot, it would have been a case of death in less than twenty minutes. There ain't no cure for their bite."

General Gordon, acting under orders from the elder white man, now fetches the snake from where his well-directed shot had thrown it, and Claude shudders slightly as Williams, pointing to the crushed remains of the dangerous reptile,—which is only about two feet in length,—proceeds to direct his friend's attention to a curious horn-like projection which sticks out from the tail end of the hideous, slug-like body.

"Some say that this 'ere's got a poison fang in it, but I don't believe it," the old miner observes. "It's against Nature for the warmint to have a sting at each end. It can do all's fair with the fangs it's got at its business end, I take it."

Claude nods his acquiescence.

"This 'ere horn is just for helping the devils to jump. They move when they're skeered jest like them yellow grubs in a cheese. And I believe they use this prong to catch hold of, just like this."

The speaker, to exemplify his meaning, takes a springy stem of dry grass between his finger and thumb, and, bending the two ends towards each other, allows the fragments to fly off into the air.

The black boy, who has been watching this object lesson in ophiology, roars with delight at the ingenious method Williams has employed to explain the snake's mode of progression.

"Hah! hah! Ilia perrachîe (the snake) him make
it the buck, alle same little fellow *waddy*” (woodie: piece of wood, stick).

By which remark Claude infers that the native, whose experience amongst snakes must of course be very great, fully endorses the old miner’s theory; although, had our young friend known the polite readiness which most aboriginals manifest for corroborating anything affirmed by a white man in their presence, it is questionable whether he would have placed as much reliance upon General Gordon’s evidence as he did.

It is now getting too warm for the men to sit or stand still, for there is no wind; indeed, not the slightest movement of the air. So Claude and his companions rise and stroll across the hot, flat fragments of rock towards the other side of the table-topped hill. Here and there a lively lizard or an emerald snake attracts the eye for an instant, but little else of interest is to be seen. Presently, however, Angland stands in amazement before a level expanse of rock; for he is apparently upon a sandy sea-shore, from which the waves that left those ripple marks have but just now ebbed away. He can almost imagine that he hears the surf still rippling over those almost red-hot stones at his feet, so recent does everything appear. Here lie numerous shells of the succulent and delicious *pipi*, at the sight of which Claude’s memory flashes back to many a delightful picnic in the land of the Maori; star-fish, echina, seaweed, cockle-shells, and mussels, or rather their ghostly semblance in hard, brown silica, are scattered around on all sides where the last wave left them.

Clambering down the other side of the hill, where
a fall of rock has recently occurred, Claude finds in
the geological section thus formed an open page in
which to read the history of the country. At a little
distance below the surface of the old sea-bed, volcanic
dust is mixed with the grains of silica that form the
rock,—drab-coloured dust, such as fell at Krakatoa
and Tarawera. This gradually gives place in the
lower strata to a volcanic conglomerate, composed
chiefly of rounded masses of felsite, ferruginous clay,
burnt to a cinder, and silicious, iron-stained nodules.
The old sea-beds have long ago received the red-hot
ejecta from some great eruption, and then, the land
rising, gradually pushed back the ocean. Next come
the centuries during which the resistless sea rolls
again over the land, and once more retiring the waves
cut much of the old ocean bottom away, and leave the
flat-topped, island-like hills as the travellers see them.
And upon the last page Angland sees the sandstone
rock before him with its fossil exuviae, and its surface
sheltering a few miserable euphorbias, where passing
birds have dropped undigested seeds. The poor grass
struggles here and there to clothe the barren, ugly
rocks, during the few months in every two or three
years when it has the opportunity of growing. Per­
haps Nature will one day add another and a brighter
chapter to this history of the wilds of central northern
Queensland—a chapter of forest life and copious rains.
It may be so; but, at any rate, Claude, looking round
him, decides that man has come upon these deserts
too soon—some five thousand years too soon.

When night falls upon the little camp beneath the
rocky cliff, and the first watch—consisting of Don
and the two natives from the Myall village—have
gone on duty, Billy spreads a saddle-cloth upon a flat stone by the camp-fire, and commences to mix some flour and water thereon into a thick paste, preparatory to cooking to-morrow’s bread.

He has made a discovery that morning, whilst bathing in the water-hole with the boys, and it appears to him to be such an important one that he is rather puzzled how to act. So instead of droning a song or keeping up a lively chatter with anybody who happens to be near, as he usually does when at his culinary occupations, he frowns over his work and remains silent.

The ruddy light of the hot pile of embers, that he has just fashioned into a glowing nest for the reception of the damper that he is now manufacturing, falls on his thoughtful face. Presently Claude notices that Billy is strangely quiet, and, seeing his preoccupied air, puts the cause down to one of those troubles to which all bush-cooks are at times heir.

“What’s up, Billy, not made it wet enough?” Angland asks, referring to the loaf the black is making.

“Oh no, boss,” answers Billy, keeping his black fingers moving in elliptic spirals in the little crater of dough before him. A fight is going on in the darkie’s mind as to whether he shall keep his discovery to himself or tell Angland; in which latter case he knows his secret will ultimately reach and render happy the man he most hates on earth. But the young fellow’s dependent and affectionate disposition wins in the end, and, after he has raked the last embers over his cookery, Billy turns to Claude determined to reveal his thoughts to his new master.
Williams is asleep at a little distance from the others, his bush experience inclining him to take his night's rest away from the light of the camp-fire, that might show his out-stretched form as a tempting target for the spears of any avenging aborigines who may be about.

"You remember, boss," Billy begins, as he lifts a piece of glowing charcoal with his bare fingers to light his pipe,—"you remember what I told you about when them cussed Myall blacks killed old Weevil?"

"Yes, I think I remember all you mentioned to me, Billy," responds Claude. "There was something the old hatter told you when he was dying that you said you could not understand altogether. You said, I think, that you had missed a good deal the old man said in the excitement of the moment."

"That's jest it." The black looks sadly into the fire at the remembrance of his old friend's death, and then, glancing round to see that he and Claude are alone, continues, "I had forgotten what the old man said. Now I remember. He told me he had stolen a boy pickaninnie of old Giles's from Murdaro Station, long time ago."

"You told me that much, I remember, the day after we started on this trip."

"Yes, I not forget that; but old man say, 'I mark that boy on shoulder, on near shoulder. I mark him with blue star and the front letters of Giles's names, W. G.'"

"Well," inquires Claude as the last speaker pauses, "but what became of the boy? You didn't tell me if he told you that."

Billy does not answer the question, but goes on
puffing at his pipe, even now undecided whether to reveal his secret. Presently, with a sort of groan, he turns him towards his master and asks,—

“Where you get that lillie fellow Don? I think him very clever boy.”

“I got him in Sydney,” replies Claude, laughing.

“Are you concocting a plan to palm him off on Mr. Giles as his long-lost son, you rascal?”

“No, boss,” responds the dark youth thus addressed, in an injured, pettish tone of voice that shows that his feelings are hurt by the light way in which Claude has treated his question.

“No need to 'coct a plan. Don, he got the mark on shoulder, all the same Weevil tell me 'bout.”

“Nonsense!” Claude ejaculates,—he is perhaps rather too much given to making this remark when surprised,—“I know the mark you mean; it’s a bruise he got the other day when his saddle turned round on Kittie, careless young devil.”

“Oh, all right, boss; I ’spose I get blind now,” Billy replies in an offended tone, for nothing insults an aboriginal more than to distrust his keenness of vision. But his clouded expression dissipates into a sunny grin of satisfaction, as he sees that the information he has imparted to Angland has apparently excited a far deeper interest in Angland’s mind than he had supposed it would.

What Claude’s first thoughts are upon learning that which seems likely to turn out a most fortunate discovery for himself and several other persons besides little Don may easily be guessed. He conjures up happy pictures in his mind, that for the most part are variations of one glorious central idea,—Wilson
Giles, with weak tears of joy dribbling down his purple countenance, presenting his golden-haired fairy of a daughter to the man who has recovered for him his "little Georgie."

And if these mental sketches of our young friend's are rather selfish ones, and more redolent of love and Glory than of the mutual gratification upon meeting that the long-separated father and son will soon enjoy at his hands, it is but natural, after all, that in Claude's present state of mind it should be so. But cold second thoughts and chilly doubts soon come to tone down these brilliant visions. Then a half-conceived suspicion as to whether Billy and Don—or perhaps Billy alone—might not have concocted the story of the blue marks upon the boy's shoulder duly presents itself; to flee away, however, before the knowledge that the tattooing and subsequent healing of the wounds produced thereby would take longer than the whole time the two individuals concerned have known each other.

For various reasons, at any rate, Angland determines not to investigate the subject further that night, and, as he rolls himself up in his blankets prior to going off to sleep, he tries to call to mind all that he has heard about the lost child.

During the second watch, which he keeps in company with his little purchase Joe, Claude remembers that Glory had told him once about a severe accident that happened to her baby brother not many months before he disappeared. It had occurred when some visitor at Murdaro head-station—who was rocking himself in one of the chairs upon the verandah and had not noticed the approach of Mr. Giles's tiny
son and heir—had heard a sudden scream at his elbow, and discovered that the rocker of his chair had crushed some of the child’s tender little toes.

“Ah, when I examine Don to-morrow morning,” Claude thinks, “I will notice if his toes are intact. I am glad I remembered this, as it will possibly throw some light upon the mystery.”

As Angland looks up in thought at the purple dome above him, where “the stars burn bright in the midnight sky,” suddenly a great meteor appears, and blazes into brightness as it comes in contact with the world’s elastic shield of air, and then sinks with a graceful, downwards streak of brilliant incandescence into earthly obscurity.

“What makes that fellow star fall down?” Claude asks of the owner of the small, dark figure standing by his side, who is gazing up at the purple-set jewels of scintillating worlds above the watchers’ heads.

Joe, in reply, grins fondly up at his friend and owner,—his white teeth glistening under the starlight as he answers, “Me know,”—and, taking a match from his pocket, proceeds to explain what to his mind appears to be the correct solution of the cause of meteoric phenomena. Striking his match and pretending to light an imaginary pipe, and putting on a slily grave countenance, which in the darkness, however, is lost upon Claude, the boy says,—

“Me think great, big, one Master,—pointing to the heavens,—“Him want um smoke um pipe. Strike um matche,”—acting the process meanwhile,—“and puff, puff”—pretending to smoke. Then Joe makes a movement with his hand, and drops the match slowly to the ground, which, with its bright, smouldering
end, gives a remarkably faithful representation of a shooting star on a very small scale.

Claude has often been struck before with the "smartness" of his diminutive henchman, and many a weary hour has the boy enlivened with his grotesque sayings and doings. But Angland is particularly interested in this last piece of evidence of Joe's histrionic powers,—the more so since it is the first time the youth has expressed a belief in a supreme "great, one Master." But just in order to prove that the aboriginal mind—as represented by the little specimen of the race that is now following Claude in his midnight march round the slumbering men and horses—is practical, as well as theoretical, perhaps we may be excused if we linger, for a moment, to relate another comical little instance of Joe's ingenuity. It happened when Angland and his companions were on their way to Murdaro, and amused our hero a good deal at the time.

Little Joe, upon becoming "by right of purchase" one of Claude's goods and chattels, had been presented with a suit of slop-made clothes and a tiny pair of boots. These latter shortly disappeared. Whether the boy sacrificed them as a parting gift to one of his numerous brothers—all male blacks of the same class—family stand in this relationship to each other—when the party left Mount Silver, or whether they were stolen, as Joe stated was the case, never transpired. But, anyhow, a few days afterwards, the black urchin, who did not relish being the only one of the party to ride bare-footed, chanced upon an extremely ancient pair of what had once been elastic-sided boots lying upon the site of a deserted camp, and straightway
determined to appropriate them to his personal adornment. Dismounting from the tall steed he is riding, two small black feet are carefully inserted into the sun-dried derelicts, and with a grin of satisfaction Joe prepares to mount. But as he lifts his right leg over the horse's back, the enormous boot thereon—which is absurdly too large for the diminutive limb—tumbles off upon the ground. Again and again the boy tries, with the same result. The "boss" is calling, but it will never do to leave the treasure behind. Joe has no string to fasten it upon his foot, but he soon solves the problem. Running round to the other side of his steed, he seizes the stirrup-iron and securely jams this into his prize; then mounting, he places his foot therein, and joins the other riders, looking very proud and haughty, with the dilapidated old leather coffins swinging at his horse's girths, in ludicrous contrariety to the spindle-like shanks which, decked with short white trousers, rise from them.

* * * * *

The next afternoon Claude finds an opportunity, as old Williams and he ride side by side behind the trackers, to tell his friend of Billy's discovery concerning Don's supposed parentage.

"I bathed with the boys myself this morning," Angland says, "and took the opportunity of checking what Billy told me about the mark on the youngster's shoulder. It's there safe enough."

"You didn't tell the boy about all this, nor Billy neither?" inquires Claude's companion.

"No, of course. I don't intend Don to know anything about it at present, and I told Billy to keep mum about it."
"Ah! it's what I call a rum yarn now," remarks Williams, as he muses over what he has just heard. "If it had been any one else nor you had found the boy, I'd have said they had salted him against the chance of making a rise out of old Giles."

"Salted Don?" repeats Claude interrogatively, looking at the old miner, and wondering at the strange expression he has made use of. "What do you mean by 'salting' him?"

"Don't you know what salting a mine is?" asks Williams in return.

"Well, I fancy I've heard that term applied to some kind of mining swindle," replies Claude.

"Exactly so, my lad. And after I've explained what 'salting' is, you'll understand what 'salting' a boy is." Old Williams is never happier than when explaining some mining term to a new hand who will listen patiently, and, when started on such a theme,—especially if a chance of bringing in old reminiscences occurs,—he must be allowed time to run down. Claude has already learned this much about him, so does not attempt to check his elderly friend when he sees him settle down comfortably in his saddle to begin his discourse.

"Salting a mine," Williams goes on, "is getting rather out of fashion; leastwise there's a many easier ways bin invented of late years—and safer ways too, mind ye—of making a 'wild cat' look like a first-class, bonified speculation."

"Well, tell me first what the old system, the 'salting,' was like," interrupts Claude, fearful that Williams will wander yet further from his subject unless kept in the groove.
"Salting a mine, lad, accordin' to the old way of doing business, was just firing some gold dust into a 'face' in order to sell out well or float a company."

Claude remembers that Williams has already informed him that a "face" is the exposed section of a reef in the workings of a mine in distinction to the "backs," which is that part of a lode unworked and above the lowest levels.

"There is better ways nowadays than this kind of 'salting,'—such as using chloride of gold and the like,—but get a good syndicate together to help ye, and it will do all the dirty work for you and float anything." Stopping every now and then to persuade his horse to walk a bit faster, Williams continues, "Some say as how the term 'salting' originated this way. On a new field, especially if tucker's scarce, as it often is, there's always a lot of hungry dogs about. They'll steal anything they can grab hold of, from your last piece of damper to a pair of boots. Now it ain't quite the go ter shoot these ere 'canine tithe collectors,'—that's what I calls 'em,—for their owner might come down and argue in the 'love me love my dog' style. So yer puts salt in yer gun, and the dog ain't killed, but he don't come hankering around agin where he finds he'll only get condiments and nary a bit of meat. I don't like to shoot any man's dog," observes the lecturer feelingly, "let alone a camp-mate's, and I'm always sorry fur the brutes when they go off yelling after getting a charge of salt."

"Yes, I suppose so," observes Claude, who, thinking of certain appropriate lines, proceeds to quote them:

"Sympathy without relief
Is like mustard without beef."
"But what has this 'salting a dog' got to do with 'salting a mine'? I can see now, at any rate, the origin of 'saving one's bacon,' for I expect the dogs would make a bee line for home on finding themselves thus salted down,—but why all this about dogs? You don't think any one has been firing salt into Don, do you?"

"No, lad," Williams says, "you don't take me. In the rough old diggin's we always used to empty our revolvers about sundown, if we did it at all. Those who made the most show about doing this were mostly new hands, but that's neither here nor there. I mean you wouldn't hear no firing after nightfall. If there should happen to be a shot fired it was either a murder or a robbery, and the whole camp would turn out. But if it turned out to be only a hoax, the boys would skylark round, and mayhap the man who started the fun would have to put on a roller bandage instead of a shirt for the next few weeks."

"I see," remarks Claude, knowing that it is of no use to attempt to hurry the old miner, who always moves towards the main subject of his remarks after the manner of a hawk approaching its prey, namely, in circles.

"Well, some chap invented this plan of punishing the dogs, and then firing at night got to be quite common. Instead of turning out when you heard a shot, you'd say ter your mate, 'Oh, some one's cur is gettin' salted.' By-and-by all kinds of shooting got to be called 'salting,' and from that, not only firing gold into a reef, but every kind of swindle, went by the same name."

"You've explained it very well," Claude says, as
Williams closes his remarks, "and, as regards little Don, I thought myself it might be a try on till I examined his feet, and found that the toes on his left foot have evidently been damaged at some time or other." Angland then discloses to his companion what Glory Giles had told him about the accident that befell her baby brother, which we have related for the benefit of our readers.

"And now, Williams, what ought I to do? I somehow feel I should send Don back to Giles at once. I might send Joe and General Gordon with him, but it would be risky work with one water-bag. That's the only reason, as you know, I've not sent Gordon and his mate back before."

"Send him back!" exclaims the elder man; "not a bit of it. Providence, lad, has given yer the boy to keep for a time, and it would be going agin yer luck to send him back. Don't you go out of your way to chuck what Providence has lent you, just to oblige a man who you don't count as a friend, anyhow. A very obliging man is another name for a fool, take my word for it. Besides, how do you know these Myall blacks wouldn't knock both the boys on the head if they got a chance? They would do it, and no fear they wouldn't, if they thought Don was Giles's son. Wouldn't they like to get square with old Giles! He has polished off a good many of their relatives, if you ask me. No!" adds the speaker in a voice that shows he puts his foot down at what he says, "we'll all go back together. You'll be able to play this trump card, my son, better when you've got some more in your fist, as Providence is going to give you shortly."
CHAPTER XVIII.
A STATION SKETCH.

"The proper quarry of mankind is man."

It is about eight o'clock P.M., at Borbong head-station, which lies at some fifty miles' distance from Murdaro, and the evening meal being over, half-a-dozen men are settling down to enjoy an after-dinner smoke in that sanctum of Government House, the boss's "den."

Most of the bronzed, manly figures before us are dressed in white linen, and one wears the long top-boots and spurs of a sub-lieutenant in the N.M. Constabulary. Three of the other men are passing travellers, and although quite unknown to the hospitable manager of the run, till a couple of hours since, are made none the less welcome on that account, after the laudably generous custom that obtains on the better class "up-country" stations.

One of these strangers is the new manager of Hanga run, who is on his way northwards to take charge of his new scene of labours, and the other
two are mining speculators up from Brisbane to look at a new find of silver in the neighbourhood.

"Now, gentlemen, make yourselves at home," observes Mr. Browne, in the loud, resonant voice of one who is accustomed to give outdoor commands. "Here are some cigars that ain't bad. You'll have to excuse me for a bit, but I'll be back by the time you've filled your glasses. I just want to see about the horses for to-morrow." Mr. Browne retires, being followed from the door by a battalion of enormous cats, who, with tails erect, stalk noiselessly after their master, whose sole hobby is breeding animals and training them to perform all kinds of unfeline feats.

The manager's guests proceed to make themselves comfortable upon various seats about the rather roughly furnished room, and an observant eye might have noticed that the older frequenters of the house studiously avoid the neighbourhood of a certain chintz-covered sofa standing near the door, which is known to them as the favourite roosting-place of their host's strange pets.

The room in which the smokers are assembled has no ceiling, and the rafters of the thatched roof can dimly be described in the gloom overhead. Upon the log walls, which are scantily covered with a mutilated covering of scrim, a few coloured almanacs and pictures from the illustrated papers have been pasted. A dusty, little-used book-case and a well-supplied gun-rack—fit emblems of the unequal amount of influence exerted by peace and war in the locality—occupy two opposite corners of the room by the door, which, hanging upon green-hide hinges, has evidently at some time or other formed parts of various packing
cases. This is the “den,” otherwise the sitting-room and office, of Mr. Browne,—where that splendid specimen of humanity writes his diaries, does his obtuse calculations as handicapper for the neighbouring Jockey Club, and pays his hands,—and the absence of a ceiling is not without certain advantages, as may be perceived after a number of guests have been loading the air for the best part of a warm summer night with fragrant clouds of incense in honour of the Genius of Bachelordom.

“Wonderful lot of cats about the place!” exclaims one of the mining speculators, moving suddenly off the aforementioned chintz-covered sofa, and proceeding to stamp and shake himself as if he had come in contact with a lively ant-hill. “I’ve always admired Henry the Third of France because he hated cats.”

The other men smile knowingly at each other, as if they had expected him to vacate his seat before long, and one explains, “That’s the cats’ seat; there ar’n’t any over here.”

“Talking of cats,” observes the station storekeeper, who, being the distant relative of an Irish baronet, is considered a person of some importance in the district, “it wouldn’t be a bad ideah, bai Joave, to twain some of Bwowne’s cweatures for the hill-country, where the dawgs cawn’t work properly. How did you manage to get along yesterday, Mr. Morth?” The last sentence is addressed to the young sub-inspector.

“Oh, not so badly,” replies the police officer, as he knocks his cigar end off upon the leg of his rather rickety chair. Mr. Morth is a youngish man, slim and active as a greyhound, who glories in his work from a sportsman’s point of view. “Oh, we didn’t
do so badly. We got another lot besides the party your boys put us on to. But that broken country at the back of the Black Rock is the very devil. Fifteen miles, sir, we had to track the beggars after we left our horses, and then they'd have got away if there hadn't been old people with them."

"You lost a boy, didn't you?"

"Yes, worse luck. Poor old Jet lost the number of his mess. We got the beggars against a cliff, and when they found they were in a trap they rushed at the boys. I never saw a nigger harder to kill than the rascal that knocked Jet on the head. I put six bullets into the beggar before I dropped him."

"Niggers bad up my way?" asks the new manager of Hanga Station.

"That's not in my patrol, so can't say," replies the sub-inspector.

"I think you will have a deuce of a lot of trouble up there," observes the storekeeper. "Your predecessor allowed the beggars to wandah all ovah the wun. Spoilt them all togethah. Weally one could not go neah a water-hole without seeing some of the black devils camped there. They came in from all the other stations wound."

"Oh, I'll soon alter all that," remarks the Hanga manager with an oath.

"Milby was the boy with niggers," says a dark-eyed man at the other end of the little table, as he glances up from the American cloth cover before him, upon which he has been amusing himself by imprisoning sundry stray ants in a complicated maze, traced with the wet bottom of his tumbler. "Did you ever meet him, Lawrence?"
The individual addressed, who is a cattle-drover of a superior kind, replies in a husky voice that he has not only met him, but was with him some time in the Northern Territory the year before.

"He was a beggar to shoot niggers," this gentleman adds, "and no mistake. Way, hang me, if he didn't order six cases of Sniders up to the station when he first took up that MacArthur country."

"What on earth did he want with that lot?" asks the new manager of Hanga run.

"Oh," replies the drover, "he said the niggers' heads up that way were so precious thick that his boys would break all their gun-stocks if he didn't keep a good supply of 'em."

A general laugh greets the news that the red-faced drover has just retailed concerning this latest piece of eccentricity of the famous Milby.

"I was with him for two years up at Hidamoor," observes the dark-eyed man. "He hadn't a single 'boy' on the run; they was all lubras (girls). He used to tog them out in trousers and shirts, and they made jolly good stockmen. Does he do that still up north?"

"Yes," replies the drover, "they all do it up there. He lets his white stockmen have two gins (women) apiece. I brought a couple down with me to the Springs last trip; give them to Boker there."

"Milby's a smart fellow all round," remarks Mr. Browne, who has just entered, dismissing all save two of his furry following, these latter taking the seats demurely upon the chintz-covered sofa.

"Yes; first time I was out with Milby," continues the manager, stooping to use the tobacco-cutter, "we
got nicely on to about a dozen buck niggers near Wise­man's water-hole—you know it, Lawrence? Well, I saw Milby taking a long feather out of his pocket when we'd grassed all the black devils, and wondered what he was going to do with it. Hanged if he didn't send a 'boy' round to each of the beggars we'd knocked over to tickle their noses.

"'What's that for?' I asked. 'Oh, you'll see,' said he. And sure enough presently the 'boy' with the feather ranged up alongside a nigger who'd been shamming. I'd tried the beggar before with a match, in the ordinary way, and he hadn't shown a sign. I thought I'd have died o' laughing," the manager continues, after moistening his inner man, "when I saw the beggar twitching his nose as the feather tickled it; he couldn't for the life of him keep it still. That was a very good 'dart' of Milby's; we'd have missed that buck without the feather dodge."

"Oh, that's an old trick," remarks the new manager of Epsom; "they always used it about Kimberley when I was through there with horses before the rush."

"Ain't you station-folk a bit rough on the niggers about here?" inquires one of the two burly individuals that we have already introduced to our readers as mining speculators. "I've had a good all-round experience with 'em, as you may guess, when I tell you I'm the original prospector of the Mount Walker. Now I've had to shoot one nigger in my time, but only one; and I was living amongst them, you might say, for about twenty years, till I made my rise at the Mount."

"Oh, ah!" drawls the storekeeper, bestowing an insolently pitying smile upon the simple-minded individual who thus dares to find fault with one of the pet
institutions of the "squattah" nobles of the country. "But you must remember there's a denced lot of difference between wunning a wun and wunning a mine, Mr. Walker." This remark smells so strongly of a sneer that the black Cornish eyes flash angrily across the table, till, observing that the storekeeper is a foe that is hardly worthy of his steel, Mr. Walker calms down again.

"Maybe, maybe," he goes on, "but I'm a practical man, and I look at everything in a practical way. I don't blame you gentlemen for potting a nigger for cattle spearing. I'd as lief shoot a man as a dog black or white, if he tried robbing me too often. You mustn't think, gentlemen," Mr. Walker goes on, as he observes that he has decidedly not got "the house with him," "you mustn't think I'm presuming to teach you anything about how you ought to manage your own affairs. But it's always been a good stout argument of mine that it's waste of good bone and muscle, as the country can't well spare, all this shooting business."

"What would you do with the cussed vermin? Can you tell me that, eh?" asks the Epsom manager, winking at Mr. Browne with the intention of attracting his attention to the observations he is about to make. "You'd go in for making miners of them, would you? It strikes me somehow that you miners ain't very fond of coloured men knocking round the diggings. Look here, Mr. Walker, the miners played it pretty low down on both the niggers and the chinkies at the Palmer rush, for one place, and you know as well as I do that it was near as a toucher that the Johns (Chinamen) didn't get kicked off Croydon last year."
Look at the Kimberley rush, too; the niggers ain't learnt to fall in love with what they've had from the diggers there."

Mr. Walker knows that these accusations are correct, but is not going to be led into an argument as to whether miners or cattle-men are the "roughest" on the native population, so he answers the last speaker as follows,—"I'm not arguing whether it's right to shoot the blacks or not, but whether, looking at the thing fair and square, in a practical, common-sense, business way, it's a sensible thing to do."

"Yes, that's the talk," remarks his mate of chintz sofa notoriety, who has hitherto refrained from argument.

"But," continues Mr. Walker, "as this gentleman here has got hold of the Chinese Question, I'll tell him that, talking as a miner, I think you'll find most of us think this way." The speaker whilst arguing takes a pencil from his pocket, and from the force of old associations makes as if to draw the plan of an imaginary mine upon the table-cover. "We'd let the aboriginals mine if they like to; it's their country after all, and they've a right to do that, at any rate. In fact, lots of them have done mining; the first big nugget got in Queensland was found by a nigger at the Calyope. But foreign coloured men is different altogether."

"Ah, but these niggers are a useless lot of devils, and they won't work unless you make 'em," observes the drover.

"Well, mate," Walker says, laughing, "they suffer from the same complaint as many whites do if they won't work unless they're driven to it; that's all I can say about that. But as to their being no use, I don't know how you'd be able to get on without the
'boys' to muster, track, and drove. And I've seen blacks near Adelaide who've become farmers, and they're just as good as lots of the Europeans farming near them. And on the Russell diggings we couldn't have kept going if we hadn't trained our 'boys' to bring us tucker from the township. I've got a couple of 'boys' with me now as can carry a two-hundred of flour for a mile without resting. Now there ain't a man in this room could do the same. I'm open to bet on it.” Mr. Walker, like most modern Heracles, is much given to judging of a man's value by the amount of physical power he has at his command; and this rule of the one time miner is not a bad one to go by, for as a general thing the most practically useful members of society are those strongest in wind and limb. 

*Mens sana in corpore sano.*

Just as Mr. Walker closes his remarks a knock comes at the door, and the manager's favourite house gin pops her red-turbaned head into the room.

"What do you want now, Oola?" Mr. Browne sharply inquires of his grinning handmaid.

The dark-skinned girl glides forward, keeping her long-fringed eyelids turned bashfully towards the earthen floor, as the men stare admiringly at her buxom figure, and then, lifting her beautiful soft eyes to her owner’s face for a brief instant, remarks that "Charlie bin come up," and hands to the manager a piece of paper.

"Oh, a note from my brother Jim!" exclaims Manager Browne, looking meaningly at Morth.

"Ah, anything fresh?" asks the gentleman addressed, his eyes brightening. During the late controversy he has maintained a most masterly neutrality.
“Tell you directly; if I can make out his pencil scrawl.”

After sundry screwings of the managerial eyebrows, and bendings of the managerial back to the lamp upon the table, Mr. Browne ceases snorting smothered anathemas at his relation’s bad handwriting, and looking up motions with his finger the sub-inspector, whereupon both men leave the room together.

“Thought it safer to speak to you out here, Morth,” observes the manager, as soon as they are beyond earshot of the station-house. The police officer replies by nodding his head, but remembering immediately afterwards that it is too dark for Mr. Browne to see this signal of acquiescence, he proceeds to convey his meaning by observing, “Just as well.”

“I told you about the weaner,” goes on Mr. Browne, “that Jim found speared last week up Agate Creek, didn’t I?”

“You did. Has Jim picked up any tracks yet?”

“Yes. It’s like this: I sent Jim out with a couple of ‘boys’ to see if any of our beasts had gone over the Murdaro boundary. Well, he writes to me he’s come across the tracks of a party of horsemen going north. Thinks it is that explorer fellow who was stopping with Giles.”

“By Jingo! they’ll have a dry trip of it,” observes Morth, who has just crossed a corner of the northern desert on his way to Borbung.

“Yes, but he’s picked up a Myall black,—to show him the water-holes, I suppose. Jim noticed the beggar’s tracks besides the horse’s hoof-marks, and guessed that it was a warragal, because if it had been a station black he’d have ridden one of the spare horses.”
"That was smart of Jim," remarks the police officer.

"Oh, the young 'un has got his head screwed on level. But to continue: Jim ran the tracks back, and then sent for Bogie—the best tracker we have—to have a look at them. Bogie spotted where three niggers had come out of the scrub."

"Ah!" interrupts Morth, with a laugh, "I'm glad I waited."

"Bogie," continues Mr. Browne, "knows every black's track around, and he swears that one of those which Jim found is that of a nigger who cleared out from Murdaro lately; what was his name now? Never mind that, however."

"Oh, you mean that boy of Dyesart's," observes the sub-inspector.

"No, I don't mean Billy—that was the name of Dyesart's boy." The manager suddenly stops speaking, and snatches the palms of his hands together,—an impromptu manifestation of delight, for a new idea strikes him that satisfactorily clears up a mystery contained in his brother's note. "Why, that explains it!"

"Explains what?"

"Why, don't you see, what puzzled me was how this explorer got hold of a Myall. They are pretty shy of whites. But I guess this Billy, that you've just reminded me of, has been camped with some lot of blacks about here, and has joined this party. Won't Giles and Puttis be mad; they've been raising Hades to get him. And he's been camped close by all the while! Ha!" Mr. Browne laughs out loud, and then informs his friend how he has long suspected that
there must be a camp of runaway niggers in the direction where Jim has found the tracks.

"You'd like me to take the 'boys' up there then, I suppose, before I go on," observes the police officer. "The clouds on the hills this evening looked like rain. Nothing like a wet night for stalking a camp, so many noises going on in the scrub."

"No, old man, my idea's this," rejoins the manager, taking Morth's arm, and walking him back towards the house. "I'll put Jim up to letting Bogie and another good tracker we've got watch for these blacks coming back into cover,—that they won't go far with the exploring expedition I'm pretty certain. I'll arrange, in the meantime, for the Bulla Bulla and Murdaro people to be ready to join us, and we'll clear all this end range; I've often intended to do it."

"Will Giles turn out, d'you think?"

"Turn out?" exclaims Mr. Browne; "he's the most energetic old cock I ever came across where a nigger's concerned. Besides, one of these is a runaway of his. Oh, he'll come fast enough!"

It is finally arranged for a select party of sportsmen to join Morth and his troop upon the return of the three natives to the scrub,—who, as our readers have no doubt already guessed, are Billy and his village friends,—and thus, whilst combining the business of exterminating sundry nests of human vermin with the exciting pastime of a big game shooting-party, at the same time assist to carry out that line of Native Policy that obtains to-day under the régime of three out of five of the Australian Governments of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen.
CHAPTER XIX.

THE GRAVE.

"Sleepe after toyle,
Port after stormie seas,
Ease after warre,
Death after life,
Doth greatly please."

SPENNER'S "Faerie Queene."

It was there he fell, boss. He struck right on top of them gibbers (stones). I caught at him, and fell too,—there's the mark where I struck the mud by the broken stem of that cooliebar there."

It is Billy who is speaking, as, with tears in his eyes, and his affectionate heart overflowing with genuine
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grief, he looks up at the rugged cliffs and points out to Claude and Williams the place where Dyesart met with his fatal fall.

On the ninth day out from Murdaro the expedition has reached the long blue line of gum-trees, towards which it has been toiling since daybreak across the desert plain. And here, at no great distance from the little water-hole, near which the horses are now being unsaddled by the rest of the party, Claude pays a first visit to the lonely mound where, beneath a protecting cairn of stones and tree-stems, his explorer-uncle has begun his long, well-earned rest. As the young man stands there in the scanty shade of she-oaks and box-trees, a thousand solemn thoughts gather around him. What strange power is it that has seemed to guard and guide his footsteps so far in the fulfilment of his appointed task? Will it pilot him to the end? And what is to be the climax of this journey? By Claude's side is Don, who has filled out wonderfully since our hero found him a little waif upon the Sydney streets. The boy, not having been enlightened as to his parentage, still bears his old name, and Angland making more of a companion of him since Billy's discovery, has noticed with delight that the youth, who by a strange procession of circumstances seems likely to become his brother-in-law some day, is developing a kindly disposition and an engaging manner.

Billy now arrives and unearths a small tin box, the contents of which Claude feels much tempted to investigate forthwith; but, acting on Williams's advice, he postpones the operation, and determines to make the most of what remains of the day in searching for the supposed mine at the "Golden Cliffs,"—which our
readers will remember as being set down upon the secret map discovered by Angland on the back of his uncle's posthumous communication. About two miles from the grave there rises, white and weird against the violet sky, a barren, isolated mountain, or rather a collection of rugged peaks. And thither, across the red, rock-strewn plain,—bounded by a phantom sea of desert mirage,—the white men and Billy proceed, and, having traversed the gentle slope that rises from the dried-up course of the river to the hill, they now stand beneath the shadow of the rocks.

"And you carried my uncle all the way to the water, over those gibbers, without once putting him down!" Claude exclaims, as he stands wiping the moisture from his forehead at the summit of the boulder-strewn glacis that surrounds the mount, and hears once more the story of the accident. "Why, you were hurt yourself!"

"When I carry the doctor I *pikaued* (Anglicé, carried) all I cared about in the world. 'Spose that made it easy," Billy replies simply, and leaning his head upon his arms against a rock, he allows his exuberance of emotion caused by the painful remembrance to wash itself away in tears.

As Angland regards the weeping black he cannot but feel half ashamed of his own want of feeling. "Surely this is rather incongruous," he thinks, "that Billy, who after all is only an aboriginal servant of the dead man, should thus appropriate the position of chief mourner, whilst I can look on with only a strange, solemn feeling in my heart, and certainly with dry eyes. But it seems all like a dream to me. Of course, however, with Billy it's very different."
Williams calls at this instant and disturbs the young man’s meditations.

"Look here, Mr. Angland!" The old miner’s short, thick thumb points to a copy of the secret map which he holds in his toil-worn hands.

"Here’s where we’ve got to go; follow the dotted line. Right up the gully there." The old man points to a narrow opening in the side of the hill, not far from where they are standing.

"Yes, but we must find out where this place marked by the cross is, Williams,—the point of departure, you know."

"It’s here, lad. The doctor knew the boy’d lead us to where the accident happened; and see, there’s the gully. A storm creek running from some hollow in the hill I take it to be."

Billy meanwhile observes what is going on with some considerable surprise, for this is the first inkling he has received of the existence of a map of the hill—so carefully had Dyesart apparently guarded the secret that he wished only to reach his sister’s child.

The men now move on again, Williams leading, and enter a dark, gloomy defile, the walls of which, rising to a height of some eighty feet, are composed of rain-furrowed masses of hard, grey mud. Enormous flakes and slabs of transparent gypsum protrude from the sun-dried mass in places, and some of these, catching the rays of the afternoon sun, blaze and scintillate like gems of priceless value. The gorge is, in fact, just what Williams has termed it, a storm creek, and the dark cliffs of hardened clay on either hand are formed of débris which has washed down from an open basin or depression in the centre of the mount.
After following the watercourse upwards for two or three hundred yards, Claude and his companions find themselves in a great, crater-like valley, about three hundred yards across, grey and blasted, a picture of desolation. On all sides rise the sun-scarred domes of mud-springs of various sizes, some of which are twenty feet in height, but all appear non-active; in consequence, no doubt, of the long drought. Around the valley, across which Williams proceeds to lead the way, stopping here and there to consult his map or examine a stone, is an encircling, battlemented array of strangely weird and broken cliffs, some three hundred feet in height, of a hard, flinty rock, varying in colour from light red to pure white. At intervals along the scarped and tortured summit of the precipices strange, turret-headed peaks rise like giant sentries posted upon the heights to guard its sacred loneliness, and these, as the sun lowers in the heavens, cast protracted shadows over the silent, ghastly valley below. In many places heaps of honey-combed boulders of a kind of quartzite, which have fallen from the overhanging cliffs, form slopes that reach halfway up the walls of this wild-looking amphitheatre, and here and there the explorers have to turn to avoid the mysterious openings of vast, ancient fumaroles, whose orifices and walls are grandly blotched with black, purple, and Indian-red incrustations.

At last Williams comes to a halt where numerous nodules of ironstone-clay litter the ground, and, turning towards Claude, places his hand upon the young man's shoulder, and whispers in a mysterious and impressive manner "that them's the 'Golden Cliffs.'"
Stretching across the valley, and apparently barring further progress in that direction, is a dark mass of brown and purple rock, which Claude can see differs in many respects from the material of which the other cliffs already passed are composed.

But why "golden"? There seems nothing, as far as he can judge, to make the sombre pile—which appears to be some kind of ironstone deposit—worthy of the auriferous title bestowed upon it on the map. Claude's heart sinks within him. He knows what a gold-bearing reef is like; he has seen plenty in New Zealand, and some also about Cairns and Mount Silver, but there is no trace of a reef here. But perhaps Williams has made a mistake. The map is examined and re-examined with the sole result of proving that the old miner has guided his companions correctly. Then Claude begins, for the first time since he started, to feel that he has been somewhat rash in going to all this trouble, risk, and expense when after all the mysterious message from his uncle may have been only the result of the feverish promptings of a brain disordered by accident, and at the same time haunted with the desire to leave something behind for that loved sister from whom he had been estranged so long.

Neither can our young friend gather any comfort from either of his companions, who, although far more experienced than he is with rocks and minerals, seem also puzzled and disappointed. But happy is the man who, under adverse circumstances, can gather fresh stores of energy and strength such as now come to relieve Angland from the desponding frame of mind into which the frowning, barren rocks have
plunged him for the moment. The memory of a loving, girlish face comes like a peaceful messenger of hope to cheer yet softly chide the heart that fails when it should be strong for her sake. And Claude remembers that, however barren his journey through the desert may prove in other ways, the strange message from the dead has been the cause of his meeting Glory, at any rate, and a deep feeling of thankfulness makes his heart glow with renewed determination and courage.

At the foot of the cliffs Williams and Billy are closely examining the rocks. The former, breaking off chips with a short-handled prospecting pick, bends now and again to observe a likely fragment with a pocket lens; whilst close by the black boy is at work shovelling up the sandy soil from between the fallen fragments of stone with the blade of his tomahawk, winnowing the same cleverly from hand to hand for the canary-coloured particles of heavy metal, that, judging from the sulky look of the operator, have not yet come to reward his busy efforts.

"What do you make of it?" Williams turns to Angland at the question, and, carefully pocketing his lens, stands looking up at the cliff with his arms akimbo.

"Well I'm blowed if I know, to tell you straight, Mr. Angland. I don't see nary a colour. Fact is, I've never seen anything like this before." As the old man speaks he affectionately pats a boulder by his side. For just as an M.R.C.S. loves to meet an interesting and complicated case of human infirmity, to correctly diagnose which will redound to his credit in the scientific world, so does old Williams, enthusiastic
prospector and geologist that he is, feel quite a warm regard for this strange mass of rock whose hidden secrets it is now his business to unravel.

"It might be a big kind of gozzon out-crop,—the rock's got a lot of iron in it, there's no doubt about that. An old mate of mine used to say,—"

"'Es thut kein gang so gut
Er hat einen eisernen hut.'

He was a German, but a good miner for all that, and quite right about an 'iron hat,' for them's the best reefs. But," Williams goes on as he heaves a sigh, "blest if this is a real gozzen out-crop either. And, moreover, it ain't likely-looking to my thinking."

"Well, it can't be helped," says Claude, watching the stalwart old miner's face with some amusement as he stands rubbing his stubby chin, and screwing up his mouth and eyebrows, like some art-critic engaged in reviewing an enormous piece of sculpture. "I'll carry out the instructions in the letter, and if it all turns out to be nothing,—well, I can't help it."

Both men hear a shout at this instant, and Billy, who has climbed up the cliff a little way, is seen waving excitedly to the white men, and calling to them to follow him to his elevated perch. Claude is not long in scrambling up, but he has to descend again to assist Williams, whose knees are getting a bit stiff with age, although the muscles of his arms and shoulders are as good as ever. Arrived at Billy's post of vantage, the black proudly shows them a remarkable tunnel opening into the cliff: it has smooth, shiny walls, and is evidently not the result of human labour.
"Look!" the dark youth shouts, stooping and pointing to the floor of the cavern, upon which the winds of heaven have spread a thin covering of desert sand: "look!"

A compound exclamation of surprise and annoyance bursts from two pairs of lips, for there, stamped into the soft, yellow carpeting of silicious particles, are the marks of numerous human feet. Not those that wandering natives might have made, but boot-marks, and, what is worst of all, apparently quite fresh.

"Somebody been here afore us," exclaims Williams. Claude simply looks downwards, and whistles a musical execration.

Billy, who stands behind, grins extensively as he sees the discomfited faces of his white companions, and hesitates for the best part of a minute before he proceeds to relieve their minds. Then he whispers huskily,—

"That been the doctor come along here."

"Dr. Dyesart! What on earth do you mean?" exclaims Claude excitedly, as the wild hope of his uncle still being alive flashes through his brain. Billy, like most persons possessed of some superior instinct or talent, can hardly appreciate the fact that others may be deficient in the same, so he grins again when he finds that the white men are still unable to distinguish between an ancient and a recent footprint.

"How long since my uncle was here?" asks Angland sharply. But our hero’s hopes are dashed out of sight as Billy replies sadly,—

"He been dead over four months now."

"How the dickens are these marks so recent then?"

"They very old, boss," replies the black, and turning
away, he lights a match, and boldly leads the way into the black mouth of the natural tunnel, which slopes downwards at an easy incline.

All the men are smokers, therefore provided with the means of producing an impromptu illumination. Claude carries his matches, after the fashion of most settlers in the New Zealand bush, in a small but stout glass bottle,—the moist atmosphere of the Land of Ferns rendering this precaution necessary,—and as he creeps after his black guide, he examines the dark, glossy surface of the walls and roof of the cave, which are covered with ripple-like corrugations. The party has not proceeded far, when Claude slips upon a long, smooth object lying across his path, and as he falls is horrified to hear Billy, who is immediately in front, sing out that a snake has bitten him. In an instant the party are in darkness. Williams has tripped over Angland, and the black boy having leapt wildly upwards against the rock overhead—with a force that would have demolished any but an aboriginal skull—lies rubbing his head where he has rolled to, which is some yards on in advance, for the tunnel descends pretty steeply here.

To be left thus suddenly in perfect darkness, in a steep, subterranean passage, with the dread possibility of coming in contact at any moment with a furious and probably poisonous reptile, which has just bitten one's companion, is an awkward if not an uncomfortable position to be placed in. But in addition to this our friend Claude has had all his breath crushed out of him by the superincumbent Williams. It is not surprising, therefore, that some seconds, which appear minutes, elapse before a match is struck and a light
thrown upon the scene. It is then discovered, to the
great relief of poor Billy, and for the matter of that
of all three men, that the snake-bite which the dark
youth is expecting every moment to prove fatal has
been occasioned by Claude, who, stepping upon a
dead bough, has caused it to turn over, and inflict a
wound upon the black's hairy calf with the broken
end of one of its lateral branches.

A few other pieces of wood being also found lying
about, torches are now manufactured; and by the
extra amount of light thus procured, the travellers
discover that they are following a kind of tortuous,
rocky artery, from whose jetty sides numerous vein­
like smaller channels open in all directions. In places
the tunnel widens, and the red glare of the flames
dances upon the polished surfaces of curious, twisted
columns, stalactite-like roof pendants, and marvellous
bunches of natural filigree-work.

"Well, this is a rum kind of diggings!" exclaims
Williams presently. "Did you ever see anything like
this before in your travels, Mr. Angland?"

"I was just thinking that it is a sort of black
edition of some of the limestone caves I've been in,"
replies Claude, adding, "But they're as miserably wet
and cold as this is hot and dry."

The explorers have now been some fifteen minutes in
the tunnel, and the white men have decided to return,
and prospect the cave further upon the morrow, when
Billy, who is some way on ahead, shouts "Daylight!"

A minute afterwards and the party stand blinking
their eyes on a kind of undercliff, overhanging another
valley, similar in some respects to that which they
have already traversed, but smaller in size and with
a much fairer aspect. For here and there trees and shrubs are growing amongst the fallen rocks, and these, although stunted and bleached-looking, convey a certain softening effect to the otherwise wildly barren slopes. It is as if the goddess Flora had once smiled into the valley of death long ages ago, and some of the gentle radiance of her glance still remained behind to tell of her passing visit. And there, too, are a couple of wallaby, of the rare black and chestnut kind, skipping noiselessly away from the immediate vicinity of the intruders, to sit motionless upon adjacent boulders, watching with awful tameness the movements of these strange visitors who have come to disturb them in their quiet domain.

On either side of the valley, which, sloping westward, opens upon the desert plain below, rise the scarped and pinnacled buttresses of great, crumbling granite cliffs. These grey heights are crowned with a dark-red stratum of rock, which Claude recognizes as part of the desert sandstone formation, which has, in all probability, at one period covered the greater portion of Northern Central Queensland.

It is now getting late in the day, so a council is held as to whether to retire campwards by the road they have come, or by proceeding down the valley to return on the outside of the hill, which they will then have passed completely through. The latter route is quickly selected, and the rosy tints of sundown are just beginning to stain the whole landscape when our friends commence clambering over the boulders towards the lower ground. The route selected lies over and amongst enormous masses of coarse-grained
porphyritic granite, from whose weather-worn surfaces great square crystals of feldspar project, catching the sun's ruby rays and flashing them back amidst the glints of light off flakes of ice-like mica. And Claude, looking round him, thinks of the valley of gems into which Sinbad was carried by the mighty Roc, and how, perhaps, Dr. Dyesart may have also recalled that wondrous Eastern story, when he, the first and solitary explorer of the mountain, saw the jewel-like crystals blazing round him on the rocks. The descent to the valley is not by any means so facile as the bird's-eye view taken from above seemed to promise; and a small precipice presently necessitates our friends to travel along to the left, beneath the undercliff upon which they had emerged when leaving the tunnel. A hundred yards brings them to a great black buttress, which, projecting from the cliff, threatens to bar the way. But the active Billy, who declares he sees signs of the doctor having been in that direction, soon finds a narrow ledge, and by its means the rocky corner is safely rounded, after a rather risky passage. And here the men are suddenly arrested in their further progress by a most strangely beautiful sight.

A large portion of the cliff immediately before them, probably from the action of some ancient earthquake, has fallen forwards into the valley below, leaving exposed a bay or recess about three hundred feet in height and nearly as much across. The walls of this kind of alcove are formed of some dark rock, but here and there it is blotched and clouded with an almost luminous coating of iridescent colours—such as one sees on soap-bubbles and decaying glass—that
burns and shimmers in green, golden, and violet hues, as though a hundred rainbows were trembling on the sombre surface of the mountain steep.

Around the summit of the semi-circular precipice is suspended a kind of rocky cornice composed of great icicle-like pendants, as if some mighty torrent of lava plunging over the cliff had suddenly cooled in mid-air and become converted into stone.

Some of these o'erhangings appear to be tipped with burnished copper, others with silver, others again shine bright and golden against the dark, purple shadows behind. And all of them in the evening light—which bathes the whole scene with a soft crimson veil—glow and blush like molten drops of metals oozing from the edge of the wonderful rocky valance above.

Some little time elapses before the men have recovered sufficiently to speak; and then it is the sun which, sinking with true tropical celerity, releases them from the enthralling beauty of the scene. And, as the glowing hues fade into cold indigo shadow, each individual member of the party experiences that curious emotion—a mixed feeling of relief and disappointment—which some of our readers may remember to have been keenly sensible of, when, as children, the green-baize curtain dropped slowly upon the limelit fairyland of their first pantomime.

Then are three tongues unloosed, and three pair of legs hurry their owners toward the darkening cliffs.

Claude, being gifted with a scientific and artistic mind, forgets to think about the practical value of the discovery, and exclaims characteristically, "That is beautiful! I wonder what's the cause of those colours!"
Billy, remembering the prismatic tints of a material sulphide known to miners by the name of "peacock ore," concludes that what lies before him is an immense deposit of the same, and shouts gleefully, "Copper!" To which Williams, who likes to have a good-humoured "dig" at his black companion when he advances any opinion upon mining matters, observes "Grandmother!" and further explains, for Claude's benefit, "that them colours are iron oxides. Couldn't think at first where I'd seen the same kind of thing before," he adds, as he stoops to pick up a piece of stone, "but I recollect now. It was just the same as this here on the top of Mount Morgan, when they first opened up the top bench, only on a much smaller scale."

"Mount Morgan eh!" exclaims Claude, as he hears the old authority at his side compare this discovery of theirs to the richest gold-mine in Australia. "Oh, don't you jump to conclusions yet, Mr. Angland," observes Williams, whose lengthy experience amongst those most disappointing affairs, gold-mines, has left him incapable of putting any faith in one till he has fully examined it. "Many a man's burnt his fingers with the idea that because stone resembles the Mount it's auriferous. It don't follow in the least."

It is late when the men reach camp, but, tired as he is, Claude spends the greater part of the night in making assays of the specimens of stone brought back from the mount; and so interested are Williams and Billy in the experiments that they sit round the blazing logs with him, keeping up a running fire of mining anecdotes, and lending him a hand, when he requires it, at pounding pieces of stone to powder in a
big iron mortar with a heavy pestle, called technically a "dolly."

Having Angland's diary before us as we write, we perhaps cannot do better than copy an extract therefrom which was, apparently, written on the next evening to that on which our friends discovered the now famous "Golden Cliffs":—

"Weather: fine, clear, hot.
"Barometer: 29-250, 29-350.
"Thermometer: 72, 84, 91.
"Minimum last night: 52.

"Spent day prospecting 'Golden Cliffs.' There is no doubt but that, like Mount Morgan, the formation there is the result of a vast thermal spring, and what I took to be a hollow in the cliffs is the half of the old basin, the other half having fallen into the valley. My rough assays made last night of the best specimen of stone, gave a result of about fifteen ounces to the ton.

"By grinding the stone very fine under water, in an agate mortar I have fortunately brought with me, I can obtain more than half the gold in the stone, as shown by assay. Neither W. or B. can obtain a colour by means of the ordinary panning process. Williams says this is what he expected, but he is one of those worldly-wise people who seldom venture an opinion till they are certain to be right.

"Our Myalls say the name of the Mountain is "Pillythilcha Doolkooro," which seems to mean, according to Billy, the Valley of Glowing Charcoal. There appears to be a belief amongst the blacks that the place is the abode of Kootchie, or devils; also that all
men are unlucky who go near the hill, and those who venture into its secret valleys will surely die. Billy and Williams both agree, for a wonder, that there is a strong probability of this being the Sacred Hill, that, according to them, is believed in by the natives throughout Australia as the place from which Mooramooora, the native Supreme Being, will some day arise to protect them from the cruelties of the white settlers.

"To-morrow Williams leaves for Palmerville to register claim, and on his return I shall go to Murdaro with Don. Killed a big black snake just now which had crept under my blankets."
CHAPTER XX.

A "DISPERSING" PARTY.

"Greet her with applausive breath,
Freedom gaily doth she tread;
In her right a civic crown,
In her left a human head."

INSPECTOR PUTTIS, N.M.P., is pacing the verandah of Borbong head-station house. The hour is early, and although the active little man was one of the liveliest of last night's party of bronzed and loud-voiced men, who held wild carousal till the "wee, sma' hours," he is up betimes, as usual, to enjoy a cup of tea in the cool morning air, and issue instructions for the day to the "boys of his troop. The loose verandah boards creak under his diminutive Wellington boots, as with military strut he marches to and fro; and each time he reaches the end of his beat and right-about-faces to
move back again, a sable crow upon a native orange
tree hard by, who is acting as sentry to some feathered
thieves by the kitchen door, raises his hoarse voice in
a warning caw.

The Inspector’s head is bent forward, and after a
custom of his when thinking deeply, he carries his
hands folded behind his back. This morning they
rest upon an empty revolver case, suspended from the
wide, white-leather belt which he always wears when
upon active duty.

If the man before us would only cease frowning at
the boards, and, arranging his thoughts, give us the
benefit of the same in words, they would probably be
after this fashion:—

“Yes, I don’t see how he can miss me this time.
And the risk is not so very great, as we shall have
rain enough to-night, or to-morrow at furthest, to
drown any tracks. I will take his horses away; then
either himself, or one, perhaps two, of the blacks, will
have to go after them. The rest will be easy. If his
body ever is found, and it’s not likely, they will think
he was in the black camp and got shot there, and, as
everybody round about here will have a finger in that
affair, nobody will dare to make a fuss about it.”

A loud flapping of wings, as the crows at the back
of the house fly off at the approach of footsteps, now
arouses the Inspector from his meditations.

“Ah, Yegerie!” he says, as his black orderly
presents himself, and stands “attention” after duly
saluting his officer.

“Why didn’t you report yourself here to me directly
you arrived?” Puttis adds, for, casting a rapid glance
at the boy, the Inspector—having almost as sharp
an eye as the best tracker in his troop—has discovered some wood ashes upon the new arrival's boots.

Yegerie, who has just returned from doing a piece of special duty, has waited to warm his cold, stiff fingers at the camp-fire before hobbling out his horse, and he trembles now before the master who seems to see and know everything. Inspector Pritis does not appear to expect his black trooper to answer the question put to him, but marches up the verandah and back again. Then he halts opposite Yegerie, and examines him as to how he has performed instructions given him.

"Everything right?"

"All lite, Marmie," replies the boy, saluting again.

"Mine bin come up wary slow. Mine bin come longer ribber. No leabe it any tracks" (Anglicé, All right. I have been delayed by following up river bed, in order to leave no tracks).

"What tracks you see?"

"I bin see tracks longer six yarraman. I bin catch it; see um mob" (I have seen the tracks of six horses. I have seen also the party). "I bin see one white beggar, one pickaninnie white beggar, three black beggar. One fellow Myall, him make it the walk all about longer mob" (One wild black walked alongside the party).

"Ah, that's right! Who's on guard at the camp?"

"Sambo and Dick, Marmie."

"Run ring round camp. Report to me if you see a track directly. That'll do. Dismiss."

The boy salutes and disappears silently.

We pause here to explain that on the vast majority of up-country runs the native station-hands reside
in villages of huts, built by themselves in close proximity to the head and out stations. No other aborigines are allowed even to cross the run, far less to live on it. On the arrival of a "rounding-up" party or a police troop at a station, a guard is generally placed over the station black camp, to prevent any of its inhabitants giving the alarm to such runaway blacks, or Myalls, who may be camped—in contravention of the squatter's decrees—in the vicinity. The police officer has just commanded Yegerie to walk round the camp and see if there are any signs of such a messenger having escaped the sentries and set out during the night.

Half an hour passes, and then the musical clatter of cups and plates is heard in the dining-room, as the breakfast things are laid—or, to speak more accurately, flung—upon the long table, in serried rows, by a laughing, chattering bevy of dark-skinned damsels belonging to Mr. Manager Browne's harem.

There are few up-country bachelor squatters but solace themselves for the absence of white ladies by indulging their leisure moments in the society of a private, selected circle of native girls—popularly known as the "stud gins." Many of these dark-eyed houris are remarkably handsome, and after a year or two at "Government House" they are relegated to the black camp for the use of the black and white station-hands.

But to return to Inspector Puttis. With his usual abstemiousness he drank but little last evening, and his nerves are in perfect order for the day's, or rather night's, work before him. He is, of the whole "rounding-up" party collected beneath the hospitable
roof of Borbong head-station house, the only one that feels much inclined for breakfast that morning.

So when Charlie, the clean, yellow-faced Chinese cook, informs him that the morning meal is "all lie" (Anglice, all right, or ready), he turns immediately towards the glass-door of the dining-room. But just then the rattle of a buggy coming at a furious pace towards the station arrests his attention, and he waits to see who is so rash as to drive so fast over the rough ground.

"Giles, for a tenner!" he mutters half out loud; "no other fool would drive like that."

The dust cloud occasioned by the arrival of the vehicle presently subsides, and, amidst a crashing of breakers suddenly applied and a volley of blasphemy, a pair of reeking horses are pulled back on to their haunches. Then a red-faced, burly form clambers slowly down from the trap, and after kicking an attendant "boy" gives him some directions, and waddles hurriedly towards the house.

"Well, Puttis, I've found you at last."

"Morning, Giles. Want me particularly?" inquires the police officer.

"Want you? Yes, by Jupiter! Haven't I driven all night from Bulla Bulla to try and catch you?"

"Indeed!" observes the smaller man, keenly observing the excited face of Mr. Giles, as he mops it with a red silk handkerchief. "Come in and have a nip."

The squatter half turns, by force of custom, towards the door, then he stops, and says hurriedly, "No, I won't. Here, come outside. I want to speak to you first."
"You've had good news, Giles," remarks the Inspector, his sun-dried cheeks wrinkling up into a grin, and exposing his large, canine teeth.

"How the devil do you know?"

"Never mind, old friend. What have you to tell me?"

The men stroll out by the kitchen garden, where Giles takes a seat upon a low, rustic gate, beneath a sweetly scented gum-tree. Looking nervously round about to be sure that they are alone, the owner of Murdaro turns to his companion, and in a low voice asks, "What have you done about Angland?"

"Nothing," replies the Inspector; adding hurriedly, "Did you tell Miss Mundella you were coming to see me?"

"Thank the Lord, I'm in time!" exclaims Giles, quite ignoring the question put to him. "Now, listen to me, Puttis, and don't interrupt. Firstly, you mustn't interfere with Angland. I'll explain why directly. Secondly, I'm going to repudiate my agreement with Lileth."

"Stay!" exclaims Puttis, half shutting his eyes and causing his parchment cheeks to warp once more into a sardonic smile. "In that case, must make fresh bargain."

The low, wooden gate groans beneath Mr. Giles, as he shakes his podgy sides with a series of defiant laughs, which he raps out with a double, postman's-knock-like abruptness.

"Ah!" thinks Inspector Puttis, looking at him, "he has the air of a man who holds good cards. Wonder what his game is?"

"I am going to repudiate my agreement," repeats
Mr. Giles. "I am going to repudiate everything." His voice grows more cheerful and confident as he proceeds to disclose his intentions. "And if you're the sensible chap I take you ter be, you'll just listen ter what I've got ter say."

The police officer leans over the low gate, and, nodding his head as a sign that he agrees to keep silent, prepares to listen. "I've had a letter from Angland," the squatter continues, "which has altered my opinions of him. He writes from Palmerville to say he's just returned from where that—where Dyesart the explorer pegged out." The sonorous clanking of a bullock-bell, the signal for breakfast, here interrupts the speaker. "There's tucker ready, so I'll cut short what I was going to say. Angland writes to say he finds as I'm indebted to him, as heir to Dyesart, for a large amount; but don't intend pressing me, as was his uncle's wish. And then, blow me if he don't say that he wants to marry Glory! When I told the gal blessed if she didn't seem to expect it. And lastly, what d'yer think of this? If he ain't found my little Georgie!" The speaker's sensual face looks almost handsome for an instant, as a momentary blaze of parental pride and love warms the sinful old heart. "Yes, he's found my little Georgie as I lost six year ago!"

In the excitement caused by disclosing the news of the discovery of his long-lost son and heir, Mr. Giles springs from the gate, and after performing a short pas seul upon the ground,—much resembling the clumsy prancings of a pole-prodded street bear,—he turns to Puttis, and suddenly seizing his hand wrings it violently.
"How did he get hold of boy?" asks the Inspector, as the squatter resumes his seat upon the gate.

"Oh, I'll tell you all about that another time." Mr. Giles's face has resumed its ponderously would-be cunning expression as he goes on: "Not only that, but it appears Dyesart had just discovered a whacking big mountain of gold, or something of the sort, up there, just before he kicked the bucket,—a sort of second Mount Morgan, and I'm to have a share in it."

Inspector Puttis faces round at this, and beneath the stern, determined stare of the little man, Mr. Giles feels and looks very uncomfortable.

"Congratulate you on your luck. Lost son restored. Rich son-in-law. Debts forgiven. But,—the police officer grins as he growls the next words,—"but you'll not forget your friends? Awkward rather if Angland should happen to hear of your late contract with your niece, eh?"

"We won't have a row about it!" exclaims Giles weakly, avoiding the Inspector's gaze; "why should we? And look here," he adds in a tone in which the bully gradually becomes discernible,—"look here, I've got copies of certain letters you've received from Lilith about Angland. Ah! that's got you, has it? And I can prove you received them, that's more. You can't prove I had anything to do with 'this arrangement,' as Lilith calls it. I defy you to do it."

"Don't try it, old friend," observes Puttis, pulling his moustache; "don't try it. I've got the 'joker' to play yet. Don't forget that."

"You mean my nephew," responds Giles. "I've squared him all right. And I can prove, moreover,
A "DISPERsing" PARTY.

that it was you got him a hiding-place at Ulysses. Can you beat that?"

"Yes!" hisses Puttis, whose inventive genius is only equalled by a valuable faculty he possesses for bringing all kinds of novel resources to his aid upon an emergency arising. "D'you remember the musical box Miss Mundella received from Brisbane a month ago?"

"What has that got ter do with all this?" asks Giles, looking in a puzzled way at the calm, firm face that is grinning coolly up at him.

"Well, old friend, musical box all sham. 'Twas a phonograph. All your talk taken down. Even your swear words." The speaker pauses a moment, then adds, "Have another card to play. Do you want it?"

Mr. Giles remembers the fact of a so-called musical box having arrived at Murdaro, which Lileth had informed him, and with perfect truth, had been broken in coming up from the coast, and would not play. Like all ignorant persons, he has an almost superstitious dread of the more modern appliances, of which he has read such wonderful stories in that sole source of his information regarding the outside world, the weekly press. It never for a moment enters his head that Puttis is "bluffing him," to use a colonial term. Giles has been flattering himself up to this minute that he is at last free from the machinations of his tyrant niece, and the horrible thought that she has still got him in her power, and can reproduce his late conversations with her by means of a phonograph, so flurries his loosely strung brain, that for a time he becomes quite unable to see that, for their own sakes,
neither Puttis nor Lileth are likely to take that step, even if it were in their power to do so. It is not so much that he fears how he might suffer in body or estate at the hands of Angland, should his villainies be made patent; but rather a sneaking, cowardly horror of what his circle of squatter acquaintances would think of him, should they discover by means of this threatened exposé, how he, Giles, the man who has always loudly affected to consider woman as an inferior creation, has been all this time guided, even governed, by one—and a young one at that.

Before a minute has elapsed, however, the squatter has recovered considerably from the effects of the shock that Puttis's words have dealt him, and his wits are sharpened by the very desperateness of his position.

"That's mighty clever of you both, that is," Giles says, with an attempt at a careless laugh—which breaks down as he catches sight of the Inspector's watchful, grinning face. "Look here, though this plan of yours might hurt me with Angland, what good will it do you? You'll all be in for conspiracy to defraud."

"Pshaw!" exclaims Miss Mundella's fiancé, "Angland won't prosecute his father-in-law. We stand behind the father-in-law. But here's Browne coming to drag us in to breakfast. Say, what about deed of partnership in run for Lileth? Must I play my joker?"

"I'm going to repudiate all that, I tell you," replies Giles doggedly. "If you're fools enough to bring it into Court, I'll swear I was drunk or something."

Inspector Puttis grins again, and, drawing an
imaginary card from his pocket, leans forward as if to play it, and speaks in a low, hurried voice, for Mr. Browne is slowly approaching.

"Once upon a time there was a stockman on Nango run; let me see, he was head-stockkeeper if I remember rightly. He had a sister, and her only fault was a blind devotion to the interests of her brother. She was——"

"Curse you, what d'you mean?" gasps Giles, going through the eye-bulging and general inflammatory symptoms which we have already had occasion to describe.

"The owner and manager of Nango at this time," continues Puttis in a louder voice, for Mr. Browne, seeing his friends are evidently busy, has moved away again, "at this time was a wealthy young man, who had been bred and born to believe in the Jewish system of salvation." Mr. Giles continues silent, though breathing stentorously. "A successful trick was played upon the Hebrew squatter."

"Don't go too far," gasps Giles, adding pleasantly, "or I'll wring your blooming neck."

"I won't risk it, old friend," laughs Puttis coolly. "I've shown you corner of card. How d'you like it?"

Mr. Giles does not appear anxious to criticise the appearance of the figurative "joker," and remains silent.

"If things must go to Court," the Inspector continues in a careless tone of voice, "we'd have to show a reason why you should have made present to Lileth of share,—a quid pro quo. Now, a certain agreement made between her mother and you would nicely suit our purposes, I think you take my meaning."
Both men again remain silent for a time, then Inspector Puttis closes the interview with the following words, by which he routs his opponent entirely, "You know me, Giles; I don't shirk at the hurdles. If too high I'll break the timber. Now Lileth's entitled to this share and more. I'm not very partial to half-bred Jewesses generally, but this one I know to be an heiress, although she's not aware of it herself. Besides, she's the niece of a very dear old friend." The little man grins up at his big victim, with the same kind of smile that no doubt a small spider puts on, could we but catch it doing so, when in the act of putting the finishing turns to the silken hammock in which it has managed to swaddle an intrusive blue-bottle.

"Yes, friend Giles, I've started on last lap. Don't stand in the way. Will be worse for you. Don't want to tell Lileth how she came to be heiress. Would spoil my chance with her. Would hate me. Secret need never be unearthed. But if you attempt repudiation, or Lileth goes in for jilting me when she gets her own again, then out comes my trump card, my little 'joker.' Now, old friend, let's go to breakfast. Hope you've got a good appetite."

An hour after this conversation, Inspector Puttis despatches a native trooper with orders to recall two others, who are watching a party of horsemen approaching Berbong run.

After some clever manœuvring the "boy"—known officially as Native Constable Dick—succeeds in discovering his fellows, without attracting the attention of any of the members of the cavalcade which has been under their surveillance, and the three blacks return together stationwards. Not long afterwards, the
travellers, who are Claude, Don, Joe, and the two desert trackers, prepare to camp just within the Borbong boundary, by a water-hole lying in the course of Agate Creek. Close by on their right hand rise the dark, bush-draped heights of the rocky promontory forming the boundary between Murdaro and Borbong runs, in whose fastnesses Billy had waited for Claude's coming.

"Big fellow rain come aloner night, muckerie" (Anglicè, heavy rain to-night, friend), observes General Gordon to Don, as the two return from hobbling out the horses; and the white youth, to whom Claude has decided to impart the secret of his birth upon the morrow, goes straightway and informs our hero what the native meteorologist has prophesied.

"Well, we'll have to put up with wet jackets, my boy," answers Angland, "for Billy and Williams have got our tents with them at the mine. But perhaps," he adds, looking at the darkening cliffs, "we'll be able to get a dry roost for the night up there somewhere, if there are any caves about. Tell Gordon I want him." The black villagers, whose hamlet is only some four miles distant, fortunately know of a suitable shelter, and soon the party are spreading their blankets beneath an overhanging, smoke-discoloured slab of granite, some fifty feet above the plain. Down below, beyond the water-hole, the horses are feeding upon a patch of herbage, whence comes the musical jangle through the darkness of a solitary bell, which is clanking against old Rupert's busy jaws.

Claude feels very happy as, forming one of the picturesque group round the fire, he sits smoking
beneath the rocky portico. To-morrow, all being well, he will feast his eyes and soul in the presence of the girl he loves so well; to whom, blessed thought, he can now, being wealthy, approach honourably as a suitor for her hand and heart. To-morrow he will see his little friend Don—now "George," but always to be Don to him—welcomed to a home where a parent and sister await him. To-morrow, taking his uncle's cloak upon his shoulders, he will begin the great Work of Humanity to which the dead explorer has asked him to dedicate half of the vast wealth of the "Golden Cliffs."

To-morrow the wonderful prophecy concerning the mysterious *Pillythilcha Doolkooro*—whispered and repeated for many cruel years by trembling slaves and fugitives in fireless camps—will begin its humanizing fulfilment: a bright to-morrow of mercy for the unhappy race that Dyesart had pitied, beginning with the emancipation and protection of the villagers who had succoured the doctor's faithful servant Billy—without whose devoted courage and assistance the "Valley of Glowing Embers" would still be waiting for a hand to rouse the great slumbering Mooramora to defend His children.

Claude sits smoking long after his companions have fallen asleep, for his brain is far too busy with happy thoughts for it to become drowsy. By-and-by he notices that Gordon's prognostications are about to be fulfilled, and rain-clouds are flying across the starlit heavens from the north-east—dark, shadowy masses of vapour, "like flocks of evil birds," heralding an approaching thunderstorm.

"If the creek rises we shall be cut off from the
horses,” thinks Claude, as he hears the awe-inspiring mutterings of thunder echoing down the valley.

“Suppose I must go out and turn the brutes back this way myself,” he says to himself, adding in a louder voice, “Here, Joe, you young rascal. Come, turn out and lend me a hand.” But the youngster sleeps on, or pretends to do so, and Angland, hearing the heavy drops of rain that, like skirmishers before the advance guard of the shower, begin to pat, pit-pat, plop around, thinks that it is a pity to disturb the boy, and determines to go alone, as the horses are at no great distance, and so save the youth a ducking.

Angland therefore rakes up the fire into a blaze, so that it may serve as a beacon to guide him on his way back to the camp, and as he steps forth into the darkness he hears the buzz of a heavy tropical rainfall coming nearer and nearer over the forest leaves.

Stumbling down the hill the best way he can in the darkness, over awkward boulders and through detaining brushwood, Claude soon finds himself upon the plain. The horse-bell sounds delightfully near at hand, and crossing the bed of the creek with some difficulty, he finds it already knee-deep in water, although quite dry when he passed it three hours before. Another minute or two and he is alongside of the bell-horse, and by stooping can distinguish the heads of several of the others standing out against the lighter sky on the horizon like inferior silhouettes. Then, as if some one had pulled the string of an enormous shower-bath suspended in the great black cloud overhead, down comes the rain in one mighty cataract that
floods the plain around with tons of water per acre in as many seconds,—a true tropical shower that will fill the half-empty water-holes in a few minutes to overflowing. It is not long, however, before the downfall lessens in violence, and then, using old Rupert as a blind, Claude drifts gradually towards the other horses, which are momentarily revealed by the white glare of lightning flashes. Some of the animals are naturally rogues at any time, and now are doubly difficult to approach, having become timid and treacherous under the combined effects of heaven's fiery and watery display.

After a hard fight, however, a series of highly scientific strategic movements brings the work of unhobbling to a close, and mounting his own mare barebacked, which Claude knows he can reckon on as a good swimmer, he drives the little mob of horses across the level ground, now six inches deep in water, towards the river. An almost constant succession of lightning flashes shows to the rider the frightened animals before him for the first hundred yards,—then, suddenly, the electric display ceases, and the rain pours sullenly down; and Claude finds himself sitting on a wet, trembling steed in perfect darkness, without the slightest idea of which direction he ought to pursue in order to find the camp, whose fire he has long lost sight of.

Our young friend, whose bush experience has not been lengthy enough to teach him to trust his steed rather than himself in such an emergency, now goes through the usual bewildering tactics of a new "hand." One minute pushing on hurriedly, the next stopping to listen for Rupert's bell, anon trying to retrace his
steps, till he is completely lost, and as cold and miserable as he was jolly and warm half an hour before.

By-and-by the storm begins to withdraw from off the face of the sky like the black edge of a magic-lantern slide, and a patch of starlit heaven shows towards the east, shining all the brighter apparently for having had such a washing.

Claude now gradually makes out that he is close under a cliff, and strains his eyes into the darkness to see more; when, hiss! and the blackness before him is suddenly dissolved into fire. A blue-white column of flame has leapt from the cloud above and struck the earth close in front with frightful force, and everything around whirls into sparks, chaos, then silent darkness.

For, unconscious of the mighty crash of thunder that, like a thousand exploding shells, follows instantly upon the flash, Claude is lying stunned and bleeding beneath a tree against which his frightened steed has thrown him, on the other side of the valley to that where his camp amongst the rocks is situated.
CHAPTER XXI.

FATE'S AVENGING HAND.

"Thou hast said well; for some of you there present,
Are worse than devils."

The Tempest.

Taking advantage of the storm whose parting fusilade has left Claude hors de combat for the time being, Manager Browne's "rounding-up" party, under the skilful generalship of Inspector Puttis and Sub-Inspector Morth, has completely invested the native village upon the rocky promontory.

It is made up of strange constituents, this murderous shooting party. Squatter J.P.'s are there; youthful "rouse-abouts," some of these youngsters only a few years released from the sanctified thraldom of a Christian home in the old country; reckless, godless
stockmen; a colonial legislator, who has made a name by howling for separation from England; and numerous blacks, oiled, naked, and anxious for their work to begin.

There, in the darkness, around the unconscious villagers, amongst wet, dripping rocks and slimy brushwood, crouches a bloodthirsty circle of Native Constables, naked, save for a cartridge-belt and a red band round the head, and armed with Snider carbines and tomahawks; and with them are a number of no less sanguinary white men.

Regardless of the majestic fury of the roaring elements overhead, of the heavy, drenching rain, of dangerous snakes and poisonous thorns, and with the fierce, sweet love of slaughter warming each individual’s heart with its terrible excitement, the cruel cordon has shrunk its wreath of death nearer and nearer around its slumbering prey; and now some thirty pair of eyes are watching the small glimmer of the black camp-fire, and thirty fingers itch to pull the smooth, cold triggers against which they rest.

On all sides is the noisy dropping of water from the leaves, and occasionally a dead bough, sodden with moisture, and thus suddenly grown heavy, breaks from its parent tree, and crashes through the underwood with startling echoes.

But it is not our purpose to describe the sickening scene of murder and rapine that follows, when towards four o’clock Inspector Puttis gives the revolver shot signal to commence the holocaust. We have already rendered to our readers a faithful account of a similar occurrence in an earlier chapter. To those gentlemen who, taking a special interest in such kinds of sport,
have honoured our pages by perusing the same, we will respectfully point out that they can obtain their fill of it by making their way to up-country Australia. Partly for the benefit of such "sports," and partly for another class of reader, our publishers have deemed the late Dr. Dyesart's map of the "Wicked Island" worthy of reproduction with this our narrative of his nephew's adventures.

So, instead of "potting" a few "buck" niggers, or tomahawking a woman or child, or otherwise assisting the police (Queensland Native Mounted) in the execution of their duty, let us follow Mr. Wilson Giles and watch his movements and actions, which more nearly affect our story.

It having been reported to Mr. Morth that a party of runaway "boys" are encamped a few miles from where he is assisting his senior officer in the development of his plan of attack, the sub-inspector, taking a few native troopers with him, starts off to investigate matters in this new direction, being accompanied by Mr. Giles and a few other gentlemen.

After a dark ride of an hour the party reach the cliffs which Claude Angland has descended only a few hours before, and, leaving their horses with a couple of station-hands, creep silently through the shadows after their black guide.

Presently each man feels, rather than hears, the whispered order to halt, and Mr. Morth glides forward like a snake to reconnoitre.

As ill-luck would have it, at the time when the police officer raises his keen eyes above the edge of a sheltering rock that commands a view of the camp, the only members of Angland's party in sight are
General Gordon and the Myall black, whose friends, a short distance off in the village, are in like imminent peril to themselves. Both are naked; for having discovered Claude's absence, and guessing something of what has happened, they are about to set forth in search of him. Don and Joe lie in the deep shadow of the rock and are invisible; neither does the feeble illumination afforded by the wood embers reach the blankets, pack-bags, and other civilized impedimenta, and warn the scout that what he takes for a warragal camp is at present occupied by the "boys" and belongings of a white man.

On the other hand, Morth recognizes Gordon, as he stoops over the fire for an instant to light his pipe, as a runaway from Murdaro Station. So crawling backwards to his waiting friends and troopers, he commences to arrange them quietly round his intended prey.

The early morning sky is now clear and star-studded, and in another hour or two another day will have begun.

The men creep forward amongst spiny grass trees, rocks, and tree stems, but are not yet in position, when, above the roar of the creek hard by and multitudinous noises of a water-laden scrub,—all veiling the approach of the foe from the occupants of the granite shelter,—comes the muffled sound of a distant rifle volley.

The stalkers hear it as they slink through the darkness, and know that their friends have commenced their work of destruction at the village. The runaway "boy" Gordon and his Myall friend hear it also, and guessing its fearful import spring to their feet and
stand trembling to listen, as the faint echoings of a few more single shots follow the first discharge.

The tall black forms of the aborigines before the firelit granite background offer too tempting a pair of targets for certain of the younger members of the attacking party to be able to further restrain their sportsmanlike proclivities.

Out from the blackness two rifles spit forth their ringing, sparkling tongues of flame, and Gordon, leaping upwards without a cry, tumbles forward into the shadow of the rocks below the camp.

Then the crash and blaze of many rifles follow, as other figures, startled and hesitating in which direction to escape, are seen moving past the fire.

Mr. Giles, who is the nearest of Morth's party, covers one black form rapidly and pulls the trigger. As he does so the cliff echoes with a wild, boyish scream of mingled agony and terror.

There is something so piercing in that note of anguish, something that seems so like some echo from the past, that hardened as the squatter is by a large previous experience of such scenes, he feels a passing pang of remorse tapping at his heartstrings.

Morth and the other men are scrambling back down the hill; some making for the horses, others for the creek. For, as though bearing a charmed life, the Myall, having hitherto escaped unhurt from the hail of bullets aimed at him, is now bounding over the plain with the speed of an antelope towards the river's angry tide.

Giles thus left alone—for he is not the kind of man to hurry after the others—reloads, and then
turns to descend the cliff; but something makes him alter his mind, and without knowing exactly why, he clambers up to the ledge whereon his victim is lying.

As the squatter’s head rises on a level with the camp, he starts as if he had been bitten by a snake; for the dull red glare of the fire shines upon pack-bags, blankets, billies, and other objects, that tell him at once that a terrible mistake has been made, and that this is no wild blacks’ camp, but that of some party of travellers.

Then fearful thoughts begin to paint a vivid prophecy in his mind of what is to follow.

And forgetful of his age and the stiffness of his limbs, he drags himself frantically upwards, till, upon the granite platform, he sinks upon his knees where two little forms lie almost side by side before the glowing embers.

Then, as if mocking the horrified wretch’s agonizing fears, the fire flares up before the rising morning breeze, and upon the side of a leathern satchel suspended from a bough hard by he reads the name of Claude Angland.

A sickening odour, resembling roasting pork, is beginning to make the air heavy around, and a little pulseless black hand lies cooking on the ashes. But Giles sees nothing with his staring eyeballs but one small, pallid face, that even in the ruddy light of the fire lies white as marble upon the dead body of a ragged-coated dog.

No need for Giles to search for the marks by means of which Billy and Claude had discovered the identity of the long-lost child.
With fearful, awful clearness the distracted man sees his dead wife's features in those childish ones now gasping at his feet.

A groan bursts from his lips,—the deep moan of a soul too paralyzed with torture to feel further torment for a time.

Raising the child into a sitting posture, Giles madly tries, with shaking fingers, to wipe away the dreadful froth that is oozing from poor Georgie's mouth.

As he does so, his touch seems to rekindle, for a moment, the waning spark of life within the boy's fragile frame. The pallid lips open to gasp out their last words on earth, and Giles, bending to catch them, hears Don murmur,—

"Don't 'it me. Ain't doin'——"

Then the expression of pain fades off the child's features, and a smile of peaceful restfulness comes to take its place, as with a sigh the curly head falls back on Giles's arm, and the spirit takes its flight. And at that moment Giles—as Giles—dies too. His feeble brain, whirling round with a wild and ever wilder rush of fearful changing scenes and thoughts, suddenly breaks down.

A madman lifts the dead child from the ground, and, leaping over stocks and stones with a fearful, ape-like agility, vanishes into the darkness.

And none witness the false step in the dark or hear the manicical howl, as, from a cliff hard by, a form resembling that of Murdaro's owner, clasping something to its breast, spins downwards into the angry waters of Agate Creek.
CHAPTER XXII.

LAST WORDS.

"Hear a little further,
And I will bring thee to the present business
What's now upon us; without the which this story
Were most impertinent."

The Tempest.

"SYDNEY, N.S.W.,
March 10th, 1890.

"MR. RICHARD SHAW, To Renga-renga, Drury,
New Zealand.

DEAR DICK,—I have at last a few hours to myself, during which I can sit down quietly, here in my room, which overlooks the Botanical Gardens and 'our beautiful harbour,' and write to my relatives and friends. "I was very glad to get your letter yesterday, and learn that you are all well up to date. As for myself, I am pretty well, thank you. After
getting rid of the ophthalmic troubles which seized upon my eyes whilst I was lying ill in the fly-pested north, I went to Brisbane, where, of course, I got low fever. My trip to Melbourne,—the Bulletin calls it, and rightly,—which is the dirtiest if the most go-ahead city in Australia, however, set me up and fattened me, but also gave me typhoid fever. It was only a slight touch, however, and the return voyage to Sydney has put me on my legs again.

"Since last I wrote I have pretty well arranged all my affairs on this side of the water, and you may expect to see me in New Zealand before very long. I may as well run over the chief items of interest that have eventuated since I last wrote, before setting forth for your edification the outline of the scheme that I shall probably adopt for carrying out my uncle's idea of ameliorating the condition of the Australian aborigines.

"In accordance with my uncle's half-expressed wish, in the letter of instructions which I discovered at his grave, I have made my respected friend and adviser, Mr. Winze, a quarter proprietor in the marvellous 'Golden Cliffs,' and he has started for the north to superintend the erection of the chlorination plant at the Mount, where already a small village has sprung up in the desert round the 'doctor's' no longer lonely resting-place.

"Glory is still staying with her friends in Brisbane, and I am starting by to-morrow's boat to interview her upon a very particular subject, the result of which confabulation I will communicate to the 'Mater' next mail."
"I have gathered no information which tends to throw any fresh light upon the terrible occurrence at Agate Creek. I was so long laid on the shelf at the shepherd's hut at Borbong run that the perpetrators of the crime—if a crime was committed—upon the night of the storm had ample time to hide all traces of it. At any rate, when I revisited the site of the camp amongst the rocks, there was not the slightest indication of anything wrong having taken place there.

"Giles's body, as you know, was found, and so was Morth's. The latter, a police officer, was drowned trying to swim his horse across the creek after a fugitive black fellow. The former probably met with his death in a similar manner. I cannot think that Giles intended to attack us, having, as I have ascertained, received my letter previously; besides there were too many witnesses about. I rather expect that Giles and Morth's party mistook our camp for that of some Myall natives. It is by no means the first time such a mistake has occurred in the colony. And cannot we see the finger of Fate in all this? The sins of the father, Giles, visited upon the child, my poor little friend Don. I miss the little fellow tremendously.

"The people in the neighbourhood of Murdaro keep very close about the affair, as all the powerful squatters round had a hand in the 'rounding-up' party that destroyed Billy's villager friends, and with little doubt our camp as well. It would be a very risky work to attempt an investigation. To tell the truth, also, I have not pushed for an inquiry into the matter for fear of something turning up that might prove an extra source of pain to Glory, who has been fearfully
cut up, poor girl, as it is, with the double loss of her father—of whom she was very fond—and her brother, to whose return home she was looking forward with so much pleasure.

"Glory is supposed to be under the impression that it was the flooded state of the creek that caused the loss of the père et fils; but I am afraid the poor girl has an inkling of the dreadful truth, or rather what I take to be the truth.

"Miss Lileth Mundella, to whom I had the pleasure—to cut a long story short—of communicating the fact, which I learnt from certain papers I found at the grave, of her uncle Giles having unjustly kept her out of a large share in Murdaro run, has apparently already made good use of her new position as an heiress, for she writes to say she is about to marry a wealthy squatter near Bourke.

"Inspector Puttis has therefore been jilted. Nor is this the only misfortune that has befallen this gentleman,—who, although personally unknown to me, took a good deal of interest in your humble servant, as you are aware, some time since,—for he has, upon the 'recommendation' of the Commissioner of Police, resigned his commission in the Black Corps.

"Mr. Missionary Feder, with whom I am in business communication, informs me that Puttis's late fiancée has probably been the cause of this energetic officer's enforced withdrawal from public life.

"And now with regard to my uncle's letter of instructions and scheme.

"It would seem from the papers which I discovered in the tin box addressed to me at the grave, that
my uncle Dyesart was what is called a disappointed man, and that the lady who jilted him afterwards married Giles and became the mother of Glory. Mrs. Giles died in giving birth to little Don, or rather George.

"I gather that the wild speculation or gambling—call it what you will—in mining concerns, that ultimately caused uncle to begin life again in the colonies, was the outcome of this disappointment. And that this, combined with a hope to be able to return my mother's fortune, which had gone with the rest, had more to do with my uncle's ceaseless wanderings, than any real belief in the wonderful Golden Hill that he had been told of by the dying miner. It was during these wanderings that my uncle was shocked with the treatment of the aborigines by the whites, and he has commissioned me, or rather desired me, which amounts to the same thing, to use a considerable part of the wealth thus suddenly placed in his hands for the amelioration of the condition of the Australian blacks. Dyesart had intended publishing a book upon this subject, and I quote the following from his MSS. in order to show you a sample of his thoughts. After recounting a number of cases of cruelty that had come within his personal knowledge, he says:

"'After habitual crime, especially after that which involves cruelty, the human mind, so prison and other authorities say, loses that correcting sense of right and wrong which John Stuart Mill, and other experts in Socialism, tell us is one of the foundation stones of a stable social system. This sense is as valuable—perhaps more so—than those of seeing, hearing,
et cetera. Taking it for granted that it is by the senses alone that we hold any communication with our fellows, it follows that any individual must have his mind impaired, as far as those particular senses of which he has become bereft are concerned. And that such an individual's mind may not be further impaired by the privation of such sense or senses, arises only from his not endeavouring to reason about things concerning which that sense or those senses could alone give him information. He compares only what he perceives, and therefore continues to make comparisons which, however limited, are still correct. For example, there are not uncommon cases of men who, as regards colour, do not know green from red; or again, where taste is concerned, a much commoner case, cannot tell the difference between '47 port and a poisonous concoction of logwood, sugar, and other ingredients. Such defects or impairments are commonly discovered and avowed by the persons affected, and they rely on the judgment of others concerning those things of which they have themselves no accurate sense. A man could not assert, without fear of being judged insane, that green was red; and, following the same argument, can he say without undergoing a similar risk that a cruel, cowardly, or murderous action was either than what it is? If, however, his sense of right and wrong are missing, from hereditary taint or the benumbing influence of criminal companionship, he may possibly believe such actions to be commendable; but whilst in the society of sane persons, with minds of the usual capacity, he will hardly express his own contorted opinion—say, that taking pleasure in the slaughter of defenceless and
healthy men, women, and children is an honourable action, and worthy of a brave and good citizen.'

"It is not so much the ultimate destruction of the aboriginal race, as it now exists, that my uncle seems to have hoped might be prevented, nor did he apparently deplore that such a thing should take place eventually. He says that a native race, in order to survive the changes wrought in its surroundings by the incoming of a foreign and superior civilization, must have within itself the power of being able to change its customs and mode of life, and of rapidly adapting itself to the new order of things. It must, in fact, be like that singular animal, the armadillo, of South America, which, having altered most of its habits since its native wilds have become the home of European settlers, has, so far from dying out, increased in number of late years.

"It would appear that my uncle doubted whether the Australian aborigines possess this necessary power to any extent, although he mentions cases of blacks who have become useful colonists as farmers in N.S. Wales and South Australia.

"His two main arguments against the present attitude of the Australian Governments, as regards the native population, are, firstly, the great amount of harm that this rampant demon of cruelty and slavery is working upon the foundations of the growing national life of Australia; and, secondly, the fearful waste of useful lives resulting from this inhuman policy.

"He says that the intermarriage of a certain class of European settlers with the native women would be "a consummation devoutly to be wished," and
that this should be encouraged in every possible way. In the rougher parts of the colonies a European woman is out of place as a settler's wife. She becomes more or less debased, and cannot, upon a return to civilization, so readily resume the more artificial style of life as can her husband.

“Native women, on the other hand, make first-class wives under such circumstances, and the resulting half-caste progeny generally make useful members of society in those cases where they have a fair chance afforded them of doing so.

“He then goes on to point out, by means of numerous examples, how offshoots from various European nations have derived renewed physical vigour from crossing with the dark-skinned aboriginal inhabitants of different parts of the world, and gives instances of men who, belonging to families which exhibited those infallible signs of a decaying race, failing teeth and hair, have, by marrying with Australian and New Zealand native women, become the parents of children of splendid physique and good mental powers. ‘Spain,’ he says, ‘threw away the chance that Providence once gave her of becoming perhaps the mightiest nation upon earth, when she destroyed, instead of intermarrying with, the natives of South America, who had a superior civilization to that of their conquerors.’

“Now for the plan I propose to adopt:—

“I shall endeavour, for a commencement, to work through the machinery of Missionary and Aborigines' Protection Societies already existing. In such cases where I find officers of the Black Police drawing salaries as ‘Protectors of Aborigines,’ I shall en-
deavour to draw the attention of the public to the grim joke thus perpetrated, by means of newspaper articles and pamphlets, to thus get other persons appointed.

"From my uncle's and my own observation, the weak point in the present missionary system, as carried out in Australia, is the fact that, after the raw material—the native children—have been converted, by education, into an article worthy of a place in the civilized world, there is really no market for it.

"As a rule, the girls begin life as servants, are led astray, and finally become prostitutes, or the concubines of settlers or squatters. The boys generally are relegated to the black camp with their uneducated brethren.

"I therefore propose to endow each native girl with land and capital, upon her passing a certain time and standard in one of the farm schools I shall establish in various parts of the country.

"Any white man making one of these girls his wife will obtain a quantity of land and small amount of capital. I am pretty certain that the Governments of the various colonies would assist in such a movement by giving the land, as it would ensure its being settled by a good class of settler. These at present form the main body of wandering "wallaby" men, who seldom marry,—chiefly from want of funds and suitable partners,—for the white women who would marry men of this sort make neither desirable wives nor healthy mothers.

"I will also endeavour to get reserves placed aside for the natives, as is done in New Zealand, and there farm schools will be opened. In these reserves adult
natives can find a safe refuge from the squatters, and will be registered. If they assist upon the farm, they will receive payment for same in kind. No attempt will be made to force civilization or education upon the adult natives, as this never has any practically good results. The children and young natives will be brought up apart from the adults. Infanticide, which is now the rule, not the exception, amongst station blacks, will disappear as the natives are granted protection, a means of earning food, and relief from the burden of keeping their offspring. Boy natives, after passing a certain standard at the farm school, will be apprenticed to various tradesmen and farmers, and will be granted land or capital, after becoming proficient in their special line of business, wherewith to start upon their own account. Inspectors, accompanied by interpreters, will constantly perambulate the country with the object of informing the natives of the advantages offered by these schools and reserves, and for the purpose of prosecuting any one committing atrocities upon the aborigines. Premiums will be offered for a series of articles and papers upon the best means of protecting and utilising the native race.

"Having given you this rough outline of my plan, I must bring my epistle to a close. Perhaps I could not commence my campaign better than by writing an account of my search for the grave. By Jove, I will! I append a newspaper cutting, showing that some one else is moving in the matter.

"Yours regardfully,

"CLAUDE ANGLAND."
THE BLACK POLICE.

("South Australian Register.")

"THE BROTHERHOOD OF MEN.

"THE CONDEMNED PRISONER JACKIE.

"December 16th, 1889.

"We publish to-day two letters called forth by the Court proceedings in the case of Jackey, the aboriginal who at the last criminal sittings in Adelaide was found guilty of murder and sentenced to be hanged. One of these, signed 'Gauntlet,' is directed to the treatment said to be commonly meted out to the blacks on distant stations, and more particularly in Queensland. The writer, who informs us that he speaks from personal observation and from information gained from thoroughly trustworthy sources, in reality only repeats an oft-told tale. The atrocities practised upon the natives in various parts of Australia—sometimes in retaliation for treacherous and barbarous acts committed by them, but very often without any such excuse—have been horrible, and even now it is undeniable that there are some who think as little of enslaving or even shooting a black as of killing a mangy dog. This certainly cannot be said of all run-owners. Even in the far interior there are men who have gained the confidence and goodwill of the aboriginals by treating them with kindness and giving them fair payment for what they do. There is too much reason to believe, however, that the system of compulsory service, or, as 'Gauntlet' describes it, of downright 'slavery,' accompanied by cruelty, does prevail. The protection professedly afforded to the natives in remote portions of the country is a protection only in name.
They are practically at the mercy of the settlers, who, if they are so disposed, can ill-treat them with impunity. What chance has a native of having his testimony believed against that of a white man? He has to grin and bear the kicks without receiving any large amount of salve in the way of halfpence. It is quite time Australia recognized better its duty towards the blacks, and gave them the full benefit of the protection of the laws to which they are made amenable. With all respect to the tribunals of justice, it is impossible to say that the trial of Jackey for murder was satisfactory. We say this without reflecting for a moment upon the judge or jury,—who conscientiously exhausted every available means for getting at the facts, and who could not on the evidence well have come to any other conclusion than that which was arrived at,—but it is impossible not to feel that the prosecution had immense advantages over the accused. And this brings us to the letter appearing elsewhere signed 'Veritas.' If the facts are as there stated, and it is as an eye-witness that our correspondent—who will doubtless be easily identified by those chiefly interested—writes, Jackey, on his way down to Adelaide, was treated with shameful brutality. Had the luckless creature been already found guilty of the worst crimes in the calendar, he could hardly have been dealt with with greater severity, but in point of fact, according to the maxims of British law, he was at the time an innocent man. It was, of course, necessary to take all reasonable precautions for preventing his escape, but will any one say that this object could not have been secured without subjecting him to such inhuman treatment as 'Veritas' describes? Had he been a white man the picture
drawn of him heavily manacled, forced to sit hour after hour upon camel back in a most painful position, under a broiling sun which heated the irons upon him until they burned him, would arouse intense indignation throughout the length and breadth of the land. And why should it be different when the victim of such usage is a black fellow? The matter is one that should be strictly inquired into, as well in the interests of justice and of humanity as of the aboriginals, who are necessarily so heavily handicapped in their dealings with white men.”

FINIS.
VOGAN, A. J. (Arthur James)

The black police: a story of modern Australia

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