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Title: Australia Revenged

Author: Boomerang

Release Date: July 4, 2009 [EBook #29315]

Language: English

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Transcribers Note

Obvious punctuation errors have been corrected.

A list of other changes is supplied at the [end of the book](#)

AUSTRALIA REVENGED

BY

"BOOMERANG"

LONDON:
REMINGTON AND COMPANY, LIMITED
15, KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN
AND SYDNEY
1894

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PREFACE.

Each character in this work is a type. The Australian characters may be met with every day in the Colonies. Nor are Villiers Wyckliffe and the Detlij Club distorted figments of the imagination; and the broken heart is a symbol of the aims of the one, and the object of the others, softened down so that the cheek of modesty may be spared a blush.

In those parts of the work where Colonial Governors are mentioned, they appear in a less heroic light than that in which one ordinarily sees them in print. Therefore for the further enlightenment of the reader, an appendix has been added, in which the standpoint wherefrom Young Australia views them is fully explained.

"Boomerang" is the joint *nom-de-plume* of a Young Australian and his collaborator.

London, October, 1894.

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CHAPTER I.

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THE DETLIJ CLUB.

In a handsome block of buildings in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly—a phrase which may embrace a considerable area, North, South, East or West—is located the quarters of that small and extremely select Club, known, and known up till now only to a favoured few, as the Detlij Club. The name, like the Club itself, is an uncommon one, and is simply indicative of the sad mischance which must befall each member before he can qualify for admission. No mysterious or secret rites were shadowed in the title, and the ultra-curious in search of the origin of the name, need no more overhaul their Hindu or Persian dictionaries, than they need their Liddell and Scott. A simple inversion of the letters is all that is necessary to solve the riddle, a process which discovers the word "jilted," and discloses the character of the Club.

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Briefly, the origin of the Club was in this wise. Some four years previous to the date our story opens, a certain Major Fitzgerald, a man of unenviable notoriety in Society, whose name was

almost as well known in the Divorce Court as it was in the clubs and boudoirs—a fact which, though it caused his exclusion from some circles, made him more welcome in others—chanced to meet the young and charming heiress, Helen Trevor, at the time of her *début*.

"That's the girl for my money," was the Major's inward comment. He had no money, by-the-bye, it was merely his *façon de parler*. So he lost no opportunity of cultivating Miss Trevor's acquaintance. Now the Major was a handsome, dashing man, with complete knowledge of the world, much *savoir faire*, the faculty for making himself dangerously agreeable, and no morals to speak of. Helen Trevor, too, though a girl of her time, was one of those strong characters that—thank goodness!—have not yet been eliminated from the human species, either by the artificial restrictions of Fashion on the one hand, or the undisciplined vagaries of Female Emancipationists on the other. She was too young and enthusiastic to have surrendered her habit of sympathy for the cheap cynicism that marked the culture of her day. Brimming over with sympathy, impatient for some sphere of active interest, and just sufficiently tinged with the spirit of martyrdom to be anxious to feel herself doing some work in the world, her sympathetic young heart, that had no suspicion of evil, went out to the Major when he murmured in a tone of manly contrition: "It is true, Miss Trevor, I have been wild and reckless, but it was all due to my having no one to guide me."

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Helen's older acquaintances shook their heads in mysterious warning, and supplied just the needful hint of opposition to cause her to devote herself to what seemed to be a labour of moral heroism, helping him to the best of her ability. And Fitzgerald congratulated himself on his success in having brought about the very condition of mind he had laid himself out to produce. But he over-estimated his powers, and he made an irretrievably false step in trying to persuade Helen to elope with him to avoid her father's anticipated disapproval.

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Helen was prepared to go far in her antagonism to her parents' wishes, even to consent to an open engagement, but to fly with her *fiancé* in the fearless, old fashion did not commend itself to her somewhat rigid ideas of right and wrong. She frankly, therefore, told her father everything, and he, prompt to nip this affair in the bud, removed his daughter out of the way of Major Fitzgerald's influence; and, calling upon the Major himself, subjected the latter to an unpleasant quarter-of-an-hour. The result of the interview was that the Major assumed the air of an injured man, whose love had been ruthlessly trodden on, and who had suffered the humiliation of being jilted.

For the space of two whole days the Major was absent from his usual haunts, and when he did appear again he wore a becoming air of dignified dejection.

"Hullo, Major!" said a young fellow named the Honourable George Buzzard, as he familiarly struck him on the shoulder. "Why these tears of sadness, eh?"

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"My boy, I've been badly treated. I've been jilted."

"Jilted, have you! and by whom?"

"Young Trevor."

"What! Helen Trevor! that youngster who is causing all our fashionable beauties to hug the green-eyed monster. Then shake hands, Major. For I met the same fate yesterday."

"You did, George?"

"Yes. I suppose you noticed that I have been paying a good deal of attention to old Browne's daughter."

"Don't know her, George."

"Oh! her father is a squatter in Australia, with millions. She's his heiress, and not a bad sort either."

"She refused you. Eh?"

"Rather, and now she's engaged to the Earl of Bentham."

"It's the title, my boy. Younger sons have no show nowadays; but how those Australians run after titles. Eh?"

"By Jove, they do," said the other. "But now, as we are companions in misfortune, let's drown our sorrows," and he led the Major in the direction of his club.

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Here they were joined by Thomas Thomas, Esq., known to the entire Society world as "Tommy" only. He was one of that common class of young men whom only Society produces. Without any income or apparent means of subsistence he did not work, yet he was invariably well-dressed, and had the *entrée* of the best houses. Welcome there because he could readily adapt himself to any occasion, preserve a constantly agreeable manner, and had the details of the latest scandal at his finger-ends; in fact was one of the parasites that Society creates, and without whom it cannot get along the thorny path of its day's enjoyment. Tommy greeted the two men with a silent nod, and waited, with the caution typical of his species, to discover the subject of their conversation. This did not take him long, as experience in this work had sharpened his wits. Sitting down beside them, he heaved a deep sigh, and said, sadly:

"I have been atrociously treated, you fellows. The little widow has thrown me over."

"What, another!" cried the Major. "Then sit down, Tommy, and enjoy yourself. By Jove, we ought to start a club for fellows like ourselves, and call it the Jilted Club." [Pg 7]

"A grand idea!" said Tommy, rubbing his hands. "Why we can already number five, for I know Watson and Carrington have suffered the same fate."

From that hour the Jilted Club was formed, and as time went on its membership increased. The mysterious title of Detlij Club was agreed on, and, at the time of writing, its adherents numbered some seventy *habitués* of London Society.

The Major was elected President; Tommy held the honourable and lucrative post of Secretary, and a code of rules, of which we quote the principal, was drawn up:

1. This Club shall be called the Detlij Club.
2. None but jilted men shall be eligible to become members.
3. The objects of the Club shall be:
 - (a). To extend shelter and sympathy in their calamity to all members whose affections have been trifled with.
 - (b). To assist them in their schemes of vengeance. [Pg 8]
 - (c). To encourage them to jilt others in return.
4. Each member shall be required to take the oath of secrecy.
5. A gold badge shall be voted annually to that member who shall prove to the satisfaction of the Committee that he has made the highest record in broken hearts.
6. The badge of the Club shall be a heart rent in twain.

There were a great many other rules, but they are of minor importance relative to this narrative.

When Tommy announced at the first general meeting that he wished to propose Villiers Wyckliffe as a member, the announcement was greeted with loud cheers, for that gentleman was a man of town notoriety, popular with all sections of Society, but especially so in the boudoirs. He was immensely wealthy, having inherited a vast fortune from his father, the celebrated Seymour Wyckliffe, the world-wide known head of the great banking firm of Wyckliffe & Co. Having joined he soon let it be known that he intended making strong running for the coveted gold badge. He was generally known and addressed as "Wyck." [Pg 9]

The fifteenth of July, when the season was well on the wane, was the date fixed on which the first competition for the badge was to be held.

Great preparations were made for a banquet at the Club, on the most lavish and extensive scale.

The dinner over, the President, Major Fitzgerald, formally opened proceedings; and, alluding in felicitous terms to the momentous occasion, announced, amid cheers, that there were no less than nineteen competitors for the badge, who, their names having been drawn from a hat, were to address the meeting in the following order:—

1. Villiers Wyckliffe.
2. Sir Charles Keyning.
3. Thomas Thomas.

and so on until the full list had been announced.

"Gentlemen," proceeded the Major. "We are all anxious to get without delay to the main business of the evening. I will therefore make my remarks as brief as possible—"

A loud "Hear, hear!" from a distant corner made the Major look round angrily, but without discovering the delinquent. [Pg 10]

"Jilted gentlemen, your most sacred feelings have been trifled with by the delicate, the harmless, the innocent (groans) daughters of Eve. They are not to blame, oh no, they could not do such a thing; but we, gentlemen, we know better (hear, hear), and we are here to-night to ratify our bond to stand united against the insidious onslaught of those 'whose fangs,' as an American writer so aptly and so eloquently expresses it, 'drip with the blood of the foolishly fond and true' (loud cheers.) I shall now call upon our esteemed member, 'Wyck,' to relate to us his story of the revenge he has taken upon the sex which has wronged him."

Cheers again greeted the close of the Major's speech, and cries of "Wyck! Good old Wyck," resounded from all quarters of the room.

Villiers Wyckliffe, a young man of about 28 years of age, rose slowly. In his hand he held ostentatiously a small ebony stick, that was his constant companion, and which he handled fondly.

"Gentlemen," interposed a member, "before Wyck speaks I have to ask you to charge your glasses, and drink to him." A request that was at once complied with. [Pg 11]

"Mr. President and gentlemen," he began, in a soft, caressing voice, "I thank you for the kind manner in which you have drunk my health. I will now endeavour to give you a few details of my simple career. I will plead guilty to a sneaking fondness for the fair sex (hear, hear), but I can fairly say I have only yet seen one member of it who struck me as being anything out of the common (oh). I mean by that, one that I should care to marry (laughter). Feeling rather weary of London, I went for a trip round the world, and it was during that trip that I met the uncommon one. At Nice I made her acquaintance. She was the daughter of a retired Colonel with a wooden leg, and she took my fancy. Why, I cannot tell, but there is no accounting for taste. Her manner to me was cold and haughty, which had the effect of making me all the more eager, and after a week's acquaintance I proposed. I offered to make handsome settlements, even to make the one-legged papa a handsome allowance of the most liberal description, but all my offers were received with scorn, as she informed me her heart was given to another, a beggarly Lieutenant in a marching regiment. I humiliated myself by even proposing a second time, when dear old wooden-leg threatened—the humour was unconscious—to kick me out of the house. Gentlemen, either through disappointment or chagrin, I felt my heart was broken, and I vowed one day to avenge it. That day did arrive, and I took advantage of it. Here is my record," and thereupon he held up to the view of his audience the ebony stick on which was cut a series of notches. "You will see here a number of notches. At present they number forty-eight, and each notch represents a broken heart. Number 1, is that of a haughty young damsel who had cut me on various occasions. Number 2, is that of the girl I loved, now an officer's wife. Number 3, is that of her husband, for they are separated." He continued to tick them off, giving each a short description with comments of almost diabolical cynicism. "I have two more in view," he continued, "and when I have completed my record of fifty, I intend to take a long rest and go for a trip to the Colonies. I think that is all I can say."

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Wyck resumed his seat amid tremendous cheering, maintained for several moments. His enthusiastic friends surrounded and complimented him.

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When silence was restored the President called upon the second candidate, Sir Charles Keyning.

"I beg to withdraw in favour of Wyck," said that youthful worthy. The remainder of the candidates, unable to sustain their own triumphs against such a crushing list, also resigned their claims, and Villiers Wyckcliffe was unanimously awarded the coveted badge.

In the small hours of the morning the meeting broke up, and Villiers, the Major, Tommy, and a few more of the choicer spirits adjourned to Wyck's rooms to finish with a few hours' card-playing.

CHAPTER II.

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CONFIDENCES.

Some time after mid-day the next morning, Wyck awoke with the unpleasant sensation that his head was of abnormal size, his throat very dry, and altogether he felt and looked extremely seedy. A brandy-and-soda and a cold tub eased him somewhat, and he managed to get through his dressing and lounge daintily through his breakfast. A knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Tommy.

"How do, old boy; head a bit thick?" was that youthful spark's airy greeting, as he coolly settled himself in an easy-chair.

"A trifle, thanks. How's yours? Help yourself," he said, as he pushed the brandy-decanter towards him.

"Thanks. I feel in want of a pick-me-up," and Tommy helped himself to a stiff nobbler of brandy.

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Wyck and Tommy were fast friends, though of such opposite dispositions. Wyck liked his companion's light and jovial manner, and Tommy liked Wyck's pocket.

"What sort of a cruise did you have, Tommy, while you were away?" asked Wyck.

"Ripping. A month in the Mediterranean is great fun, I can tell you, when you are in good company."

"You're a lucky devil, Tommy."

"Yes, I suppose so. But judging from the charming little history you gave the Club last night you've been going it during my absence."

"Yes, I flatter myself I've had some good fun."

"I say, Wyck, I want to know how you do it."

"My secret; eh, Tommy?"

"Exactly. Now out with it. I swear dumb."

"Then I'll tell you, Tommy. Only mind, should you let it out, I'll kill you," said Wyck, fiercely.

"It's a bargain, Wyck," answered Tommy, calmly helping himself to a cigar from Wyck's box, and, lounging back, prepared to listen. [Pg 16]

"Last night I mentioned an episode with a Colonel's daughter. Well all that is true. Smarting under the slight, and vowing vengeance, I left Nice and travelled to India, where I had plenty of chums. One night I attended a big kick-up given by one of the Rajahs in honour of some affair or other. All sorts of amusements were provided, and amongst the numerous entertainments was one by a mesmerist and hypnotist, who gave very clever manifestations of his skill. I happened to be standing close to him and he begged my assistance in one of his experiments. I, of course, agreed and did exactly what he told me, trying to help him to the best of my power; but to my surprise all his passes had no effect whatever upon me. Another fellow was taken in my place and the feat was accomplished successfully. This puzzled me and the first opportunity I got I asked the mesmerist the reason. His answer was: 'You are as strong if not stronger than I and, unconscious to yourself, you make yourself antagonistic.' I laid awake all that night, his words running through my head, and when I fell asleep I dreamt I was a great mesmerist. A hunting party was organised for the next day and I was invited. We took the train some distance, and then rode into the jungle. I became separated from the main party and was watching an open space in the jungle when my attention was attracted by a pretty little tropical bird, fluttering round and round a tree. This interested me, and on closer inspection I found a huge snake had coiled himself on one of the upper branches, and was calmly lying with its mouth open, waiting for his prey. Smaller and smaller were the circles the bird made, and weaker and weaker were its efforts to escape the fascination, until it finally fluttered to a limb just above the snake. It seemed to turn its piteous glance for help on me, but not I! I was enjoying it. At length it could no longer resist its fate and it fluttered into its enemy's jaws. Now other men would have let sentiment get the better of them and have shot that snake; but I looked up to it with respect, and it set me thinking. 'What if I could bring people under my will like that!' I thought. 'No girl would slight me any more.'

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"Two days later, I left India for England. A sudden departure, but I was on the eve of a great discovery. I gathered together all the treatises relating to mesmerism that I could find and shut myself up in the country to study them. By the time I had mastered them, I found I thoroughly understood the art and, returning to London, I began to practise on people whom I had engaged for the purpose. One evening I accidentally made a great discovery. I found that by concentrating my gaze at a certain angle on another I could control that person's will. To my joy I found it answered with greater ease on women, and I started experimenting right away. My first subject was Fanny at the 'Royal.' You know the snubby little minx she was. She had tried to snub me more than once in public, and I felt I owed her a grudge, so to her I went to pay it. [Pg 18]

"I found her alone in the bar, and calling for a whiskey and soda, she served it out in her usual languid way that riled me. As she put out her hand to take my half-crown I seized it and looked her in the face hard. Her first impulse was to withdraw it in disgust, but gradually her face began to relax, and in two minutes we were talking together like the oldest friends." [Pg 19]

"What did you will her to do?" asked Tommy, with interest.

"I willed her to think that she loved me. And I succeeded, for when her *fiancé* came in, she gave me the preference of her company. I despised and detested them both, so, to rile him, I boldly invited her to go with me to the theatre that evening, and she could not refuse, for I willed her to come. Needless to say, I did not take her. Her intended married someone else; hence the first notch in my stick. The second was, as I said, the Colonel's daughter, now the Lieutenant's wife. I found out her address, and called when he was on duty. Though she gave me a chilly reception, I soon had her will under control, and I carried on in public with her for some days. On her husband's return, his kind friends told him all about it. He accused her; she retaliated. There was a row, and now he is in Africa, while she is living again with her father, fretting her heart out. I was overjoyed at this success, for it enabled me to put two notches on my stick and, as he is the only man represented, he ought to feel honoured. As for the others, they are of all classes; some married women; some Society ladies, who have displeased me at one time or another." [Pg 20]

"What about Marjorie Williamson?" asked Tommy, who was drinking in this ignoble history of wrong redressed with avid interest. "I heard you had some fun with her. Tell us about it."

"Oh! that was a great joke. It all came about like this:

"Of course you know that Marjorie was acknowledged to be one of the prettiest little girls on the stage, and you know how stand-offish she was where men were concerned. Charley Walkden was fearfully gone on her, and occupied the same front stall for months. Every night he threw her a bouquet with a note or present and every night, as regular as clockwork, were they returned. One night he made himself too conspicuous, so that Marjorie became annoyed, and that night's bouquet was returned on the spot, accompanied with a verbal message that even an ardent admirer like Charley could not misunderstand. I was in the theatre that night and Wilson, the manager, told me about it. I mentioned it at the Club, and when old Charley turned up he was chaffed by the others. He was annoyed when he came in, but this fairly maddened him. [Pg 21]

"'I'll lay five to one in hundreds,' he said, 'that there is not a man here who would be allowed to see her home.' As no one seemed inclined to take it up, I said, casually, 'I'll book that bet, Sir Charles.' Of course, the boys were delighted and I suppose I got a bit excited, for I offered to lay

another even five hundred that I would take her to Brighton within a week. Sir Charles eagerly snapped that up, and when I left I felt keenly interested in Marjorie, as I stood to win a thousand or lose six hundred.

"The next day I called on Wilson, the manager, who told me there was to be a *matinée* that afternoon. As I wanted his help I told him about the bet and what my plans were. At first he demurred to assisting me to carry them out, but I had been of some use previously to Wilson on several occasions, so I had not much difficulty in shewing him there was no harm in my scheme. By a little manœuvring I was soon introduced to the fair Marjorie and had her will well under my control. I saw her home that afternoon and made five hundred. The next day I met her after rehearsal; we took a cab to London Bridge, caught the mid-day train to Brighton, lunched at the Metropole, and got back to town by five. Witnesses were posted at both places to avoid disputes. Walkden was madder than ever and that night we had a big kick-up, on the strength of the thousand I had won."

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"But what's become of Marjorie?" asked Tommy. "We never see her now."

"Oh, it appears that Lotty Carr, that stuck-up little minx who is jealous of her and everybody else, heard something about this business and asked Walkden, who, to save himself, told a lot of lies. Little Carr then proceeded to make mischief by going first to Wilson and then to Marjorie's mother. Wilson, of course, I was able to square, but the mother was an invalid and the affair so upset her that it ended in her death. Marjorie at once left the stage, forfeiting her salary. I was, of course, awfully sorry and sent her half my winnings, which she returned. *Truth* then took it up and added to the fuss."

"What's she doing now?"

"Dressmaking or something of that sort. And, poor devil, I believe she has two or three kids to support, brothers and sisters."

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"Ah, well! I suppose she'll pick up with Sir Charles, now? He's got plenty of the needful."

"Fool if she doesn't," replied this elegant young gentleman, flippantly. Extremes meet. The naked savage has a fairly low estimate of the value of his womankind, but it is many degrees higher than that of this product of a highly-cultured civilization.

Tommy's curiosity was roused and he was anxious to draw more particulars of his peculiar gift from his friend, so he continued his catechism.

"I say, Wyck! I suppose if you wanted a girl to get properly struck on you, you could do it. Eh?"

"Rather, Tommy, I only want a girl to be in my company three or four times and I can mould her so that she will break her heart and pine away, if I leave her."

"Nonsense. But you don't go so far as that?"

"No, but I may do so for an experiment."

"I suppose you alluded to this power when you once said you had conquered every nation under the sun?"

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"Oh! only that I had willed girls of most nationalities."

"And who are the two you are looking after now?"

"One I have found; she is a Swiss. The other I am looking for; she is an Australian."

"Australian, eh? I fancy I could fit you up there. I know a jolly girl from Australia."

"You do? By Jove, Tommy, that's glorious! Who is she?"

"I don't know her very well. She lives in one of the suburbs with some retired Australians, called Whyte. Her name is Amy Johnson."

"Is she good-looking?"

"She's more, she's sweetly pretty. But I believe she is engaged to a young fellow named Morris, also an Australian."

"That makes it all the more interesting. But how are we to meet?" said Wyck, really roused.

"I can arrange that, if you are game for a suburban ball-room. The Brixton Bachelors give their annual ball shortly. She will be there and I will get you an invite."

"Tommy, you're a brick," said his friend, slapping him on the back; a proceeding which ensured the success of his neat manœuvre, by which a note or two was transferred from Wyck's pocket-book to that of his friend, who was "rather hard-pressed, you know," and Wyck was "a devilish good chap for helping a fellow out of a hole."

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In Piccadilly they parted, Tommy's last words being:

"Ware young Australian, old chap. These colonial fellows are not to be trifled with."

"My dear boy, I've heard that before. They told me the same with regard to Americans, but three of my notches represent Yankee maidens. I'm all right. Don't forget the ticket for the ball. I must

complete my score of fifty."

He waved him an adieu, and went his way, very well pleased with himself and full of self-confidence. The old pitcher in the fable succumbed at the hundredth journey, and Wyck's successful career will be cut short by the fiftieth notch.

CHAPTER III.

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THE MIA-MIA. ^[A]

"How dare you do it, sir? You are too presumptuous."

"I am awfully sorry, Amy, but really I could not help myself."

"But you did help yourself, Reg," and the young girl turned upon her companion such a bewitchingly pretty face, her lips pouting with badly-simulated anger, that the young man had no compunction in taking her in his arms, and kissing the pouting lips till they smiled again.

This scene was enacted in a tiny summer-house of trellis-work, completely covered with hanging greenery, which stood in one of those pretty gardens that are still to be found in the suburb of Brixton. The summer-house appeared to be designed expressly for its two occupants. It held only two seats and was of dimensions just sufficiently confined to prevent them from being too far apart. Through the opening could be seen the full stretch of the carefully-tended garden, backed by a comfortable house with a verandah running round it. On the lawn, a couple of dogs were lying lazily; hanging in the verandah was an aviary and the noisy twittering of its occupants reached the ears of the two in the summer-house. Their eyes dwelt lovingly on the scene before them, with a sense of rest, for happiness and contentment seemed to be in the air.

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An elderly man in shirt-sleeves was busily engaged in pruning some fruit trees. As he paused in his work to wipe his perspiring brow he formed a picture of contentment in complete harmony with the scene of which he was a part. This was Oliver Whyte, the owner of the house and garden, which he had christened, in true Australian fashion, "The Mia-Mia." He was a man of about sixty, short and thick-set in appearance with a tendency to corpulence. His character was written in his fine open face, clean-shaven save for a ring of white hair that set his honest countenance in an oval frame; was felt as one listened to the tones of his rough, good-natured voice. He was joined by an elderly woman, who despite her grey hair and heavy build, was as active as many a younger maid. Her voice had a genuine and pleasant ring in it and her face always wore a cheerful, contented smile. She was beloved by all who came in contact with her, for she was the embodiment of the word motherly. The dogs rose and stretched themselves and lazily rubbed their noses against her skirt, as she passed from one flower bed to another, snipping a dead leaf here and picking a faded blossom there. This was Mrs. Whyte or, as Oliver fondly calls her, "the missus."

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Forty years before, Oliver Whyte, a young man in his prime, set out with two companions for the sunny shores of Australia. He had served his time as a carpenter, and his employers had cause to regret the loss of a fine workman when Whyte became fired with the ambition of travel at the time when the glorious accounts of the richness of Australia attracted the energetic youth of Britain. Arriving in Melbourne in '52, when the gold fever was at its height, he and his companions lost no time in finding their way to the fields in search of the precious metal. He spent twelve months in rough living and hard labour then, to realize it was not as easy to make a fortune as he imagined. But he was a good artizan and, men of his stamp being scarce, he returned to Melbourne and started working at his trade. In vain he tried to persuade his mates to follow suit, but the gold-fever had taken too strong a hold upon them. Wages were very high in Melbourne, and he had no difficulty in earning ten and even fifteen pounds a week. In a few months' time he was able to start in business on his own account and, as Melbourne had by this time been acknowledged as the capital town, he invested all his savings in land which could then be had at low rates. When he had made a fair business he sent home for the girl with whom he had "kept company," and on her arrival they were married in Melbourne. Years went by, his business extended, and his land increased in value fifty-fold, and Oliver Whyte was rapidly becoming a wealthy man.

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The fact that no children blessed their union was a great trouble to the Whytes. But when his wife began to fret over it Whyte would answer in his cheery fashion, "Never mind, missus, we shall have to get one of somebody else's."

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One day, when they were at their mid-day meal, a letter in a strange hand-writing was brought to them, in which they were begged to come at once to the Melbourne Hospital where a woman named Johnson wished to see them.

"Johnson! Johnson!" said Whyte. "The only Johnson I ever knew, was my mate, Bill Johnson, whom I left on the 'fields.'"

"Maybe this is his wife, Olly."

"We'll go at once and see her."

Straightway the honest couple set out for the hospital and, on arriving there, were taken to the bedside of a dying woman.

"Are you Olly Whyte?" asked the woman, feebly.

"Yes, that's me," said Whyte.

"My name is Johnson and Bill told me that if anything went wrong I was to look out for Olly Whyte, and he would help me."

"Are you Bill's wife, then? Where is he?"

"Dead, two years ago, and I am going to join him."

"Poor old Bill!" said Whyte, feelingly.

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"I've got a little girl," murmured the poor woman. "She ain't been brought up first class, but if you would look after her I'd die happy."

"Where is she?" said Mrs. Whyte, speaking for the first time. "Of course we will do so."

That night the widow of Whyte's old mate, Bill Johnson, died and the house of Whyte had an additional inmate in the shape of a tousled-haired little girl, removed from a tenement in Little Bourke Street, one of the lowest slums in Melbourne. When Amy Johnson found herself in the midst of these novel surroundings, and experienced the delights of new and warm clothing and of plenty of good things to eat, and the disagreeables of having her face and hands washed oftener than she thought necessary, her equilibrium was completely upset. But time and careful handling soon made her forget her old ways. As she grew up, she developed startling qualities of mind and body, united to a loveable disposition, that she soon filled the gap in the home of the old couple. At the age of eight she was sent to school, where she early distinguished herself and became a great favourite with the teacher, as with her schoolfellows. Her life was one of sunny happiness, the more so because she was completely unspoiled. Though she never knew trouble, she could yet sympathize with it, and she returned the idolization of her adopted parents with a love and consideration that caused them to bless the day that saw them on their errand of mercy to Melbourne Hospital.

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Meanwhile, the occupants of the summer-house in Brixton were passing the time in lover-like reminiscences.

"Do you remember the first time we met, Amy?" said Reginald Morris, as he fondly stroked her hand.

"We met, 'twas in a crowd, upon the mighty ocean, on board the steamship *Ormuz*," answered Amy, in mock-tragedy. "Yes, I remember it well," she added, with a happy little sigh.

"I can remember every incident of the voyage, though it's three years ago. I thought it was going to be a disagreeable voyage for me, and I was seriously thinking of landing at Adelaide, when I made the acquaintance of your dear old dad, and that changed the whole purpose of my life. I can see him now as he came up to me with his frank smile and said in his cheery voice: 'My name is Oliver Whyte, sir.' My heart went out to him after his hearty greeting, and we soon became fast friends. Then he introduced me to his dear old wife, and a pert little kid—"

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"Take that for your impertinence," interrupted Amy, boxing his ears lightly.

"I mean a smart young lady. I can see her now, and she captured my heart on the spot and, try how I will, I cannot get it back."

"Well it was a fair exchange, for you took mine in return," she answered, with a blush.

"Six months from to-day, Amy?"

"Yes, Reg. Six months before I have to give up all my pleasures, sacrifice all my pets and put myself at the mercy of a tyrant."

Reg stooped to kiss the lips again that chaffed him so prettily, when the doorway was darkened by the figure of Oliver Whyte, who said in an amused tone of enquiry:

"I suppose you are too busy to go and say good-bye to Mr. Northmore, Reg? He's waiting to see you, for he sails to-morrow."

"Come Amy, let's go to him together," said Reg rising and, tucking Amy's arm under his own, he entered the house and greeted a young man waiting there:

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"Hullo, Jack, how are you?"

"I'm jolly, old chap. And Miss Amy, I trust you are well."

"No, I'm not, Mr. Northmore, he's been worrying me again. Never get engaged: it's too wearing. If it were not for the fact that one can wreak revenge when one is married I don't think any girl could stand it."

"Well, Reg does not seem to dread the coming vengeance."

"How do you do, Mr. Northmore. I am so sorry you are going to leave us so soon," said Mrs. Whyte, entering at this moment.

"Business, Mrs. Whyte, business. I am not so fortunate as our friend here. I came only on a visit, which I have enjoyed very much. I am due at Cape Town in a fortnight."

"Amy, do you think you can find our friend Northmore some refreshment," said Whyte, as he joined them.

"I'll try, dad. Come on, Reg, I shall want your help," and they both skipped out of the room.

"That's the way they go on all day long," said Whyte to Northmore, "just like two kittens." [Pg 35]

"They are to be married shortly, are they not?"

"Yes, in six months. It's hardly fair to keep Reg waiting any longer. They've been engaged three years now."

"I am glad Reg is going to settle down, and with such an excellent partner."

"Yes, you're right, Northmore. I don't think a happier pair, or one more suited to each other could be found in a year's travel."

"Reg is a wonder, too. It is not every man who can boast of having made a fortune for himself at twenty-four."

"Ah, I intended asking you about that. He is so modest and reticent about himself. He says he did it by accident and could not help himself."

"Nothing of the kind, Whyte. He was left an orphan at fourteen in Adelaide and had only one relative, living at Dunedin in New Zealand, who sent for him there and procured him a post in a sharebroker's office as errand-boy. By dint of hard work he rose to be confidential clerk when he was twenty-three. It was then that the great event happened which made him. I remember it well. Reg had studied mineralogy thoroughly and was able to give a pretty accurate forecast of the capabilities of a mine, and he was often sent to report. One day he was ordered to 'Dagmar No. 2' and, on his return he gave a most promising account of it, in face of two experts who had reported it of no value. The experts were believed and the shares fell, but Reg, to show his confidence in his own opinion, bought all he could get at a low rate. His employers and his friends reasoned and argued with him, but to no avail. All his earnings and all he could raise, he invested in the mine. His employers were annoyed and he was dismissed. Nothing daunted, he went off to the mine and offered to manage it for nothing, telling the directors he would make it pay. They laughed at him, but finally gave way, especially as his holding was large enough to entitle him to a seat at the board. Two months later reports began to spread that Dagmar No. 2 had struck a rich lode, and a week later it was acknowledged to be one of the richest mines in New Zealand. Reg sold out for something like sixty thousand." [Pg 36]

"Come this way," said Amy in a playful way, opening the door, and leading Reg by the ear. He was carrying a tray of glasses and completely at her mercy. "This is how I intend to lead my husband." [Pg 37]

"Amy, I'm shocked," said Mrs. Whyte, laughing heartily.

"So am I, mother," said Reg, putting down the tray, and gently releasing her fingers.

Then the conversation became general. In the midst of it the postman's knock was heard, and letters for Reg and Amy were brought in, which proved to contain invitations to the annual ball given by the Brixton Bachelors.

"Oh! Reg, dear, will you go?" cried Amy.

"That rests with you."

"Then we'll accept," said Amy, decisively.

As Northmore bade them good-bye at the gate he said: "Reg, you are a man to be envied. You have a girl who is a pearl amongst diamonds."

"I know it, old fellow, and I appreciate it to the full."

On the following day acceptances were sent to the invitation of the Bachelors, and little did that happy circle dream that this ball, about which they laughed and joked, would be the means of blighting that happy home for ever.

[A] Pronounced "mi-mi."

CHAPTER IV.

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THE BALL.

When Reg and Amy, accompanied by Mrs. Whyte, arrived, the ball was in full swing. This Bachelors' Ball was an annual affair of some more than local reputation and the suburban element was frequently enforced, and leavened, by guests from the West End, who at other periods of the year professed never to have heard of Brixton. The ball-room was beautifully decorated with hangings of dainty tints. Palms and ferns, artistically placed with fairy lamps glimmering through the masses of greenery, made inviting corners, that attracted the weary dancers. No expense had been spared to make the scene one of splendour and attraction, and it fairly took good Mrs. Whyte's breath away. Reg succeeded in finding two vacant seats near a Colonel's widow, who was an acquaintance of Mrs. Whyte and, having comfortably settled the old lady, offered his arm to Amy and they were soon whirling together in the mazy throng of waltzers.

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They made a striking couple; the tall, handsome man and the slight, willowy girl, with her beautiful face flushed with the exercise, and many were the enquiries made as to who and what they were. The dance over, Reg reserved for himself nine of the items on her card, leaving the remainder, as he laughingly said, to her numerous admirers to fight over. Then he left her for a moment to greet some friends.

"Miss Johnson, may I introduce a great friend of mine?" said a voice behind her.

Amy turned to find Tommy smiling complacently at her, accompanied by a handsome, dark stranger.

"Certainly, Mr. Thomas."

"Miss Johnson—Mr. Wyckliffe," and the two met. Amy was too full of enjoyment to notice more than that her new acquaintance had a quiet manner, soft attractive voice, and a peculiarly penetrating gaze. She surrendered her programme, and, as he passed it back to her, he merely bowed, and said:

"I have taken sixteen and eighteen, thank you."

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The ball went merrily forward, both Reg and Amy enjoying themselves to the full. At the sixteenth dance Reg found himself disengaged, and went outside to have a smoke. He was scarcely half through his cigarette, when the fancy seized him to go back to the ball-room and watch Amy dancing. Standing in the doorway he marked each couple pass him, but without discovering the object of his search. He made his way round to Mrs. Whyte, but that good lady could only tell him that she had been claimed by her partner, Mr. Wyckliffe. Reg felt vaguely disturbed, how or why he scarcely knew; but he remembered Amy had once told him she never sat out a dance except with an old friend. He wandered away aimlessly, and when the next dance had begun and still Amy did not appear, he decided to look for her. Pausing at the refreshment buffet he was in the act of raising a glass to his lips when his eye caught sight of a portion of a dress he knew too well, partly hidden by some drapery hanging over a corner of the gallery. In the twinkling of an eye he ran up the stairs. Amy saw him coming, and drawing the drapery on one side, smiled at him. It was enough to dispel all his troublesome thoughts, and he came up to her and laughingly said:

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"Ah, here you are, you truant. It is too bad to disappoint your partners in this way."

"Reg, this is Mr. Wyckliffe," said she, referring to her partner.

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Morris," said that gentleman, rising with a smile and extending his hand.

"Thanks. I am delighted to make your acquaintance," answered Reg, shaking warmly in his genuine way the hand extended to him.

"Miss Johnson has been good enough to make a confidant of me," continued Wyck, lightly. "She has told me of your engagement and I hope you will let me congratulate you. You are a lucky man."

"I am, indeed," answered Reg, as politely as he could, though he felt strongly inclined to resent the familiarity from a man who had only met him and his *fiancée* for the first time that evening.

"Miss Johnson mentioned that she was engaged for this dance with you, but as I have the next she agreed to sit them both out with me."

Reg began to grow uncomfortable, and turned to Amy, and said, "It's very cold here, Amy, I think you ought to go back, as Mrs. Whyte is looking for you."

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"Oh! you won't desert me, will you, Miss Johnson?" said Wyck, gazing at her in an intense way, and exerting his will-power to the utmost.

"I'd rather stay, Reg," she answered, but the decision seemed to come from her reluctantly.

"I'll take care of her, Morris, never fear," said Wyck, smiling.

Reg looked from one to the other. He felt helpless, and in a predicament from which only a scene, which he abhorred, would extricate him. It was galling in the extreme to find a total stranger dictating to the girl he was engaged to.

"Then you won't come?" he asked.

"Not yet, Reg," she replied, in a languid manner, and he turned sharply on his heel and descended the stairs in a mood the reverse of amiable. Here he ran against Tommy, whom he stopped and asked:

"Who's your friend Wyckliffe, Thomas?"

"Oh, old Wyck is a great friend of mine. Why do you ask? You don't look well, old chap. Come and have something to pull you together." [Pg 43]

"No thanks. Look here, Thomas, I don't like the way your friend is going on."

"Why, what's he done?" asked Tommy, in feigned surprise, though he was rather enjoying the joke of badgering the jealous lover.

"Miss Johnson is an innocent girl, not up to the free-and-easy flirting ways of your Society friends, and she should not be compromised by sitting out three dances with a stranger."

"Come, old chap. You make too much fuss over a small matter. But look, there is Mrs. Whyte beckoning to you," said he, pointing to the lady in question, who was anxiously watching them. "I won't keep you."

"Where's Amy, Reg?" said Mrs. Whyte as he came near, in an anxious voice, somewhat louder than strict etiquette demanded.

Reg sat down beside her and told her Amy was sitting out with Mr. Wyckliffe.

"What, three dances, Reg. I think I had better go to her."

"There is no need for that, for here she comes," answered Reg, quickly, as he saw Amy suddenly appear in the ball-room. A fierce pang of jealousy seized him when he noticed how she hung on her partner's arm. "Hadn't we better go home, mother?" he said, "I am tired of this." [Pg 44]

"Really, Mrs. Whyte," said Wyck, coming up to her with a bland expression of unconsciousness, "I must apologize for keeping Miss Johnson away from you so long; but it was so cool and pleasant in the gallery."

Mrs. Whyte merely bowed and said:

"Amy, come and let us fetch our cloaks, we are going home."

"All right, mother," she answered, quietly, her eyes fixed on Wyck's departing figure.

They passed him again in the entrance hall, and as Amy shook hands with him and bade him good-night, Reg was maddened to notice Wyck stoop and whisper something to her, and to see her smile and nod in return.

The demeanour of the party on their return was so different, that even the old cabby could not help noticing it. Incessant chattering and gay bursts of laughter marked their journey to the ball-room, that "it did one's heart good," as the cabby put it. But on the return journey everyone was silent, gloomy and depressed. Whyte was waiting at the gate for them and, as he opened the door, cried out in his cheery voice, "Back again, my children," but, to his surprise, there was no response and, seeing Mrs. Whyte signal him to be quiet, he gave a low whistle and murmured under his breath, with a chuckle, "a lover's quarrel, by Jove." [Pg 45]

Amy, on entering the house, went straight to her room and locked herself in; an occurrence so unique in the history of the Mia-Mia, that old Whyte stared open-mouthed at Reg, who had flung himself on the sofa, and asked:

"What's the matter, Reg?"

"I don't know, dad. I don't understand it at all."

"Have you quarrelled?"

"No."

"Then what is it?"

Reg told him all he knew about the matter, which certainly did not seem much in the telling, and sitting-out being a common occurrence at balls Whyte was disposed to look at it in the light of an attack of lovers' jealousy, until Mrs. Whyte entered the room, looking very concerned, and, taking her husband's arm, burst into tears.

"Don't give way like that, missus. Why, what's the matter?" said he, tenderly. [Pg 46]

"Oh, dad, dad, it's horrible. She has locked herself in her room, and is crying bitterly, but she won't open the door. Who would have thought our Amy would do such a thing. Oh, these horrid balls!"

"It's not the ball," said Reg, fiercely. "It's that scoundrel Wyckliffe who is the cause of all this. I'll murder him."

"Reg, I am surprised at you talking like that," said Mrs. Whyte. "If Amy wished to stay with him, she—"

"Prefers him to me, is that it?" put in Reg, rising, and pacing the room, angrily.

"No, not that. I mean she is to blame."

"She's not to blame. If she had not met that fellow, there would have been no trouble."

"Come, come," said Whyte, anxious to make peace. "Let's get to bed; perhaps she will have forgotten all about it in the morning." And he led his wife away.

Reg did not go to bed, but walked restlessly to and from the garden to cool his heated brain and collect his thoughts. At last he entered his room, and casually picked up a copy of *Truth* to while away the time until he felt inclined for sleep. His eye happened to light on a paragraph drawing attention to the ruin of the prospects of a young actress by a gentleman "well-known in Society." No names were mentioned, but fuller details were promised. Had names been mentioned an amount of sorrow, with its appalling consequences, would have been saved and this story never have been written. At last Reg tumbled into bed, only to toss about and dream of dreadful accidents to Amy, with which Wyck was somehow connected, while he himself lay powerless to rescue her, fighting fiercely against the invisible hands which kept his hands tied, and his limbs stiff and helpless.

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CHAPTER V.

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THE OATH.

"Reg, Reg, get up," said Whyte, entering Morris's room the next morning.

"Hallo, dad, what time is it?"

"One o'clock, lad."

Ten minutes later Reg was down to his breakfast. The reminiscences of the previous night had come back to him, and were very bitter.

"Is Amy up yet?" he asked.

"Yes, and gone out," said Whyte, looking anxiously at him.

"What!" cried Reg, in surprise.

"About an hour ago," continued Whyte. "She came out of her room fully dressed for walking out, and looking as miserable as possible. I asked her where she was going, but she seemed not to notice, and only came up to me and flung her arms round my neck, kissed me, and left the room."

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"Did she not say where she was going to?"

"No, lad; she said nothing."

"What would you suggest doing, Whyte? Shall I go and hunt this fellow Wyckcliffe up, and ask him what he means?"

"No, lad. That will do little good. We will speak to Amy herself when she returns. Dear, dear! I fancy her brain must be touched," and the sympathetic old fellow walked hurriedly away to conceal the tears that would fall.

Reg walked to the garden with a heavy heart. There were all the pets waiting for their mistress. The dogs ran to him with yelps of enquiry; the birds twittered plaintively, as if they felt something was wrong. Reg stooped and patted the dogs, and it seemed a relief to his bursting heart to tell them all his forebodings for the happiness of their home.

The weary hours passed, and Amy returned. Her usually bright manner had disappeared; her step had lost its lightness, and there was an air of languor about her, very foreign to her nature. As she caught sight of Reg she hung down her head, and passed rapidly into the house, taking no notice of the dogs who bounded towards her barking with delight. Reg slowly followed her, his face revealing the troubles of his heart.

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"My darling girl," said Mrs. Whyte, as she met her in the passage and, fondly throwing her arms around her, drawing her into the room. "Won't you trust us and tell us what is the matter?"

"Don't ask me, mother," said Amy, bursting into tears.

"Look here, Amy," said Whyte, coming forward and vainly trying to put a trace of sternness in his voice. "You must give us some explanation of your conduct, dear. You are not acting fairly by Reg."

"Oh, Amy, darling, I'll forgive anything. Only do tell me what has come between us," said Reg, coming quickly forward, and taking her hand he led her to a sofa.

At length her sobs became less violent, and she tried to say with some air of decision:

"I want you to release me, Reg. I find I do not love you sufficiently to be your wife."

"Release you!" cried Reg, starting.

"Yes, Reg dear. I cannot marry you now. I thought I loved you, but I find now I love another."

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"Is *he* the other?" asked Reg, sternly.

"Yes, I love Wyck."

"Wyck! is that Mr. Wyckliffe?"

"Yes. He told me to call him Wyck;" and here she began feverishly to pull off her engagement ring.

"Oh, don't take that off," cried Reg, in a pained voice.

"I must, Reg, I must. He told me to;" and she handed back the ring she had worn and caressed so long.

"Then all is over between us," said Reg, quietly.

"Yes, Reg. I am sorry, but it must be," and she slowly rose and went to her room, not noticing any of the others.

"Reg, my dear boy, bear up; be a man. God knows, it is a severe blow for us. So changed; so different! Had anyone told me that such a catastrophe could happen in such a short time, I would have given him the lie direct."

"Yes, Whyte, you are right. It is a blow, but there are times in every man's life when he is called on to bear the heaviest burdens, and it is his duty to submit. She has told me she prefers Wyck, as she calls him, to me; so I give way, and God grant he may make her happy."

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"He is a stranger to us and, if he does marry her, he will take her away from us, and we may never meet again. With her all our happiness disappears," and tears again welled in the good old man's eyes.

"Whyte, I must see this man," said Reg, firmly, but threateningly.

"Reg, I beg you won't interfere. It will do no good. Promise me you will not interfere," said Whyte, imploringly, for he feared the consequences if Reg and his rival met.

"What shall I do then, dad?" he said, sadly.

"Go away for a few days. This sudden infatuation may go as quickly as it came, and when you return, perhaps we may see a change."

"Very well, dad. Your advice is always good. I will go away for a week, and wander about somewhere to kill time."

That evening he took the mail to Dover, and with a heavy heart crossed to France. The Whytes missed Reg sadly, and Whyte himself deeply regretted having advised him to go away, for Amy, instead of noticing his absence, seemed to become more and more absorbed every day in her new attraction, that she took no notice whatever of her surroundings. She made no enquiry for Reg, and scarcely addressed anyone in the house. The second day after his departure she went out in the same mysterious manner as before without explanation. Whyte thereupon determined to follow her.

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He saw her take a 'bus going in the direction of the city, and managed to catch another running close behind it. At Westminster Bridge she quitted the 'bus, and looked round eagerly, till her gaze rested on a young man, who was laughing and talking with two others. After waiting in their vicinity, Whyte saw one of the trio lounge carelessly towards her and, without raising his hat or making any formal or respectful greeting, take her hand and kiss her on both cheeks. A roar of laughter greeted this proceeding from the two companions left on the pavement.

"Well, and how's little Amy to-day?" said Wyck, carelessly.

"Quite well and happy now, Wyck dear, thank you," replied Amy, in a bright tone, but in a dreamy, absent manner, walking away by his side along the Embankment.

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Whyte remained watching these proceedings, but did not attempt to interfere. He had seen sufficient, and hailed a return omnibus going homewards with a heavier heart than ever. "Why did I send Reg away?" he murmured to himself. "No good will come from this, I see. I'll put a stop to it, for he can't mean square." The whole journey through he puzzled his brains to find an explanation for this peculiar conduct of Amy's so unusual with her. On his arrival home he told his wife all he had seen, and in their helplessness the two old people could only offer a silent prayer to Heaven to protect the child they loved so devotedly.

When Amy returned from her visit, Whyte went to her and said:

"Amy, I forbid you to see that man again."

"You cannot stop me, dad, for he said I was to go," she answered, looking at him in a curiously absent way.

"We shall see," he answered, vaguely, for her opposition startled him. Amy said nothing, but passed on to her room and locked herself in.

The next day, and for several days afterwards, she eluded Whyte's vigilance with a cunning so abnormal, and so unlike herself, that the poor old man was nearly driven frantic with perplexity. Each day she returned in the same silent, oppressed mood, and avoided everyone in the house. [Pg 55]

A letter in a man's hand-writing came for her one evening, which she opened in the Whytes' presence, and made no comment. Since the mysterious change in her behaviour she was in the habit of rising early and retiring to her room with the morning paper. The morning following the receipt of the letter she acted as usual, and shortly after, the Whytes were startled by hearing a loud cry coming from her room, followed by a heavy thud, as if something had fallen. A vague terror seized them, and in an instant both rushed to her room and, flinging open the door, they were horrified to find their darling child stretched on the floor with the paper clenched in her hand. They gently raised her and, while Mrs Whyte undressed her and put her to bed, Whyte himself ran for a doctor.

Reg meanwhile had found his resolve to keep away intolerable, and had, in a moment of impulse, returned to London in time to meet Whyte hurriedly entering the house, followed by a young doctor. [Pg 56]

"What's the matter, Whyte?" said Reg, running forward.

"Thank God, my boy, you are back again. I feel the change is coming, one way or another," answered Whyte, solemnly, as he motioned the doctor upstairs. Then, in answer to Reg's breathless questions, he told him all that had happened during his absence.

At this juncture the doctor returned. His face was grave and troubled, and a nameless chill seized the two.

"Well, doctor," cried both together.

"I'm afraid it's for the worst," he answered, sadly. "I would advise you to send for a specialist's opinion at once. Sir Charles Edward I would recommend, for there is grave heart trouble."

In all haste the celebrated specialist was summoned, but his examination was sickening in its brevity, and his verdict held out no hope. "The nervous system has received some terribly sudden shock," he said; "and there is a serious rupture of the vessels of the heart. She may recover consciousness, but it will be only momentary. We see many appalling sights in my profession, but rarely one so sad as this. A young life so beautiful, and apparently so strong, to be suddenly cut off; it is terrible! What can have caused it?" [Pg 57]

Whyte hurriedly told him all he knew. Meanwhile Reg, in his restlessness, had seized the paper left lying on the floor, and began aimlessly to scan the columns. Suddenly his eyes were arrested by a familiar name, and he read as follows:

BANQUET TO MR. VILLIERS WYCKLIFFE.

This popular and fortunate young gentleman, who is on the point of starting for a tour of the Australian Colonies, was entertained at dinner at the Angora Club, last evening. Lord Hardup presided, and in proposing the health of the guest of the evening in eulogistic terms, presented him, on behalf of the Club, with a handsome diamond pin, and heartily wished him God-speed. The pin was in the shape of a broken heart, which curious badge has been adopted by Mr. Wyckcliffe. Mr. Wyckcliffe left by the night express for Naples, to join the *s.s. Himalaya* en route for Adelaide.

"The — scoundrel," said Reg, emphatically. Whyte and Sir Charles turned round upon him in surprise. "Here is the cause of it," said Reg, handing the paper to Whyte.

Barely time to express their surprise at the discovery was given them before they were all hurriedly summoned to Amy's bedside. Mrs. Whyte and a nurse, who had been at once sent for, were watching the still figure on the bed, with the doctor in attendance. [Pg 58]

"Will she die, Sir Charles?" asked Reg, in a feverish whisper.

"My dear young sir, there is no hope. She may recover consciousness, but if she does it will only be for a few moments. Doctor Carr will remain till the end;" and giving the young man's hand a sympathetic squeeze, while he brushed away something dangerously like a tear, he hurried away to his carriage.

They remained in the darkened room in anxious silence. Suddenly, the nurse moved to the bedside, and held up her hand in warning. The nervous tension of each watcher was extreme, that the movement seemed to give relief.

"Wyck! Wyck!" came from the lips of Amy, in a mournful whisper. "Wyck gone; Reg gone. Poor Amy."

"No, my darling," burst from Reg's lips, but the doctor held up a warning finger and hushed his impetuous outburst.

It was a terrible scene. To watch helplessly while a few stifled words broke in interjections from [Pg 59]

the dying girl's lips, and note the manifest struggle to give them utterance.

"Reg, Reg, forgive—forgive daddy, mammy! God—bless—you," and with a convulsive shudder, her spirit had passed away.

Doctor Carr had seen many death-beds in his career, but never one so affecting as this. Kneeling by the bedside were the two old people, and a hale and hearty youth, sobbing as if their hearts were broken. He was about to leave the sombre chamber, when he was startled by a voice saying in loud, firm tones:

"I call God to witness and hear me swear. By the hand of this corpse, than which I hold nothing more sacred in this world, I, Reginald Morris, solemnly swear vengeance upon her murderer. Henceforth I have but one hope; henceforth I dedicate my fortune and my future to avenging Amy Johnson's death. Amen!"

A deep echoing "Amen" broke from Oliver Whyte, and the two men joined hands over the fair dead form each loved so much.

Two days later all that remained of Amy Johnson was carried to its last resting-place.

The bright and sunshiny little domicile "The Mia-Mia," was now silent and desolate, as if under a spell. Whyte and his wife had aged visibly since their darling's death, while Reg had grown into a sad, silent man with a stern, relentless expression of face. Even the pets seemed subdued; the flowers seemed to droop; the sun to shine less brightly, for the hope and the light of the house was dead. [Pg 60]

One solemn duty had yet to be performed, when Whyte took Reg by the arm and led him to the room of the dead girl. Here the gay pictures on the walls, and the pretty draperies so daintily arranged seemed to mock them. On the table lay her writing desk, one of his first presents to her, and Reg, with a feeling of sacrilege, slowly opened it. On the top lay a letter, which read as follows:

"Tuesday.

"Dearest Amy,

Come to the Park to-morrow as usual. I have procured a special licence, and we can be married right away.

Tout à toi,

WYCK."

"Why this was written the evening before he sailed," cried Reg. "This is a worse villainy than I dreamed of. Stay, here is another in her own writing," and he read the following: [Pg 61]

"Tuesday night,

"My dearest Reg, Mammy and Daddy,

"By the time this reaches you I shall be married to Wyck. Forgive me. I cannot help myself, for he said I was to go, and I do love him. Good-bye. Forgive, but do not forget,

"Your undutiful girl,

"AMY."

"At last," said Whyte. "Now we see what caused the shock."

"Yes, he had promised to marry her at the time he had arranged to leave England for his trip. Why the Angora Club presented him with his badge, set in diamonds, and, by Heaven, I will do the same. I'll brand the scoundrel on both ears with the same distinguishing mark."

"It was all my fault, Reg. If only I had not persuaded you—" began Whyte, blaming himself.

"Stay, Whyte; it is too late for praise or blame, however undeserved. I have only one sentiment left to guide me, and that is Revenge."

Villiers Wyckliffe had added the fiftieth notch to his stick, and with the air of a hero at the close of a brilliant campaign, had started on a tour of pleasure to Australia—for, as he expressed it, he liked that "Australian kid" so well that he must needs go to her native land to make acquaintance with others of her sort. Little did he think that on his track was one dominated with a relentless purpose that would never grow weak, whose motto was—*REVENGE*. [Pg 62]

REVENGE.

Reg had now fully determined to follow Wyck to Australia, and he lost no time in making his preparations. His first step was to go to a firm of die-sinkers, where he ordered a die to be cut in the shape of a broken heart, exactly similar to the device on Wyckliffe's letter-paper.

"Make it of the finest steel," he said, "and have its edges as sharp as that of a razor. Have a case made to fit it, so that it can be kept constantly sharp and bright, and ready for use at any time."

"It will be an expensive article, sir," said the shopman.

"Never mind, have it made exactly to order. Let me know when it will be ready, and I will call and pay the bill."

That done, he called a cab, drove to Finsbury Pavement, and got out at a large warehouse.

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"Is Mr. Bridgland in?" he asked at the Inquiry Office, and was ushered into a small room on the door of which was painted the word "Manager."

"Good morning, Bridgland," he said, entering and shaking hands with a man sitting at a desk.

"What, Morris!" he replied. "You look like a ghost. Are you ill, man?"

"She's dead and buried, old chap."

"Who?—not Miss Johnson," almost gasped Bridgland.

"Yes, Amy Johnson is dead. She was murdered."

"Murdered!"

"Yes, murdered." And sitting down, Reg told Bridgland everything, omitting not the slightest detail from the day of the ball to the present.

Joseph Bridgland was the only man in London Reg had ever called a friend. He had met him through a business transaction shortly after his landing, and had taken a great fancy to him. Bridgland was a self-made man, and had started in life as the office boy to the large firm of whose business he was now manager. He was short and stout, with a full-moon-like face that was always twinkling with good-humour. He always faced his troubles with a smile; met all difficulties lightly, and generally conquered them in the end. But Reg's trouble was too serious to be smiled at, the sight of the pale, drawn face of the friend who had always been so gay and light-hearted was a shock to him, and when Reg had told his pitiful story, he found it difficult to restrain his tears. He was fairly intimate with Reg and Amy Johnson, and looked upon them as an ideal couple.

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"My dear old chap, I cannot tell you how sorry I am. This fellow Wyckliffe must be a miserable scoundrel, but I think I can help you."

"You can, Bridgland?" said Reg, starting.

"Yes, sit down and I will tell you. Listeners are people I despise, but I was compelled to overhear a conversation, which has troubled me ever since, but now I see there must have been something in the fact that I was given this chance. One of the partners here leads the life of a man about town. His office is there, next to mine, and he frequently has a young fellow called Tommy drop in and have a chat with him."

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"I know him," said Reg.

"Well, on this particular day the door I suppose was not closely shut, and I chanced to hear them talking about a certain secret club called the Detlij Club, or some such name. It is nothing more or less, I believe, than an association of youthful rakes who lay plans to ruin women. Tommy and he were apparently members, and they frequently spoke of Wyck."

"That's my man, Bridgland," said Reg, fiercely.

"From what I could gather, this Wyck boasts of the possession of a diabolical faculty for making girls fall in love with him. His next move is to throw them over and one more is added to his record, which is kept by means of notches on a stick. Now I distinctly heard Tommy say that Wyck had his fiftieth notch booked, and that she was an Australian."

"My God! that was Amy. Bridgland, I will see you again, but I cannot stay longer now. I begin to see my way clear. A thousand thanks and good-bye." To Bridgland's astonishment he left the office hurriedly, without another word.

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Calling a cab, Reg drove to the Angora Club in Piccadilly, and asked for Mr. Thomas. Finding he was not in, he left a letter asking him to meet him on business of importance at a certain hotel at three o'clock the following afternoon.

That evening he and the Whytes discussed his project.

The old couple were bearing up well, and so deep was their indignation against the man who had ruined the peace of their home that they encouraged Reg in his revenge.

"You are young and strong, Reg. I wish I was too, then I would go with you," said Whyte; "but I am getting too old."

"Leave it to me, Whyte. I have sworn to brand him, and as long as I have breath in my body, I will not give in."

The following day, Reg engaged a private room in the hotel, and gave instructions that Mr. Thomas was to be shown up immediately on his arrival, an event which soon happened.

"How do you do, Morris?" said Tommy, genially coming towards him. "Awfully good of you to think of me."

"Yes, I wanted to have a chat with you."

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"You don't look well, old fellow. Nothing wrong, I hope."

"I have a little trouble, but—"

"Then let me share it, old fellow."

"What will you have to drink?" asked Reg, disregarding the invitation.

"Ah! the best way to kill trouble. Drink, and put your care in the grave."

The liquor was brought, and the waiter dismissed with instructions that they were not on any account to be disturbed.

"Do you mind my drawing the curtains?" said Reg, "the light affects my eyes."

"Not at all, old man. Here's good luck to you," answered Tommy, filling his glass.

Reg did not reply, but going to the door, he locked it, and put the key in his pocket. Tommy looked on in amazement. The little man had not much pluck, and he felt his knees tremble.

"What's the joke, old chap!" he asked, in a voice intended to be jocular.

"Thomas Thomas, listen to me. Amy Johnson is dead."

"Dead!" gasped Tommy, upsetting his glass in astonishment.

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"Yes, she is dead. Your friend Wyck murdered her."

"Murdered her!"

"Yes, murdered her," reiterated Reg.

"My God, old chap, I'm——"

"Silence!" cried Reg, in a stern voice. "You were the man who introduced her to him, and it is to you I look for some explanation. Who is this Villiers Wyckcliffe, and what is his power?"

"My dear Morris, really I don't know. I always thought he was a straight chap."

"Tommy, you're a liar. You do know, so out with it."

"But I've sworn not to divulge," almost whined Tommy.

"Then you refuse," said Reg, placing pen, ink and paper before Tommy, and producing a revolver from his pocket. Then he quietly placed his watch on the table in front of him, and said:

"There are pen and paper. If you want to write to your friends, do so, for you have five minutes to live."

This was too much for Tommy. All his dapper gaiety had disappeared. His clothes seemed to hang loosely on his limbs, and a perspiration broke out on his forehead. All his self-control vanished, and he fell abjectly on his knees and cried out for mercy.

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"Get up, you lying scoundrel," said Reg. "What mercy did you or he show."

"I'll tell you all, Morris. I'll tell you all," gasped his victim.

"Then get up and do so at once, for you have but three minutes."

"What do you want to know?"

"All you know about Villiers Wyckcliffe, and this power he is said to possess."

Tommy started with a tremulous voice, and narrated in disjointed sentences all that is known to the reader, the Detlij Club, all Wyck's secrets, his affair with Miss Williamson, and his own share in procuring the invitations for the Bachelors' Ball.

"Where has he gone now?" said Reg, still fingering the revolver.

"To Adelaide by the *Himalaya*."

"Is he going direct?"

"Yes he is, I swear."

"Then go down on your knees, Tommy, and swear you will never divulge that you have told me all this, and that you will not communicate with him."

"I swear, Morris," and Tommy was fairly on his knees.

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"Now go. You are only his accomplice. You did not do the deed, so I'll let you go; but mark my words, if ever I hear of you mixing my name up with yours, I shoot you like a dog. Now go," said Reg, unlocking the door, through which Tommy rapidly slipped without a second bidding.

"It's really wonderful what an empty pistol can do with some fellows," said Reg to himself, as he drank a glass of wine and straightened the table.

"Miss Williamson," he continued, musing to himself, "Marjorie Williamson; you are the poor victim who lost your mother and your livelihood through the same man. I must see you, for you and I ought to shake hands."

Half-an-hour later, he entered the Caledonian Theatre by the stage-door, at the entrance of which he was confronted by an old fellow, who gruffly enquired his business.

"Have you been here long?" he asked.

"Yes, close on twenty years; why?"

"I want a little information. What's your name?"

"Jones. What's yours?"

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"Mine is Morris."

"Well, what is it you want to know?" said Jones, looking suspiciously at him.

"Do you know Miss Williamson?"

"Yes, I do."

"Can you tell me where she lives?"

"No, I can't; and what's more, you'd better clear. She was ruined by one of you cursed—"

"Stay, Jones, I understand you. I don't come here as one of those vile cattle who hang round stage doors. I want to offer help and sympathy."

"Then you can go away, for she don't want either," said Jones, pointing to the door.

"My good fellow, I see you are a friend of hers, and I am glad to find she has one so good and true."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Can I trust you, Jones?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then listen. The same man who ruined that girl, and killed her mother, killed also the girl I loved, the girl I had been engaged to for years. And I now look for my revenge."

"But what has she to do with it?" asked he, in a softer voice.

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"I want to know her. I want her to have her revenge too. I am a rich man and I am off on his tracks to Australia next Friday."

"I don't think she'd see you, sir. She's never seen a gent since."

"You are an old friend, I can see?"

"Yes, sir, I am. Her dead mother and I were old friends. She was one of the good sort. She didn't put on airs because her daughter was a great actress. She used to sit and talk to me every night."

"Jones, you can manage it. Come, we'll go together."

As they drove along very little conversation passed between the two. At length the cab stopped at a house in a shabby street in Camden Town. "You stay here, sir, until I've seen her," said Jones, as he knocked at the door. The curtain was drawn aside for a moment before he was admitted. Five, ten minutes elapsed, and he did not return. Reg became impatient, but at last he heard the door open, and Jones was saying, "You see him, Miss Marjorie, he has a good face." But still she seemed to hesitate, and Reg, without waiting for more, walked up to her and grasping her hand, said in an earnest voice:

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"Miss Williamson, I *must* see you."

She offered no further resistance, and Reg passed with her into a small sitting-room.

"Stay where you are, Jones," said Reg, as he saw him about to leave them alone. "You can hear all I have to say. Miss Williamson, I have heard all about your troubles, and I want you to listen to mine:" and again his sad story was recited.

"Now Miss Williamson I am off to Australia to take vengeance, and I want you to assist me."

"Assist you! how? Mr. Morris."

"In this way. You are here toiling your life away for a meagre pittance. You must give it up."

"Indeed I—"

"Stay, let me finish. I want you to clear your name and honour before the world. I want you to rise again to your old position, and be revenged that way."

"Impossible," she said.

"No it's not, sir," chimed in Jones, eagerly.

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"She could get a good engagement to-morrow if she liked."

"Miss Williamson, as I said before, I am a rich man. I have thousands a year, and now I have no use for the money I want you to accept—"

"I shall accept nothing, sir," said she, sharply.

"I want you to accept," resumed Reg, tranquilly, "a small loan in order to enable you to have a fair start, and as you will not quite trust me, I will place it in Jones's hands. Here, Jones," he continued, handing him a roll of notes, "are a hundred and fifty pounds. You are to watch over Miss Williamson and see that she resumes her calling. Miss Williamson, once more I beg of you to assist me, and when you are a successful woman again, and making lots of money, you can repay me."

"Miss Marjorie, do it. I'll help you," said Jones, appealingly.

"Then I'll do it, Mr. Morris, and God bless you;" then words failed her, and she laid her head on the sofa and burst into tears.

Reg bid her good-bye and, followed by Jones left the house, feeling lighter-hearted than he had been for several days. And Jones, when he was put down at the theatre door, said, in a choking voice:

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"You'll never regret this day's work, sir. God bless you."

Reg next went to the shop at which he had ordered his die, and found it a most satisfactory piece of workmanship. Then he drove to the offices of the Orient Company, and found if he left London on the following Friday he could catch the *Orltuz* at Naples.

"There's only one berth left, sir," said the clerk. "It's in a two-berth cabin, and a Mr. Allen Winter has the other."

"Then cable and secure it for me," he said, putting down the money and receiving his ticket.

The next day he called on Bridgland, related all he had done, and told him his plans.

"You are a marvel, Morris," said that worthy man. "I could not understand why you left me so suddenly. So you leave England to-morrow for certain?"

"Yes. Wyck has a clear week's start and, as the *Himalaya* is a faster boat, I expect he will reach Adelaide eight days ahead of me."

"And when you catch him what will you do?"

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"Do you see this die, Bridgland?" asked Reg, as he produced his case. "This is his device. I'll brand him with it on both ears. He shall be a marked man for life."

"But that's rather dangerous, is it not?"

"Listen, Brigland. I have sworn by the corpse of the girl I loved that I would avenge her death, and I will do it at any cost. Your high-class Englishman looks upon a woman's honour as his legitimate prey, and his fellows feast and toast and testimonialise his success in his nefarious deeds; but we Australians are made of different stuff from the rotten fabric of European civilisation. We hold the honour of our women in respect, and we have only one law for those who sully or sport with it—the law that a right-minded man makes for himself. Here is a murderer gone to our country to continue his infamous amusement. Mark my words, Bridgland, if he ever returns alive to England, he will return so that it is impossible for him to hold up his head. Now good-bye, old chap. When you see me again, rest assured Australia will have been revenged."

"My God!" said Bridgland to himself when Reg had left him. "I would rather be dead than have a sleuth-hound like that on my track. Wyck, your time has come, but not before you deserve it."

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The final arrangements were completed, and Reg started on his journey. He bade a fond farewell to the Whytes, and his last word rang in Oliver Whyte's ears for many a day. It was "Revenge."

CHAPTER VII.

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HAL.

"Now then, Reginald Morris, my name is Allen Winter. I am going to have it out with you," said a tall, handsome man, fully six feet in his socks and broad in proportion, as he closed the cabin door, and stood with his back to it.

Reg had been lounging on his bunk, deep in his own thoughts, when he was disturbed by the abrupt entrance of his fellow-passenger, and the above good-humoured demand. Reg got up from his bunk, and faced him without speaking.

"You've shared my cabin since we left Naples, three days ago. Not a word have you spoken. You have done nothing but mope about, and look as miserable as a boiled owl. I say again, I won't have it, for you are infecting me with your low spirits," said Winter.

Reg looked at him with curiosity, but still answered nothing, so that Winter began to show signs of annoyance. [Pg 80]

"Hang it all! can't you speak, man? I can box, shoot, fence, fight, or anything you like. I don't think I am a bad sort of fellow myself, and it's because I know you are a good sort that I feel so annoyed to see you moping."

"I am much obliged to you for the compliment; still I fancy I can do what I please," said Reg, quietly.

The other showed no signs of resentment, but continued smiling at him as he rattled off the following, "You are in trouble, I know. You have had a severe blow lately. There was a woman in it, and she's dead. You loved that woman; her name was Amy, and the man who came between you was a certain Wyck. You are an Australian, and have plenty of money. You are seeking revenge, and your instrument of vengeance is in your breast pocket. These are details I have gathered from what I have seen of you, or what I have heard you mutter in your sleep; and knowing this much I am curious to know more."

"You are quite an up-to-date detective, sir," said Reg, frankly.

"Ah! then you acknowledge that I have hit the mark." [Pg 81]

"But pray, sir, are there not enough people on board to amuse you without the need of exercising your powers on me. I am in trouble, I acknowledge, but I prefer keeping my troubles to myself," answered Reg, really angry this time.

"I apologise, Morris, if I have been abrupt, but really I did not mean to be so. It is strange that though there are over two hundred passengers on board, I have not seen a face I care about but yours, and when I see you fretting away I feel for you, for I have gone through the mill, and know what it is."

"What do you mean?" said Reg, growing interested.

"Let me tell you my history. I was born in Victoria. My father died when I was fifteen, and left me to look after my mother, who was a confirmed invalid. She died twelve months later, and I was left alone. While walking down Collins Street one day I had an adventure which changed the course of my career. A carriage and pair of flash horses were being driven by, the coachman lounging on the box holding the reins carelessly, when a tram-car rounded the corner at a good pace. The horses gave a bound, the sudden shock sent the coachman off his box, and away they galloped. They turned one corner, and then another safely, and I was able by cutting through a cross street to come up with them. Well I was always a handy youngster, and as they dashed by me I made a run for the back of the carriage, caught one of the springs, scrambled on the top of the carriage, and reached the box, only to find the reins hanging round the pole beyond my grasp; but it did not take me long to slip along the pole, pick them up, and get back to the box. I, like most Australians can handle the ribbons, but it took me all my time to pull those horses up in time to avoid a collision. I didn't think much of the feat, in fact I rather liked the fun of it, but the old gentleman inside, who was the only occupant, chose to think differently, and when the coachman came up in a cab, in which he had been following us, not much hurt, the old gentleman made me get in beside him.

"What's your name?' he asked.

"Allen Winter,' said I.

"Then he asked me my history. I told him that I was an orphan and had to work for my living. Well, to make this long story short, I have never had to work since, for he gave me twelve months at the Scotch College in Melbourne, and during my holidays he died, leaving me the whole of his fortune. He was an old bachelor, and his money was well invested, so I have now an income of a thousand a year. I have been over every inch of Australia; I know the Colonies well, and I have been round the world twice." [Pg 83]

"But you have not explained your interest in me," said Reg.

"No, I thought I would keep that to the last," he said, his voice growing sadder. "I never was much of a Society man, for although I have been through a lot, I never feel at home amongst fashionable folk, and Australian Society is rotten—I don't like it. But I chanced to be thrown into

contact with a young girl, with whom I fell madly in love, and whom I endowed, as every man in love does, with all the virtues. I courted her for two years, and she professed to return my devotion. Now, her mother had a great fondness for Society ways and fads, and we were not the best of friends in consequence, but I thought we loved each other too well for that defect in my character to make any difference. The wedding-day was at last fixed. I had presented her with funds to buy her trousseau, as they were not at all well off, when a young sprig of English nobility visited the Colonies, and became acquainted with them. The mother played her cards well, for that cursed snob married my girl under my very nose, and used the trousseau I had provided. She sent me a letter, in which she stated she had never loved me as I deserved to be loved, and that she would offend her mother if she refused the Englishman."

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"Did you care for her very much?" asked Reg.

"Except my mother, she was the only woman I ever loved, and when she threw me over it nearly killed me."

"She married this man?"

"Yes; and her mother had the cheek to ask me to the wedding, but, needless to say, I did not go. I very nearly went to the devil instead."

"Now, just listen to me. Suppose that man had come between you two, and, after separating you, had jilted and deserted the girl, and was directly the cause of her death, what would you have done then?" said Reg, excitedly.

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Winter did not reply at once. He guessed instantly that Reg was referring to his own case.

"What would you have done?" asked Reg, again, impatiently.

"I think I should have shot him dead, or marked him for life," he answered, deliberately.

"Winter, shake hands. You are a man," said Reg, jumping off his bunk. "I apologise for my previous rudeness."

"Accepted, with pleasure," said Winter, cordially; and the two men shook hands.

Reg thereupon unfolded to him his whole history, which the reader knows. Winter listened attentively and, when he had finished, stood like a man dazed with horror. For the second time he put out his hand, and gripped Reg's hand with a grip that spoke volumes of sympathetic help. For a minute or two there was silence between the two men, which Winter broke by saying:

"Morris, I am an Australian. I know the Colonies well. You will let me join you?"

"Thanks, Winter; but I live for nothing but revenge."

"Then I will join you. You swore an oath to devote all your time and money to vengeance upon this man who has so foully wronged you. Let me swear too that I will join you. I will go with you, and the same spirit that animates you shall animate me too."

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There was no mistaking the genuineness of the appeal, and Reg frankly gave him his hand. From that day they were "Reg" and "Hal" to each other, and Wyck had two determined men on his track, the one endowed with all the shrewdness of a keen detective, possessing also a thorough knowledge of Australian life and habits; the other of strong determination and obstinate will that no obstacles would foil. Both awkward customers to deal with, and whose bitter enmity no man could afford to despise.

From that day they were observed by all the passengers to be close friends, and they showed very plainly how little they wished to be disturbed by, or to come into contact with, the other passengers. Now it happened that, although there was a large number of passengers, eligible young men were scarce, and when two of the best-looking young fellows on board gave it to be clearly understood that they intended keeping aloof from the general company it naturally caused a little sensation.

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"I can't understand them two gents. They be always together, always talk, talk; and when anybody speaks to them they appear offended. It's a shame they ain't more sociable, 'specially as my gals is fond of gentleman's company."

Both Reg and Hal overheard this remark from a stout, florid lady, who with her two daughters was starting on a tour through Australia. She was the wife of Samuel Lewis, cheesemonger, of Drury Lane: they had noticed a label on one of her boxes.

"I feel sorry for her and her daughters, don't you, Reg?" said Hal.

"I've not noticed them, old chap," he answered, indifferently.

"Look here, my boy. You must enliven up a bit. It's no use fretting. You can do nothing till you get to Adelaide, so let's have a bit of fun."

"I'll come round in time, old chap. I have felt better every day since meeting you."

"Yes, and I mean you to feel better still; but come away, here's that confounded old Tickell coming, he's dead set on us," as they dodged round some deck-chairs.

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"Ha, gentlemen, here you are! I am so glad to see you. Would you try one of my cigars; they are really a first-class brand. No; you don't smoke cigars, eh? Sorry for that. Prefer a pipe, eh? Well, that's a nice one you are smoking, and it seems to colour well. Splendid thing, a meerschaum. I always smoke cherry-wood myself; see, this is one. I have some more down below like it. Would you care for one? I assure you they are something special; and this tobacco's simply—"

"Yes, yes," said Hal, stopping him abruptly. "I am sure all you say is quite correct, but we do not require anything to-day, and, moreover, we are engaged—"

"But, my dear sir, you know on board ship people are—"

"Supposed to mind their own business," said Hal, exasperated with the man's importunity.

"Yes, exactly, my dear sir, but when—"

"Look, Mr. Tickell, there's Mrs. Morgan beckoning to you," said Reg.

"Where? Ah, yes, I am sorry I must leave you: ta, ta; I'll see you again," and away he skipped to annoy someone else. [Pg 89]

"Tickell is a specimen of that irritating species of human kind, the unsnubbable," said Hal.

Various attempts were made to penetrate their reserve, but without success, for they clearly gave everyone to understand that they preferred the company of each other, which did not tend to their popularity on board. Amongst the passengers was a young man who rejoiced in the high-sounding name of Hugh St. John Wilson-Mainwaring, and whose sense of self-importance was as extensive as his appellation. He was the younger son of a bishop, and intended to tour the Colonies at the expense of the inhabitants, feeling satisfied that he had only to make it known that his father was the Bishop of Doseminster to have the door of every aristocrat-loving Australian flung open wide in his honour. His voice had a delightful drawl that attracted the female portion of the passengers, and the little time of each day that was left to him after that which was occupied in the management of this characteristic, the manipulation of his eye-glass, and the exposure of the correct four inches of shirt-cuff, was devoted to the invention of inane practical jokes. He had successfully played "ripping good jokes, don't yer know" on most of the passengers, and one old squatter who was returning with his "missus" after doing England felt highly honoured at being made the butt of such aristocratic ingenuity. [Pg 90]

"We must invite him to the station, missus," he said to his wife the evening after that event. "He would be such a catch for our Eliza."

Now Mr. Hugh St. John Wilson-Mainwaring had noticed that Hal and Reg invariably took possession of a couple of the most comfortable chairs on deck, which they placed in a sunny corner while they read, smoked, or talked together, and he determined to have a joke at their expense. He took the ladies into his confidence in his charming, affable way, and the Misses Lewis, especially, were delighted to be made partners in the attempt of a bishop's son to make these two young men who thought so much of themselves look ridiculous.

One afternoon Hal and Reg, coming on deck, found all the chairs occupied, and were compelled to seat themselves in a couple of hammock chairs, ingenious contrivances in which the back is supported in a notch cut for the purpose. Fortune favoured the bishop's hopeful offspring, for they were not only convenient for his purpose, but they occupied a conspicuous position. Reg and Hal were just dozing off, when he seized his opportunity and crawled quietly on his hands and knees behind Reg's chair, and tied a piece of string on to the support. Cautiously, and in the same monkey-like fashion, he returned, paying out his line as he went, and gleefully drew all his lady admirers' attention to his huge joke. [Pg 91]

"You'll come down directly, Reg. They've tied a string to your chair," said Hal, in a whisper.

"Right! old chap. We'll see who will have the best joke. If I come down my back will be broken: understand?"

"Rather! Look out, he's got his string taut."

Scarcely had Hal finished when Reg's chair collapsed, and he fell on the broad of his back. Hal jumped up as if startled, and a violent peal of laughter burst out in all directions, but still Reg lay motionless. Hal went to his assistance, and in a scared voice, called out for the doctor. That gentleman happened to be close at hand, and soon a crowd gathered round.

"My back; it's broken," moaned Reg; and a litter was improvised, and he was carried to the surgery. [Pg 92]

"Poor fellow!—How could you do it?—What a shame!—He'll die"—and similar expressions were hurled at the bishop's son, who became seriously alarmed.

When they reached the surgery, the doctor ordered all to leave, except Hal, and began to examine the wounded man.

"Stop," said Reg, pulling himself up. "It's all a joke. Keep it up, doctor."

The doctor was amazed at first, but expressed himself as quite agreeable to join in the plot. Hal left the cabin with a serious face, and met all the anxious enquirers at the door with one stern remark:

"He's dying. I'm going for the Captain."

Mr. Wilson-Mainwaring became seriously alarmed, turned pale, wrung his hands in despair, and gave vent to disjointed appeals and ejaculations. "It was only a joke. Oh! you know it was only a joke. Oh, my poor father! Why did I come? What shall I do?" until they were afraid he would throw himself overboard.

Hal, who had been enjoying his dilemma, now thought the joke had gone far enough, and opening the surgery door, pulled out Reg, smoking his pipe, and looking as if nothing had happened. [Pg 93]

The laugh was now turned against Mr. Hugh St. John Wilson-Mainwaring, who disappeared below, and did not venture on deck for several days.

No one after this attempted to interfere with the two friends' mode of passing their time, and they were left undisturbed, and remained engrossed in each other's society. After an eventful voyage the ship arrived in due time at Adelaide.

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 94]

ADELAIDE.

"That's Largs Bay over there," said the officer on duty to the small group of passengers collected on deck to watch the approach of the vessel to her anchorage at Adelaide.

To none did the news come with greater pleasure than to Reg and Hal, who were impatient to get on to Wyck's track without delay. Reg had improved in spirits considerably since he had taken Hal into his confidence, but he remained as determined as ever to carry out his object.

Poor old Tickell had in vain tried to penetrate their reserve, and find out something about them, but he had to acknowledge they had seen through all his cunning devices. He knew everybody and everybody's business, from one end of the passenger list to the other, with the exception of these two. His failure here worried him, but still, though the voyage was fast terminating, he did not lose all hope of finding out something about them. As luck would have it, he found himself standing close beside the two who were occupying his thoughts. [Pg 95]

"I am sorry we are going to part, gentlemen," he said, affably.

"Yes?" answered Hal, smiling.

"I shall miss your society. You are out here for pleasure, are you not?"

"Now, Tickell, my good fellow, drop all that," said Hal, seeing what was coming.

"No offence, my dear sir. On business, then?"

"Go to the devil, Tickell—or what is better, go and worry some of the old women," said Hal, turning away.

"Now, don't get cross, sir."

"You're an infernal old fool," said Reg, fairly losing his temper; and tucking Hal's arm under his own, strolled away.

"Well, I'm hanged if I can make them out," said Tickell, to Mrs. Morgan, who had come towards him.

"Found out anything, Mr. Tickell?" asked that lady, sweetly.

"No, just had another try, but no use." [Pg 96]

"Wonder if they're criminals escaping from gaol," hazarded Mrs. Morgan, who had all the romantic imagination of her sex.

"No, more like lords in disguise," said Tickell, thoughtfully.

"You've hit it, Tickell," said Hal, passing by, not having heard the remark but guessing it referred to them.

"I knew it. I knew it," said Tickell, gleefully, as he rushed below to spread the news.

"Oh, my lords, I really beg your lordships' pardon," said Mrs. Morgan, apologetically.

"Pray what for, madam?" asked Reg, wondering if she had lost her senses.

"Well, you see, your lordships, neither me nor my gals ever guessed your lordships was what you are, or we would not have talked about you so familiar-like."

"My dear madam, we are no more lords than you are," said Hal, laughing at the joke.

"Here they are; here they are," cried Tickell, to a little crowd he had collected. "I found them out;

I found them out."

"Found out what, Tickell?" asked Hal.

"I found you out, my lords. I knew all the time you were lords in disguise, but I did not like to say so," and Tickell skipped about and snapped his fingers with joy at the discovery. [Pg 97]

A small tender now came alongside, and the Health Officer boarded the ship, and at once granted *pratique*, as there had been no sickness during the voyage. Several people accompanied him. Reg and Hal, taking advantage of the lull, escaped to their cabins, but no sooner were they there than the Captain rushed down to them, shook hands, and complimented them on their disguise. He had not taken any notice of them before, for he was a big man in his own estimation.

"I really feel annoyed at your not letting me into the secret of your identity, gentlemen, for there is great competition and jealousy between the captains on this route as to whose ship carries most members of the nobility in a year. I'd have put on extra steam had I known, and arrived a day sooner. You two will put me top of the list, and I shall be bound to have a big passenger list coming home."

"But, Captain, we are not lords or noblemen, or anything else," said Hal, laughing at the joke; but the Captain, being called on deck, left them with a hurried apology.

"That confounded old fool Tickell will get us into trouble yet," said Reg, as they both returned to the deck. [Pg 98]

"That's them," said Tickell, pointing them out to a couple of young men standing by with notebooks and pencils in their hands, whereupon both stepped up to them.

"My lords, I have the honour to represent the *Advertiser*. I should feel much obliged if you would give a few particulars of your visit to the Colony."

"I belong to the *Register*, my lords," said his companion, preparing to write.

"I am afraid, gentlemen, you are under some mistake," said Reg. "We are not lords, nor anything of the kind, we are happy to say. Here are our cards."

"But you are travelling *incognito*, perhaps?" suggested one.

"No, we are both Australian born, and if I don't make a mistake, I believe I recognise Joe Watson," answered Hal.

"That's my name. Why, now I know you—Winter; Hal Winter, of course," and they shook hands, laughing heartily over the joke.

"Then who is that old fool who told us a long yarn about your being lords in disguise? I am awfully sorry you are not." [Pg 99]

"And why, Watson?" asked Hal.

"Oh, news is scarce, and the arrivals of nobility are welcomed nowadays. They catch on, you know."

"Don't understand, Watson."

"Why, from a matrimonial point of view. There are so many mammas lying in wait to receive them. But I must go. I am glad to see you, Winter; call at the office and look me up, some time or other."

"Certainly I will," and the two shook hands.

"Fancy that," said Hal, "he and I were at school together; we haven't seen each other for ten years."

"He does not seem over fond of the nobility, with all his enterprise," said Reg, smiling.

"No," answered Hal. "He is a young Australian. His father is one of the leading citizens, but when a man's on a paper he is not allowed to express his own opinions."

"Then the papers toady to the nobility?"

"Not exactly. I consider the Australian Press is second to none in the world, and both the papers these men represent would hold their own in any country; but they must study public taste, like any other public caterers, and they do so love a lord. See, they are both now engaged with the bishop's son." [Pg 100]

The Captain did not seem so cordial to them as they left the ship, and he wore a disappointed look. As they said good-bye to all, and the tug started for shore, a figure on deck waved his hat and called out to them: "I found you out."

"Good-bye, you old idiot," shouted Hal, and an uproarious laugh greeted the amiable Tickell.

"It's nearly time they had an outer harbour here," said Reg, as he tried to dodge the spray flying over the side of the tug.

"Yes, you're right, but there seems to be too much jealousy amongst the three ports. Glenelg

think they ought to have it, and the Semaphore, too, lays claim to it, and between the lot of them we have to land with a wet skin."

"Now then, gentlemen, hold tight," shouted the tug-captain, as a wave washed the small boat from stem to stern and drenched them to the skin.

After a tedious voyage they were landed at the pier, wet through and, having made arrangements about their luggage, they stepped into the train for Adelaide. [Pg 101]

"Where shall we stay while in Adelaide, Hal?" asked Reg, when they were fast approaching the pretty little city.

"The 'York' is the tip-top house, but I should prefer the 'United Service.'"

"Good, the 'United Service' it shall be."

Half-an-hour later they stood at the door of the hotel, ready and fit for work.

"Hal, are you ready to begin the search?" asked Reg.

"Right you are. We'll go to Reuter's first, and see if there is a cable."

The office was in King William Street, close by and, on enquiry, a cable was handed to Reg. It read:

"Morris, Adelaide. All well. Revenge. Whyte."

"Yes, Whyte, we'll be revenged," said Reg, handing the telegram to Hal.

"So far, so good. What's the next move?"

"Wyck will arrive a stranger here. He will enquire for the best hotel, and will be told the 'York.' He will tip the man, and ask him if there are any good-looking girls there, and he will be told that old Ford won't have a barmaid about the place, and is fearfully particular. Then he'll ask for another, and he ought either to be told of the South Australian Club, the United Service, or the Southern Cross. All these keep saloon bars, so we cannot do better than enquire at them." [Pg 102]

"Why do you think he will proceed in that way?"

"Wyck is fond of ladies, isn't he? Well, where would a stranger go to talk to a nice girl? He'd go to a saloon bar, where so many good-looking girls are found."

"You're right, old chap. Let's go over to the 'Cross.'"

On entering the small saloon, they found a handsome young lady in attendance. After calling for drinks, Hal asked her how long she had been there.

"I only came yesterday," she replied, sweetly.

"Good-bye, miss," said Hal, with equal sweetness.

Johnny Lord's and several more were visited, but without success, for no one knew of such a person as they were enquiring for.

On calling at the South Australian Club they were met by a very busy, energetic, little man, who said he was the proprietor, and seemed proud of it. [Pg 103]

"Have you had a gentleman named Wyckliffe, stopping here?" asked Hal, as he stood sipping some iced wine.

"Yes I did. He stayed here three days."

"Do you know where he went when he left?"

"I fancy he left for Port Pirie; at least that's where I heard him say he was going to," answered the bustling little man as he hurried away.

"Did you know Wyckliffe?" asked Hal of the young lady who presided over the bar.

"Yes, I knew him slightly," she answered.

But the entrance of a gentleman of the masher type, who shook hands with her, and kept her in conversation with him, effectually prevented any further information being procured from that quarter. Hal and Reg therefore left.

"Hal," said Reg, anxiously, "is Adelaide a very holy city?"

"Why; whatever makes you ask that?"

"Well, in the first place I notice an enormous number of churches, and secondly, I hear you cannot get a drink on Sunday."

"That's true, but it came about in this way. When public-houses were open on Sunday, the churches were always empty. The parsons agitated the temperance party, and the result was the closing of the houses." [Pg 104]

"And did that fill the churches?"

"Oh, no, it filled the clubs instead."

"I wonder if he would call on the Governor," said Hal, after a slight pause.

"Don't know, but he might. Shall we see?"

"No, thanks."

"Oh, I forgot. Of course you don't appreciate Governors."

"No, you are right there. I think them useless pieces of furniture to the Colonies. They do no good and are merely sent out for Society's sake to be able to entertain English visitors, when they come over at the Colony's expense. Now look at that little man in the carriage there, with a dog by his side. Well, he has more brains than any six Governors put together."

"Who is he?"

"He's the Lieutenant-Governor and Chief Justice, and one of the cleverest men Australia ever had."

"Why don't they appoint him Governor, then?"

"Well, my dear old chap, if you had a friend who was in trouble financially, or otherwise, you would do him a good turn, would you not? Well, English political leaders do the same." [Pg 105]

"I see, there is a big salary attached to it. But, now, how about Wyck?"

"If he has returned to Adelaide we must find him. He may have seen the cable addressed to me, or he might have seen our names in the passenger list wired from Albany," said Hal, musingly.

"Then we had better continue our search, for he cannot now have much start on us," answered Reg, and they prepared to renew their enquiries at the hotels. Walking down Rundle Street, they called at the "Globe," and other places, without result, till dinner time caused them to adjourn.

"Let's have another nip of Mount Gambier whiskey," said Hal, "and after dinner we'll try Hindley Street."

While walking along King William Street continuing their search, Reg, who had continued closely observant, remarked:

"Is there anything exceptional about our appearance, Hal?"

"Why?"

[Pg 106]

"I was judging by the number of people who stare at us closely, and then turn round for a second look."

"That's one of the characteristics of Adelaide—curiosity. They do love to know who's who and, if they see a stranger, they like to know all about him," answered Hal, as a well-dressed lady passing them stared hard. "Now, come round this way, old chap. We must explore Hindley Street. It's a peculiar street, fashionable at one end, and——"

"Not fashionable at the other," added Reg.

"Exactly; there is a tribe of Mongolians and Asiatics inhabiting the lower quarters, but let's ask here where Mick Tier lives."

"What, Mick Tier, Slavin's friend when he was in England?"

"The same. Here he is," and a stout gentleman, who could turn the scale at eighteen stone, appeared.

They had half-an-hour's chat with their genial host, without being able to procure any additional information, and went on to the "Melbourne Hotel." They entered the saloon, and were smilingly greeted by a good-looking young lady.

"Good evening, Miss Wallace; how are you, this evening?" said Hal, leaning familiarly over the bar. [Pg 107]

"Very well, thank you."

"Have you seen Wyck lately?"

"No, do you know him?" answered she, with a slight start.

"Oh, yes, I know him well. He told me to call and give you his best love, Gussy."

"That's very kind of him, and did he tell you my name?"

"Certainly. When did you see him last?"

"I don't remember. Why?" she asked, curiously. "But really I forget your name, though I remember your face."

"Thompson is my name. It is very unkind of you to forget me so soon."

"I don't remember the name."

"I saw Wyck at Port Pirie. He said he thought he was going on to Melbourne."

"But he did not go," said the girl, quickly, and Hal gave Reg a gentle touch with his foot.

"Where did he go to?"

"Come on, let us look round and see all the pretty girls," said a familiar voice behind them, and turning they saw Tickell and an elderly gentleman. [Pg 108]

"Hullo, Morris and Winter. I've found you out," shouted Tickell.

Hal made a movement of annoyance, for he had seen the girl start at their names, and now felt sure she was in league with Wyck, and knew of his whereabouts.

"Will you join me, gentlemen?" said Tickell, between his smiles and smirks at the barmaid.

"No, thanks," said Hal, as he sat at a small table, with Reg alongside him.

"Confound that old fool, he's spoilt my game," said he, in a low tone, to Reg.

"How did you know her name, Hal!"

"My dear boy, if a girl leaves a letter on the shelves behind, addressed to Miss Wallace—"

"I see, but where did the Gussy come in?"

"Look at her brooch, and you will find that."

"Well, good-bye, my dear; awfully sorry I must go. Good-bye, gentlemen," and Tickell and his friend retired.

"You'll excuse me for a moment, sirs," said the barmaid, leaving her post, with a bow. Quick as lightning, Hal leant across and examined the envelope—

"Melbourne stamp, dated two days ago."

[Pg 109]

"And that's his writing, Hal," said Reg, excitedly.

They had scarcely time to settle themselves when the lady returned, carrying a sheet of blotting-paper, which she carelessly threw on the shelf under the counter.

"Same again, please, Gussy," said Hal, trying to be pleasant.

"My name is Miss Wallace, sir," said she, indignantly.

"I beg your pardon, madam."

"I don't believe you saw Mr. Wyckliffe at all. I know what you are after, but you won't see him again, for he has left for Western Australia."

"Is that so?" queried Hal, cynically. "Then he did not go to Melbourne, Miss Wallace?"

"No, Mr. Morris, he did not," she answered, with emphasis on the name Morris.

"I notice you had a letter from him," said Hal, quietly.

"I never had—" She got no further for, turning round, she found the envelope facing her. "You've been reading my letters while I was away," she called out, in a fury; then, noticing it was an envelope alone, she cooled down, and said: [Pg 110]

"This was from my brother at Port Augusta."

"It's a pity all the Colonies do not adopt the same colour for their stamps, for, while Victoria is puce, South Australia is yellow," said Hal, carelessly pointing to the puce stamp, but the girl snatched it up, gave him an evil glance, and sat down to write a note.

The saloon was very tastefully arranged, and Gussy had forgotten that the wall at her back was covered with mirrors, otherwise she would not have been so hasty as to write on a telegraph form in a manner that was easily to be distinguished by both Hal and Reg.

"Come, Reg. We must go," said Hal, rising.

"Good-bye, Miss Wallace, I'm awfully sorry you are offended."

"She's going to send a telegram to him. We must try and get a look at the address," said Hal, as they once more found themselves in the street.

"How is that to be done?"

"Well, I don't know if you have noticed the way a messenger generally carries a telegram to the office."

"Can't say I have."

[Pg 111]

"Well, I amuse myself frequently by noticing these things, and I have observed that he invariably carries it in his hand, and reads it twice before sending it."

"Well, what of that?"

"In the first place it will enable us to see who the messenger is, and in the second we may be able to read the telegram as well as he," answered Hal, as he took up his position in a deep doorway on the side of the street opposite to the hotel.

Shortly afterwards they saw Gussy appear at the door, and look about her to see all was clear. A few minutes later a boy appeared carrying a telegram in his hand.

Walking on the opposite side of the street as far as King William Street, they shadowed him, and crossing the road walked close in his rear. As the lad stopped at the office, he opened the telegram, and looked at it. Hal at the same time glanced over his shoulder, and read:

V. Wyckliffe, Great Australian Palace, Melbourne. Morris and another called for you to-day. Going Melbourne. Look out. G—y.

"Hal, you're a wonder," said Reg when he became acquainted with the contents of the telegram. [Pg 112]

"I reckon we're getting close on him now. He will only have three days' start of us," said Hal, complacently. "The guide says—'Express to Melbourne at 3.30., arriving at 10.30 next morning: boudoir car attached.'"

"Let's fill up the time by going to a music-hall," suggested Reg.

"Don't keep them here, my boy."

"What, no music-halls!"

"Well there is a small one run by Tommy Hudson, but it is used as a theatre. Adelaide people don't believe in leg-shows and ballets."

"But I thought they had the Gaiety people out here, and did a big business."

"Quite true, but it caused such an extra-ordinary number of divorce and breach of promise cases that they have not repeated it."

"Have they a decent theatre, then?"

"Yes, a capital one, run by good old Wybert Reeve, and as the Governor goes there to-night, there will be an extra crush."

"Does he influence the public?"

"Rather, my boy. I have seen the stalls and dress-circle quite empty one night and crowded the next to overflowing, all on account of the presence of the Governor and his wife." [Pg 113]

"Then we had better not rob them of their enjoyment," said Reg, emphatically.

They spent the following morning in visiting the sights of Adelaide, that picturesquely placed and beautifully laid-out city, nestling by the *broad waters* (!) of the Torrens, beneath its background of lofty blue mountains; and took the afternoon express to Melbourne.

CHAPTER IX.

[Pg 114]

MELBOURNE.

After passing a somewhat restless night in the boudoir car they arrived at Melbourne. Boudoir cars are very comfortable and pleasant places in their way, but on this particular occasion they did not find it overwhelmingly pleasant, for their fellow-passengers had their own peculiar way of amusing themselves. For instance, a Melbournite and a Sydneyite had to share the same compartment, and any man who has travelled in Australia knows what that will lead to. It was a new experience to Reg. Hal, however, found himself fully occupied in closing his ears to the snores coming from a passenger in the next compartment.

"Talk about Sydney! Why, what have you got to talk about? You've a decent harbour through no fault of your own, and that's about all you can boast of," said the man from Melbourne. [Pg 115]

"And what have you got? Just open the window, and everybody will know. *Smellbourne* is your proper title. I always have to carry disinfectants with me when I come here. Say, guard, see that those windows are closed," sang out the man from Sydney.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the other, in retort. "We certainly have not your natural resources, but what we have we have made ourselves. Look at our splendid buildings, our streets, our cable tramcars, our prosperous country."

"Yes, look at them. Where are the men that built them? In gaol. How was the money to build them obtained? By robbing English capitalists. And what's the consequences? Why, they are all empty. Fancy, ten thousand empty houses in a small town like yours."

"And how about your empty houses? Your Parliament House? Bah! It's a bauble shop. While your members are fighting amongst themselves like cats and dogs, the country is going to the deuce."

"Guard, please separate those gentlemen," screamed a shrill voice from the lady's compartment. [Pg 116]

"Stop your row, there," shouted the man who had been snoring so loudly, imagining their quarrel had woke him up, whereas, a kick from Hal had done it.

"Go to sleep, you fellows, blowing about Sydney and Melbourne. Why, our little town of Brisbane licks you both hollow," roared a tall man in pyjamas, jumping on the floor.

"Yes; before the flood," shouted the Sydney man.

"Look here, gentlemen. You will have to make less noise," said the collector, now appearing on the scene.

Thus it was that they were disturbed all night long and, on the following morning, things nearly approached a crisis, owing to the Sydney man ostentatiously producing camphor and eucalyptus and preparing to scatter them about to kill the noxious germs of Melbourne.

"That is a fair sample from the citizens of the two rival cities of the South," said Hal. "They are for ever fighting against one another. Jealousy is no name for the rivalry between them."

"It seems a pitiful waste of energy," answered Reg, strapping up his rugs, for they were nearing Melbourne; and soon the train ran in to Spencer Street Station. [Pg 117]

Here all was noise and hurly-burly. Porters jostled the passengers and each other, and flung the luggage about. Cabbies yelled for fares, and everyone seemed bent on making as much noise and causing as much inconvenience as possible.

"Thank goodness, that's over," said Reg, when they had safely put themselves in a hansom. "Talk about London porters. They are not a patch on these fellows for banging your things about."

"That's true. In Melbourne, old man, everything must go with a rush," answered Hal, as the cab pulled up at the entrance to a tremendous building, some eight stories high.

"Fine place this, Hal."

"Yes, as far as appearances go. It's run on temperance principles, at a heavy loss every year."

"Who built it then?"

"There's his face on the wall there, somewhere. He's in gaol now, went with the land-boom when it bust."

"That's why they put his bust up," laughed Reg, dodging the portmanteau that was flung at him for his atrocious pun. [Pg 118]

They booked their rooms on the advance system at the office, and started for a stroll round the streets of this marvellous city.

"By Jove, Hal," said Reg, pointing to a tall building known as a sky-scraper; "thirteen stories high. Is the man who built that doing a term too?"

"No he was too smart. He sold out and got knighted."

"Knighted for building a place like that?"

"Well you see he gave a big cheque to charity, and got it that way."

"Are they as easy to get as that?"

"Rather. One man built a university, and was given a handle to his name. England loves to encourage that sort of thing. But now to business. I noticed that girl at the Palace eye us pretty closely."

"We had better enquire, and see if we can hear of anything."

"Time is precious. Let's get back."

"Do you keep a record of all visitors staying here?" asked Hal of the young lady at the booking office. [Pg 119]

"Yes, sir. What name are you enquiring for?"

"A friend of mine named Wyckliffe. Ah, I see you know him"—for he noticed the lady give a start of surprise.

"There was a gentleman of that name here, but he has gone to Adelaide," she answered, in rather a tremulous voice.

"Oh! it doesn't matter. He asked me to enquire for him, if I came to Melbourne. We have just arrived from Sydney."

"What a shame," said she, quite recovered. "He was expecting some friends, and said he was going to Adelaide to meet them."

"If you should hear from him, you might say Mr. Thompson was asking for him," said Hal, carelessly.

"How long are you staying, sir?"

"That all depends how we like the place," said Hal, as he left, followed by Reg.

"That girl is in it. I'll swear she knows where he is.—Query, how are we to get it out of her?"

"Where did those gentlemen come from?" asked the lady, of the porter.

"Adelaide express, miss," he answered.

[Pg 120]

"Are you sure?"

"Certain, miss, for I noticed the ticket on their luggage."

"I fancy they will have to look for him," she said to herself, smiling grimly.

Hal and Reg had walked as far as Bourke Street, when Hal suddenly turned to his companion and said:

"What fools we are, Reg. That wire was sent late at night, addressed to the Palace. We must find out who was on duty at that hour, for that girl surely would not be." Thereupon they wheeled round, and returned to the Palace.

"Say, porter; do you keep a night-porter here?" asked Hal, of the man in livery hanging about the hall.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know who was on duty the night before last?"

"I was, sir."

"Do you remember a telegram arriving for Mr. Wyckliffe?"

"Well, er, you see, sir—"

"I do see," said Hal, and, by a dexterous move, a half-crown-piece changed hands.

"Thomas' buildings are not far from here, sir. I'll shew you if you just step to the door," said the porter, leading the way to the street as he noticed the girl's eyes on him. [Pg 121]

"Enquire at the Gaiety, Bourke Street," he whispered, and hurriedly withdrew, the happy possessor now of two half-crowns.

"What did those gentlemen want?" asked the lady, when the porter returned.

"They only wanted to know where Thomas' Buildings was, miss."

"Oh, all right," said she, apparently satisfied.

Hal and Reg lost no time in following up the clue given them, and a quarter of an hour later found them in one of the many saloons of the Gaiety Hotel, where they began to take stock of their surroundings. Both agreed that it had been well-named. Business seemed brisk, and liveliness and gaiety characterised everybody. They happened to have hit upon the same saloon that Wyck patronised. Had Hal known this he would perhaps have been more careful. Two young ladies were in attendance. One of a very winning appearance; the other rather plain.

"Have you seen Wyck lately?" asked Hal, of the pretty one.

"No, he's gone," said she, colouring to the roots of her hair, and then appearing annoyed at having spoken. [Pg 122]

"Why do you want to know? Who are you?" she asked, in rather an excited way.

"My name is Thompson. Wyck is a great friend of mine. We came out in the same boat from London," said Hal, carelessly.

"You are staying at the 'Australian,' are you not?"

"Yes, why?"

"Oh, nothing. I thought I saw you there the other day. Miss Kelley, will you mind my bar for a few minutes?" and she hurried away.

"You've upset Miss Harris," said the other lady, coming forward.

"I am sorry. It was quite unintentional," said Hal.

"You know she and Wyck are great friends?"

"Well, I heard something about it, but as Wyck is such an outrageous flirt I did not take much notice of it."

"But they are engaged and going to be married shortly."

"Lucky fellow," answered Hal, with a smile.

"Infernal, lying scoundrel," added Reg, under his breath.

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"Miss Harris not in?" asked a rough-looking fellow, putting his head through the doorway.

"She'll be back directly," answered Miss Kelley.

"Oh, never mind," said the man, disappearing.

"That's Wyck's old cabby," she said to Hal, and Reg, excusing himself, got up and went outside.

"Is that gentleman your friend?" she asked.

"An acquaintance," he answered. "But you and Miss Harris are not friends."

"I never said so, sir," said she, shortly.

"No, there's no necessity for that."

"She's a niece of the proprietor."

"I see, and has a lot of privileges which the others don't like."

"Who told you that?" said the girl, in surprise, but not denying the truth of the statement.

"When did you last see Wyck?" continued Hal.

"Yesterday afternoon. He came in in a very hurried manner, quite unusual in him, and called Miss Harris aside and held a long confab with her. He seemed upset, and so was she, for she left the bar, crying, and did not come back till the evening."

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"How long had she known him?"

"That's the funny part of it. She only met him three days before. It seems to have been a regular case of love at first sight. She is a very proud and haughty girl, especially to strangers. It was reported once that a private secretary of the Governor's was going to marry her. Certainly he used to pay her a lot of attention, but he married an heiress instead."

"Did she fret then?"

"No, she laughed it off and treated it as a joke."

"Tell me this before I go. Did Wyck say anything to her about a telegram when he called?"

"Yes, I remember he did, for it was sent on here from the Australian; but why are you so inquisitive?"

"You won't mention a word of our conversation to Miss Harris, but just tell me what size gloves you take, and how many buttons."

"Six-and-a-quarter, twelve buttons."

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"Thanks! good-bye!" and he left her, well-satisfied with his enquiries.

"I thought you were never coming," said Reg, as they met at the door. "Short, thick-set man, wearing soft felt hat, black coat, riding breeches, and top-boots; drives a hansom with a smart grey horse; No. 1246A."

"You could not hear his name, of course?"

"I heard someone call out, 'Good-day, Dick,' as he left. What's the next move?"

"A fashionable one. Where shall we go—Buckley and Nunn's or Robertson and Moffat's?"

"What for—gloves?"

"Yes, six and a quarter, and twenty buttons."

"No, surely."

"Twenty did I say? No, the young lady is modest. A dozen will satisfy her," said Hal, leading the way.

The gloves were bought and posted to Miss Kelley, and Hal told Reg all about the courtship.

"A proud, haughty girl is what he delights in," said Reg, though he mentally added that his Amy was not of that character.

"Our next move is to find out Dick's character and his habits, for from the way she referred to him, I fancy Dick is of some material assistance to him," said Hal, dodging his way through the crowded thoroughfares. "We'd better, therefore, find his cab-rank first."

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"Can you tell me—" he enquired of the first gentleman he met.

"No, got no time," said the individual addressed, as he bustled away at the rate of ten miles an hour.

"Where are the cab-ranks?" he asked another.

"Up there, round the corner," replied this one, without stopping, and being well out of range before Hal had understood his reply.

After trying to extract the information from about a dozen people, he gave it up, for every man he spoke to seemed to be in a greater hurry than his fellows. "One continued rush," said Hal, "all day long; each trying to out-do the others in business, but it all ends in the mushroom style, for they boom up everything to ten times its value, and when the relapse comes matters are fifty times worse. That's Melbourne."

After several unsuccessful attempts to find a cab-rank on which was a hansom with a grey horse, they at last saw one in Swansea Street, but to their chagrin, before they could get to it, they saw a hansom with a grey horse and a driver answering to Dick's description drive away.

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"That looks like Dick," said Reg, excitedly.

"Here you are, gintlemen, jump in," said the driver of a cab, with a strong Irish accent, as he brought his vehicle to a standstill alongside them.

Acting on impulse they jumped in.

CHAPTER X.

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CABBIES.

Hal and Reg had merely acted on impulse when they entered the cab. All they wanted was to get the cab out of the neighbourhood of the rank. So they ordered the driver to take them to Hosie's Hotel, in Flinders Street. Going along, a smart landau passed them, carrying a young man.

"Look, Hal," cried Reg, pointing him out. "There is our friend, the bishop's son. Wonder whose carriage he is in."

"Don't know, but it is exactly as I told you. He'll live for twelve months or more among *our* bloated aristocracy, who will feel only too honoured to have him as their guest."

"I suppose he has money?"

"Not necessarily. He can borrow, and they will be only too glad to lend. As soon as he is tired of one, he can go to another, and so on until he plays them all out. Finally, he marries an heiress, and goes home to spend her money amongst his friends and relations," said the cynical Hal.

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The cab brought them to the hotel, and, alighting there, they ordered a boy to the horse's head, and asked the cabby to join them in a drink.

"What's your name, cabby?" asked Hal, as he handed him a pint of beer.

"Terence O'Flynn, with the accent on the 'ynn.'"

"Very nice name, too. Did you notice that cab with the grey horse drive away as we drove up?"

"Sure I did, for wasn't he foreinst me?"

"Do you know the driver's name?"

"Rather! It's Dick Burton he is, and no other."

"Where's he gone to now, Terence?"

"Sure, and I cannot tell you. He is a lucky devil is Dick, and always manages to get hold of a soft line."

"What do you call a soft line, Terence?"

"Why, gents like yourselves, with plenty of brass."

"I see, and for that reason you want us to take your cab, eh? You want a soft line, too."

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"Oh! I don't mean it that way. You see, a soft line is when a fellow pays his cabby a sov., instead of a bob."

"But these sort are scarce now, Terence?"

"I don't know about that. That fellow, Dick, allus seems to spot 'em. Why look at that chap Wyck who——"

"Are you a mate of Dick's?"

"Well, you see, we go for a booze sometimes together."

"Come on! Drive us to Tattersall's stables."

"Right you are, boss," answered Terence, as he mounted the box, and cracking his whip, drove them quickly to the stables.

"Drive right in, Terence," shouted Hal.

"Take that horse out and give him a good feed," said Reg to the groom in charge as they alighted. "Now come along, Terence."

But Terence was too amazed to stir. All his Irish wit had left him, and he did not feel certain his fare were not softies. He stood with his hat in one hand and, scratching his head with the other, gazed blankly at his horse being led away to the stable.

"Come on, Terence," called Hal again; but Terence did not appear inclined to stir.

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"I'll fix him, Hal," said Reg, going to the groom and paying for an hour's feed in advance. This had the desired effect, and Terence followed them without a word, but his perplexed thoughts ran thus:

"Now be jabbers, by ould Oireland, here's a couple of queer coves. What the divil are they up to at all, at all? Maybe it's information they'll be wanting about Dick. Terence O'Flynn mind what you're up to—that's what Bidy, the darlint, would say if she were here, and by jabbers I'll take her advice."

Hal and Reg in the meantime walked to the Palace, and calling Terence in, took the lift to the fifth floor, and went to their room.

"Sit down, Terence," said Reg, pushing a chair forward.

"You mean straight, gentlemen, I hope, 'cos I have a big family, and sure they'll all be kilt intirely should anything happen to me."

"Terence O'Flynn, we—"

"Begging your honours' pardon, the accent's on the—"

"Never mind the accent now, Terence. We mean business. We want you to tell us all you know about Wyck and his cabby, Dick Burton. If you can give us any particulars that will assist us, we will pay for the information," said Hal, producing two or three sovereigns and jingling them together.

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As soon as Terence saw the sovereigns all his Irish avarice was roused.

"You want information," asked he.

"Yes, that's what we want, Terence," said Reg.

"Well then, how much are ye prepared to pay for it, for I may say the information I can give is the rarest quality to be had anywhere at double the price."

"That's your game, is it, my boy," said Hal, rising. "Now I'll pay you what I think fit, and you'll take it and be satisfied, and no hanky panky."

"Oh, beg pardon, your honour. I did not mean—"

"Never mind what you mean. Understand what I mean. In the first place you will have to swear secrecy."

"What's that: must I join a secret society? Oh, no, I'd die first, for what would Bidy and Father Doolan say?"

"I only want you to promise not to repeat anything you hear, nor anything that takes place in this room."

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"I'll swear to that all right, your honour."

"Good. Now then kiss that pistol," said Hal, producing a small Derringer from his pocket.

"Kiss that craythure! Why it's a gun, and may be loaded. It may kill me. Oh, Bidy, Bidy, your darlint is going to be kilt entoirely! I can see your game. You are going to kill me and make me swear to say nothing about it."

"I'll hold the barrel towards me. You kiss the stock," said Hal, laughing.

"Well hold it tight, your honour, for if it goes off it might kick me with its rump."

"D—n you block-headed Irishman," said Hal, losing his temper.

"I'll kiss it; I'll kiss it; and if it do kick I'll open my mouth."

"Say after me then—I swear to keep this meeting secret."

"I won't, I won't; for I'll have to confess to Father Doolan. Oh, Bidy, Bidy, your darlint is amongst burglars!"

"Now then, Terence O'Flynn, with the accent on the 'ynn,' you are a silly fool, but you have sworn to keep secret all that passes here, and to assist us, for which we will pay you—"

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"Barring Father—"

"Shut up. Wait till I've finished. When did you first see this Wyck, whom you called a soft line?"

"The first time I saw him was the second cos I only had a back view first. It was one morning just as I drove to the stand, about ten o'clock. I was in my cab, and Dick Burton was just foreinst of me. I twigged a fellow coming along who looked like a swell looking out for a cab, so I drove up to him before Dick could, but by jabers if he did not pass me right by and beckon to Dick. That was Wyck. I was a bit cross all day, and when I saw Dick in the evening I asked him who he was. 'He's my property,' says he. 'He's a good un, and allus pays in gold.' Dick drove him about for several days, and last night he comes to me in great excitement. 'Terence,' says he, 'we'll go on the booze.' 'All right,' says I; and we had a regular good booze, we had. Bill was regular screwed, and he told me his pigeon had gone away and left him. He's gone to the "toight little island." That's what we call Tasmania, sir; and that's all I know, so help me."

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"Where did Wyck live?"

"At the Gaiety. He was a bit sweet on a gal there. Lord, he was a lady's man, he was. Always had them out driving."

"What sort of a man is Dick Burton?" asked Reg, now speaking for the first time.

"Well, sir, I don't like to say bad of any man if I could say good, but Dick Burton is a bad egg, sir."

"What do you mean by a bad egg?"

"Well, as I said before, I don't—"

"Yes, we know all that."

"Well, sir, I don't like to say bad, I don't; but Dick ain't to be trusted. He's been mixed up in several dirty jobs."

"That will do now, Terence. If you are careful and mind what you are about, you will have a soft line. Your address is you say 470, Lonsdale Street, West, so we know where to find you. Here are a couple of sovereigns, and you are to keep a sharp look out on Dick for us. Remember this," and he touched the revolver. "Good-day. There's the lift."

"No, your honour, thank you. I've not got half-an-hour to waste; I'd rather go down the steps, that'll only take five minutes," with that Terence disappeared.

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"We must enquire about Tasmania at once, Hal," said Reg.

On enquiry they found that there was no boat leaving for Tasmania for several days, so they decided to spend the time in looking round to see if they could come across Dick Burton and his grey horse.

They went off to the usual stand, but neither Terence nor Dick was there, but turning, they found themselves in luck's way for once, for they met the identical cab driving towards them. They hailed him, and directed him to drive to Cumberland Hotel, Fitzroy.

Arriving there they engaged a private parlour, found up a boy to hold the horse, and invited Dick in. The man's face and manner marked him as all Terence described.

"What's the game, gents?" said he, "something good on?"

"I can't say there is anything particular on, but you shall be well paid for your time, and will not be a loser," answered Hal.

"Quite right, gentlemen, but you ain't the sort to bring fellows like me here for nothing, so again I asks, what's your game?" and Dick smiled benignly at them, and noisily expectorated into the fire-place.

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"You know a gentleman named Wyckliffe, I believe?"

"Yes, he does me the honour to ride in my cab."

"He's a friend of ours," continued Hal, "and to tell you the truth, he is going it a bit strong; in fact, too strong for his income to stand it."

"Never did it with me, sir. Fact was, he was rather mean, and often barneyed over a few bob. I was jolly glad when he cleared, for he began to be too familiar-like, and I don't like chaps who run up a score with a cabby. He owes me twenty quid now. Of course, I reckon he'll pay it, for he told me he was a bit stiff, but that his friends would settle up, so if you'll kindly hand over twenty sovs, I'll give yer a receipt," said Dick, quite unconcerned.

Hal and Reg were as much surprised at Dick's news, as at his manner of imparting it.

"My time's money, so if you want to part up, I'll tell you what I'll do. I ain' a hard one to chaps stuck. Give me a tenner, and we'll cry quits."

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"Where's Wyck now?" asked Hal, sharply, looking Dick straight in the face, a gaze he did not approve of.

"He ain't far away, quite close handy; but what do you want to know for?" asked Dick, in return, on the aggressive.

"Merely wished to look him up," said Hal.

"Oh! well, that alters the case. I thought you was after him to do him an injury and, as he has been a good friend to me, I'll stick to him. I'll tell yer what I'll do, gents. I'm a bit short, and will run the risk of offending him, but if you plank down a fiver, I'll guarantee to bring him here to-night."

"How can you do that, when he's in Tasmania?" said Reg.

"Who told you he'd gone there? Well, well; they was getting at yer. He's not in Tasmania," answered Dick, putting on an innocent air. But finding he had given himself away, he began to get into a rage.

"We'll have another drink, and bring this interview to a close. You can drive us back to Collins Street, Dick."

Dick obeyed in a surly way, and when they pulled up at the Palace, Hal asked him the damage. [Pg 139]

"A sov.—and no humbug," was the reply.

"Your fare is two shillings," said Hal.

"It's a sov. or a summons, so please yourself," retorted Dick.

"I'll pay it you, but it's a swindle, and you know it, but, mark my words, Dick, when swindlers swindle people, then it is time for people to swindle swindlers," said Hal, handing him the money.

"Oh, go to the d—," said Dick, shortly, and whipping up his horse, drove rapidly away. Terence appeared then on the scene, and received the order to follow him and report.

"Come up as far as Menzie's Hotel, Reg," said Hal. "I have a little bit of business to do there."

Off they go, but Reg is puzzled to find out what the business is, for all Hal does is to call for drinks, take a sheet of paper from the rack, and scribble a few words, put it in an envelope, and leave again.

Back in their room at the Palace, Hal explains the purpose of his visit to Menzie's.

"It was this address I wanted," said he, producing a couple of sheets of paper having the name of the hotel stamped on them. "These are for our friend, Dick. I intend to swindle the swindler," he added, as he handed Reg the letter he had written, as follows: [Pg 140]

"Dear Dick Burton,

"A chum of mine recommends you as being the very man I want to assist me in a little bit of fun. Meet me at Pier Hotel, St. Kilda, on Tuesday, at 10.45, and bring a good horse. There's a lady in it.

"Yours, etc.,

"WATSON.

"P.S.—Enquire for letter of instruction at the bar."

"That's for Dick at this end. Now for another at the other end," and he sat down and wrote:

"Melbourne.

"MY DEAR RICHARD,

"I am very much obliged by your coming. Did you ever hear of a case in which a swindler was swindled? This is one. Remember honesty is the best policy.

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"Yours etc.,

"WATSON."

"The first I will post to-night, and the second I will leave at the hotel to be called for."

About eight o'clock Terence turned up, and reported having shadowed Dick first to the Telegraph office, then to the Gaiety, and out to the Cumberland, before he came back to the stand. This seemed satisfactory news to the boys, and they again tipped Terence, and after giving him a few further instructions, let him go.

"Now for Tasmania," said Hal.

They found the *Pateena* was advertised to leave at noon for Launceston, and were successful in securing a couple of good berths. In the midst of their packing the following morning, it flashed upon Hal that he had made no arrangements whereby Terence could communicate with them, so they walked towards his stand, but finding both Dick and Terence there, they passed on. As a young urchin calling out "Monthly Guide" passed by them, Reg stopped him, and told him to follow them to the hotel.

"I'm fly, governor; go ahead," he said.

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Shortly after the youngster joined them, and Hal gave him a note for Terence, instructing him where to write.

"Take this," he said, "to the second cab on the stand, with the black horse, No. 1974, and here's a

shilling for you."

"Eight you are, boss; but I suppose yer going to shout."

"Certainly, what will you have—lemonade, ginger-pop?—"

"Go along with yer. A glass of beer, and not too much froth on it is my style. Ginger-pop, indeed! Do you take me for a temperance lecturer? Here's to yer, governor. I'll fix yer note for yer: never fear. Good-day."

"Now we can catch the boat nicely, Reg," said Hal, when they had done laughing over this depraved juvenile.

"I say," said Reg. "Did it strike you that Wyck might have crossed in the same boat? We may be able to pick up something from some of the officers. I suppose we are free from the 'lords in disguise' business this time?"

"We can feel safe on that score. The Tasmanians are too slow to trouble about us; and not only that, but it might be dangerous to mention it." [Pg 143]

"Why?"

"I'll tell you later on."

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 144]

LAUNCESTON.

"What time do you expect to make Launceston, Mr. Wilson?" asked Hal, of the chief officer of the *Pateena* during his watch.

"At mid-day, all being well, sir."

"Do you remember having a passenger named Wyckcliffe, on board during your last trip across?"

"Wyckcliffe, or Wyck, as they called him—rather, do I not?—the funniest thing I ever saw"—here Wilson fairly roared at the recollection of the incident. This interested the boys, and they begged Wilson to tell them the joke.

"There was a lady in it, I bet," said Hal.

"You are right; there was. It was like this. We had a pretty big passenger list, and amongst them was a Mr. Goodchild and his daughter—but perhaps you know them?" [Pg 145]

On being assured the contrary, he continued:

"This Goodchild is a very wealthy squatter, and lives about twenty miles from Launceston. He made his money in the early days: how I don't know, but he had something to do with convicts. At any rate, he's very rich, and owns a lot of country. His only daughter, May, is a girl of twenty-one, with about as pretty a face as one can see in a day's march. Goody—as we call him behind his back—adores this girl. She is everything to him, and he lives for her; he jealously watches her and wards off every man who comes near her. He once nearly snapped *my* head off for bringing her a chair. She is a good girl and tries her best to please and humour him in every way, taking very little notice of anybody else. This Wyckcliffe seemed to have no difficulty in making himself popular with the ladies, and began to pay special attention to Miss Goody. Old Goody noticed this, and twice carried his daughter away from him. Tea being over, old Goody had stayed below to finish one of his yarns, and did not notice his daughter had left the saloon. Coming to an interesting episode, he happened to look round, and missed his daughter. That yarn was never finished, for he rushed on deck, and sure enough found those two promenading arm in arm. He tore the girl away, and carried her below, shouting out to Wyck: 'I'll come back and deal with you directly, you infernal scoundrel. You reprobate, etc., etc.' 'A nice evening, Mr. Goodchild,' answered Wyck, as cool as possible, 'I'm sorry you are cross.' Well, old Goody kept his daughter down below, and wandered about himself in a frenzied condition. My watch was up at twelve, and we had a whiskey together before turning in. About four bells I heard a tremendous row; jumped out of my bunk, and ran up on deck, and the sight that met my eyes nearly killed me with laughter. It appeared that both Miss Goody and Wyck had made the acquaintance of an engaged couple who spent the whole voyage in spooning. They did not like to go on deck by themselves at such an early hour, and so had arranged that Wyck and Miss Goody should join them. This plan was carried out, and all four were having a jolly time when old Goody, unable to sleep, came on deck for a little fresh air, and was in the midst of them before they guessed their danger. Then the fun commenced. Wyck pushed Miss Goody on one side, and the old chap, with a war-whoop, made for him, but came seriously to grief by catching his foot in one of the hawsers; and, falling on his stomach, lay there yelling 'Murder!' Both Wyck and his daughter tried to help him up, but when he found who it was, he chased him round the deck. The noise was terrifying, and the picture the ship presented was intensely amusing. Ladies and children in their night-gear, gentlemen in pyjamas, all had rushed up in their excitement, feeling sure the ship was wrecked

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and, seeing Goody racing about, forgot all about their appearance, and enjoyed the fun. Suddenly an old maid appeared in her dressing-gown and, catching sight of her niece in worse than *deshabille*, shouted out, 'Maria, come here, you disgraceful creature. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.' That was the signal for them all to realise their position, and it was a case of 'rats to their holes.' In two minutes the deck was clear. It was the joke of the voyage, but did not end there, for when old Goody, looking very cross, accompanied his daughter to breakfast next day, he took care to seat her and himself in two vacant chairs which were occupied on either side. Goody had an excellent appetite, and did full justice to the good things provided, but he was so fully engaged that he did not notice that the young man on his daughter's right, had slipped away to another seat. Wyck came down and seeing the vacant chair, took possession of it, much to the amusement of all around. While old Goody was engaged in devouring a large helping of curry, and was in the act of raising his cup to wash down an extra large mouthful, he suddenly caught sight of Wyck talking to his daughter. His amazement, his rage and his greediness acting altogether at the same moment, brought about a calamity. He tried to swallow his food; he tried to put down his cup; he tried to swear and he tried to catch hold of Wyck all at once, and the result was disaster. The curry stuck in his throat, the coffee spilt all down his shirt-front, and in the struggle his chair gave way beneath him and he was landed on the floor with half the table on the top of him. There he lay sputtering, kicking and swearing, and the shrieks of laughter from the other passengers were almost deafening; in fact so great was the noise that the steerage passengers and crew came bolting to the cabin. Goody was borne off to his cabin, and he kept his daughter by him until we were at the wharf. We all supposed that Wyck was a lover of hers, but since then I have heard he met her here for the first time. But there goes the breakfast bell, and you had better secure your chairs," said he, abruptly, and as the captain came on deck he hustled the two from the bridge.

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When Wilson's watch was up, he again came aft to his two friends, and suggested they should go with him to the fore-cabin where they could see some fun, as there were a great number of miners making for Tasmania at that time, and the boat was crowded with them. Although only allowed to carry sixty, nearly double that number was on board and, in consequence, some little trouble was experienced in serving their meals.

"Now watch the fun," said Wilson, as two dirty-looking stewards came from the galley, each carrying two large tin dishes smoking from the fire. One contained chops, the other boiled potatoes. These they placed on a table, and the whole of the miners rushed and scrambled for them.

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From the seething mass of human beings one would emerge with a chop in one hand, and a potato in the other, and race away to a quiet corner to enjoy them. It looked like a huge monkey-cage at feeding-time.

After this sensation, Reg and Hal promenaded the deck, smoking and chatting.

"Why did you say it was dangerous to mention lords in disguise here?" said Reg.

"Oh, I'll tell you," said Hal. "You see, last year Tasmania was very short of visitors. Now, there was a barber in Sydney whose business was bad, so he decided to boom Tasmania. He assumed the name of a bogus viscount and, leaving his wife and children behind, went for a holiday with a young lady of the theatre. Of course, the good news that a viscount and viscountess were on their way to Tasmania soon spread, and great preparations were made for their arrival. They were invited everywhere to all the aristocratic places, and were made no end of. Well, to make a long story short, the game was exposed by means of the deserted wife applying for maintenance. The barber is now in gaol."

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"But surely his manners must have shewn him up?"

"I'll give you, in answer, the opinion of an old resident who met them. He said he and his missus liked that viscount because he put on no side, and talked and laughed in such a way that they felt quite at home with him. I must add that this gentleman was absent for a trip when the trial was on."

The boat was now coming alongside the Pier at Launceston, the pretty little capital of Northern Tasmania, nestling cosily at the foot of its surrounding hills. Landing, they went at once to the Brisbane Hotel.

"Launceston is small in comparison with Melbourne," said Hal, "and, being only twenty hours' distance by steamer, it naturally endeavours to copy her in many ways: certainly the business people have a touch of Melbourne in their ways, and they are as proud of their muddy little river, as Adelaide is of her lake."

They both lost no time in proceeding on the war-path, and immediately commenced on the hotels which kept saloons. The number was not large, but to their surprise they could not find the slightest trace of Wyck.

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"Perhaps he is going for higher game," said Reg, as they walked down Brisbane Street, struck, as every visitor is, with the overwhelming extent to which female beauty was represented there.

"He is probably still devoting himself to Miss Goodchild, but I do not think he would have much chance, as her father would not let him come near the place."

"My dear fellow," answered Reg, sadly, "Whyte forbade Amy to see him, and yet she went."

As they continued their walk, Hal made the following comments, as was his wont:

"Tasmanian people are decidedly slow. They do not care to hurry and bustle about, but take their own time. Launceston has a great deal of the leisurely element, but so many Victorians have gone over there to settle that the older residents have had to enliven themselves a bit. Launceston and Hobart are as jealous of each other, if not more so, than Melbourne and Sydney. Launceston is the best business town, so many mines having been opened up on the North-West coast, but their sore point is their mud-hole, the Tamar; while Hobart has one of the finest harbours in the world. Launceston people repudiate their connection with 'that old convict settlement' and claim to rightly belong to Melbourne."

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At dinner they made acquaintance with a young fellow named McKintosh, who had been a passenger on the boat with Wyck, so they carried him off to the smoking-room for a jaw.

McKintosh verified the first mate's account of the *contretemps* on board, and remarked that the strangest feature about it was the girl's infatuation.

"Do you know them at all?" asked Hal, puffing vigorously at his cigar.

"Oh, yes, I have known the old man for some years, as I am a frequent visitor here. I met him in town to-day, and I have never seen a man so changed in so short a time. He seems completely upset. I should advise Wyck to keep out of his way, for if he meets him there will be bloodshed."

"Did you see anything of Wyck after landing?"

"Once I saw him in the street, but I don't know where he is staying. Do you know him?"

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"I met him in England," answered Reg, quietly.

"He's the funniest chap I ever saw," continued McKintosh. "He shared my cabin, and just before landing I went down to pack. I had tennis shoes on, and I came upon him unawares, and he seemed a bit flurried."

"What was he doing then?"

"I don't know, exactly, but he seemed to be whittling a stick—a black stick with a lot of notches in it."

"My God!" said Reg, startled out of his reserve.

"What's the matter?" said McKintosh.

"Nothing," answered Reg, as, excusing himself, he left the room.

"He's subject to sudden attacks like that. Don't mind them," said Hal to McKintosh, in a casual way; and, bidding him good-night, left the room.

When he joined Reg in the room they shared, he was taken aback at what he saw. Reg was polishing his die with a chamois leather, and his face wore an expression of sternness.

"Hal, old chap. We must get this in use at once."

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"My dear boy, we cannot go faster than we are going. We have not lost an instant up till now."

"Where does this Goodchild live?"

"His place is ten miles from here, on the North-Western line. He has a private siding called Lewisham."

"One of us had better go and see him. How do the trains run? Where's the guide?"

"Here you are. The first train leaves at 8.10. I think I had better go, and leave you to get our things packed and square up, in case I send you a wire."

"Yes, all right. I should like to sympathize with him, but I may get another chance. This is the only thing that gives me relief," added Reg, holding up his die, "when I think that some day it will be used for the purpose that I had it made for."

"Let's hope so, old chap. But now to bed."

CHAPTER XII.

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GOODCHILD'S.

The North-Western express pulled up for a few moments at the Lewisham siding, and Hal alighted with a "Thank you, sir; that's the house, over there," from the guard; and the train proceeded on its way.

The house referred to was a mansion in size. It was surrounded by beautiful trees, and stood in well-kept grounds, in the midst of which a lake could be discerned glistening in the sun. The

country round was the pick of the land, for Goodchild's father had taken it up in the early days, when every pound in cash that a man could show entitled him to an acre of land. No check being put on this rough-and-ready mode of procedure, the sovereign was frequently passed on to a friend to show, who would secure another portion and hand over the title to his principal, receiving something for his trouble. Most of the rich estates in Tasmania were originally obtained in this manner. Hal walked along the path leading to the house, lost in admiration of its beautiful, natural surroundings. His arrival was apparently noted, for an elderly man came out to meet him.

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"Mr. Goodchild, I believe?"

"Yes, that's my name," and he gave his visitor a close scrutiny, wondering what his errand could be.

"My name is Winter, sir, and I have called for the purpose of having some conversation with you."

"What is your business, sir?"

"If we could go inside we could talk it over."

"Are you a book-traveller, or anything of that kind?" asked he, snappishly, "for if you are I cannot see you."

"No, sir, I am not. I have called on business too important to be discussed out here."

"Then you had better come inside and tell it," he answered, leading the way into the house.

"I called to see you about that fellow Wyckliffe," said Hal, as he sat down in the library.

"What about him? Are you a friend of his?" snarled the old man.

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"No, I am not; and that is my reason for calling on you."

"Curse him, I say. Curse him," added the old man, emphatically.

"You're not the first who has had cause to do that," said Hal, solemnly, wishing to gain his host's confidence.

"Do you know him then?"

"By reputation, yes; otherwise, no."

"Then why do you call on me?"

"Mr. Goodchild, my errand may seem a strange one, but I have had a detailed account given me of his blackguardly behaviour to you and your daughter."

"But what has that to do with you?" he asked, excitedly.

"Stay, Mr. Goodchild. I will tell you all. My friend Morris and I are on his tracks to revenge a cruel wrong he did." And Hal thereupon told him the whole story from the beginning. "Now, sir, I come to offer you my assistance to shew him to your daughter in his true light."

"But she's gone," he burst out.

"Where?" cried Hal, "not with him?"

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"God knows, I don't," and the poor old fellow hid his face in his hands, and sobbed.

"You must tell me all, sir. Tell me all: there is no time to be lost," said Hal, excitedly.

"There's not much to tell, sir. He will be able to add another notch to his stick, for he has literally broken my heart. I never have discussed my private affairs with anyone, sir, but I will tell you my story, for I feel you are to be trusted.

"She is my only child. I loved her mother dearly for sixteen years, and all that time it was our great sorrow that we were childless, and I fervently thanked God on the day she told me our hopes were to be realized. Had I known the trouble that child was to cost me, I would have been less fervent. A little girl was born to us, and a week later she was motherless."

"Go on," said Hal, encouragingly, as Goody stopped and hesitated.

"Well, it took me a long time to console myself with a little bundle of flesh like that. But as she grew up I found all my love returning, and then I had only one thing to live for—my daughter May. I loved her with a jealous love, and I guarded and watched over her as one might a precious jewel. She has had the best teachers. She can ride, drive, play on half-a-dozen instruments. Our one great joy and happiness was to be together, and I dreaded the day when her hand would be asked in marriage. We had never been separated, and when we started on our return journey from Melbourne, where we had been on a visit, I little thought what was before me." Here the heart-broken old man again broke down.

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"Come, come, bear up, sir. Don't give way," said Hal, comforting him.

"My dear lad. I am a rich man, and would willingly lay down twenty thousand pounds to have my girl back in her old place beside me."

"And so you shall, sir," said Hal, reassuringly.

"How?" asked he.

"First tell me all that occurred after your arrival."

"Well I took good care that that scoundrel should not see her again after breakfast, and when we got ashore we drove in a closed carriage to the station, and came on here."

"Well, what then?"

"She became very sulky, would not talk, and shut herself up; neglected her pets, and all her favourite occupations; avoided me as much as she could. I tried to coax her. I tried everything I knew, but to no avail. She seemed to have forgotten me, and to think of no one but that fellow, and I have since found out that he followed her here and twice met her clandestinely." [Pg 161]

"I can quite understand that. It's his infernal mesmeric business."

"Yes, I guessed things were not all straight, but I was completely powerless, and yesterday she had a letter from him, from Hobart."

"Hobart! How did you know it was from him?" asked Hal, with excitement.

"She told me so, and she said she was going to meet him."

"What did you say?"

"What could I? When I offered to go with her, she told me straight out, in a manner she had never used to me before, that she was going alone. At that I lost my temper, and I said—go. And she left by last night's express."

"Do you know what time the next train passes?" asked Hal.

"Yes, there will be one in half-an-hour. Why?" [Pg 162]

"Never mind why, but get a few things together, and be ready to go by it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if your daughter sees him, it will be too late."

"I understand," he said, and lost no time in doing as he was bidden.

The private signal was hoisted at the siding, and the train stopping, they both got in. As it passed the next station Hal threw out a note, with half-a-crown wrapped inside it, asking the station-master to forward a telegram to Reg to meet them at Launceston station.

"This is my friend Morris, Mr. Goodchild," said Hal, introducing Reg, whom they found waiting for them; and ten minutes later, by special arrangement with his highness the guard, the three had a first-class compartment in the Hobart express all to themselves. By the time Hobart was reached, all three thoroughly understood each other.

"Really, gentlemen, I don't know how to thank you for the trouble you are taking; certainly I am rich, and I shall be most happy to place my purse at your disposal." [Pg 163]

"We appreciate your offer, sir, but we have enough to go on with," said Hal.

"And as for the rest," chimed in Reg, "we are just as anxious to get hold of Wyck as you are, sir."

"Gentlemen, I am an old man, but should harm have come to my—"

"Come, come, sir, don't look at it like that," said Hal, making light of it, for he could plainly see that the old gentleman was working himself up to a highly-excitabile state.

"Here we are," said Reg, taking his cue from Hal. "By Jove, what a glorious place; what magnificent scenery; well may Tasmanians be proud of it!"

"Where do you stay when in Hobart?" asked Hal of the old man.

"At 'Eastella.' The proprietress, Mrs. Eastwood, is an old friend of mine."

"If you will be guided by us, sir, you will stay at the 'Orient' with us."

"I am entirely in your hands, gentlemen."

Hobart is known as "Sleepy Hollow." The train was slow, the porters leisurely, the cab-horses comatose, and it was only after considerable delay that they arrived at the "Orient" and took their rooms. [Pg 164]

"Excuse us for a moment," said Hal, leading Reg away. "I am going to Eastella to enquire. The girl may be there, and so may he. I may book a room for a week. In the meantime, keep an eye on Goody, and don't go out until I return and let you know the result," he said, when Goody was out of earshot.

Reg assented, and returned to his companion. Hal had no difficulty in finding his way to Eastella, and, noting it was a first-class place, he sent in his card, with the intimation that he wished to see the proprietress. A few minutes later he was ushered into a snug little office, and found himself face to face with a pleasant-featured, homely lady of some fifty summers, seated at a desk heaped

up with papers.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Winter?" she enquired, rising and greeting him.

"Yes, Mrs. Eastwood, I want to stay here for a week."

"Certainly; that will cost you three guineas," she said, making out a receipt.

Hal paid the bill, with a mental tribute of admiration of her business-like ways.

"Have you a Miss Goodchild staying here?" he asked.

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"Yes; why do you ask?"

"Have you a Mr. Wyckliffe?"

"No, he's not here at present. I expect him back in a day or two," she answered, wonderingly.

"Then they have not met?" said Hal, in some excitement.

"No, of course not; but who are you? I hope you are not an enquiry agent, for if you are—"

"No, no, madam! but you cannot think what a relief to me your answer was."

"Will you kindly explain?" said she, looking at him curiously.

"You know that Miss Goodchild has left her home and father, to meet him here?"

"No, I do not; although she's certainly not herself. But who are you?"

"My dear madam, forgive my haste; but I will explain everything to you later. I must run off now to tell Mr. Goodchild the good news."

"Why, where's Mr. Goodchild?"

"Staying at the 'Orient,' by my advice. But now, one more question, madam—Do you know where Wyckliffe is now?" [Pg 166]

"He's yachting off Port Arthur. I sent a telegram on to him to-day, which had been waiting here for him for two days." Here, the entrance of a maid-servant for instructions, gave Hal the opportunity of leaving; and, taking a cab, he was soon back at the "Orient."

"It's all right, Reg," he shouted. "Where's Goody?"

"He's in the drawing-room, pacing it like a wild beast in a cage."

"Good news, Mr. Goodchild. They have not met yet," said Hal, shaking him by the hand.

"Thank God!" said the old man, fervently, and the relief was so great, that he sank on his knees by the sofa.

Hal and Reg left the room: the old man's thankfulness was too sacred to be overlooked.

"Have you found him?" asked Reg.

"Yes, he's at Port Arthur."

"Where's that?"

"It's the old convict settlement, about forty miles from here."

"How do you get to it—by rail?"

"No, we must go by boat. If you'll look after Goody, I'll run down to the wharf and make arrangements." [Pg 167]

"Hal, old boy, where should I be without you?" said Reg, turning a face full of gratitude on his friend.

"Nonsense. We must lose no time," and he hurriedly left in the direction of the harbour. Alongside Elizabeth Pier he found a small steam-boat and, as smoke was coming from her, he concluded she was in use.

"Ship ahoy, there!" he sung out.

"What's up, boss?" said a young fellow, putting his head through the hatchway.

"Is the skipper aboard?"

"Yes, he's for'ard in his cabin. He's gone to bed."

"Are you there, skipper," said Hal, knocking at the door of a small cabin.

"Hallo, there; what's the matter?" shouted a voice from the inside, and presently the door opened and a head was thrust out.

"Can you take us to Port Arthur, to-night?"

"What?"

"Can you take us to Port Arthur, to-night?"

"No, I'll be hanged if I can."

"That's all right then. Sorry I disturbed you," said Hal, walking away.

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"Hold hard, boss. Don't be in such a blooming hurry," called out the skipper, appearing on the deck, buttoning up his garments.

"Now then, what's it you want?"

"I want to go to Port Arthur, to-night."

"Impossible, why it's ten o'clock now."

"Well, I want to start at once."

"Won't Norfolk Bay do you? It's only eight miles away: just a nice walk."

"Why Norfolk Bay?"

"Why, because Port Arthur lies outside, and to go there you have to face open sea, and it looks like blowing a bit. While if you go to Norfolk Bay, you are under shelter."

"I see; the boat is hardly big enough for the open sea."

"What! this boat! Go along with yer. I'd cross the Atlantic in her. She'd face—"

"All right. Eight miles is not much of a walk. Can you start at twelve sharp? And if a fiver will squeeze matters so that we can return to-morrow—"

"That'll do, sir. Twelve sharp it is. Now then boy, fire up like—"

"What's the name of your boat?" asked Hal.

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"*Tarantula*."

"And her Captain?"

"Captain John White, R.N."

Having made all arrangements, Hal returned to the hotel, where he found Goody quieted down and in quite an amiable mood, ready to cry for joy when Hal told him he was sure he would be able to take his daughter back with him. He bade Reg be ready by twelve sharp.

"Twelve sharp it is, my boy," said Reg. "And I hope I shall have a chance of handling this toy"—and he touched the morocco case which held the die.

CHAPTER XIII.

[Pg 170]

PORT ARTHUR.

"Good-bye, Mr. Goodchild. Be sure and carry out our instructions and, above all things, wire if you hear anything of Wyckliffe," said Hal, as he and Reg stepped on board the little steamer.

"You can depend on me, gentlemen. Good-bye, and God bless you," answered he from the pier.

"Now then, skipper, full speed ahead."

"Ay, ay, sir. Let her go, boy."

Once more the boys were on the deep. As the little boat steamed ahead, increasing the distance between them and the pier, they watched the figure of Goody standing by the gas-lamp. He had resisted all their endeavours to make him go to bed, and insisted on coming down to the pier to see them off.

"What time do you reckon to get there, skipper?" asked Reg, as they prepared to turn in.

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"About day-break, sir. I'll call you," answered the skipper, as he took the wheel.

A gruff voice bawling "All for shore," wakened them the next morning and, mounting to the deck they found the steamer was just entering the picturesque little bay. The sun was gilding the line of rugged hills that surrounded the bay and glinting on the water, and they both exclaimed in delight at the lovely scene before them.

The steamer was made fast alongside the little pier and, accompanied by the skipper they made their way to the hotel, an old building standing on the slope of the hill, a few hundred yards away.

"Mornin', skipper. You're early," said a rough old fellow, appearing in the doorway.

"So we are, Clarke."

"Is there any conveyance to be had here to take us to Port Arthur?" asked Hal.

"None, unless you wire to old Brown at the Port to bring his cart over."

"Then we'll walk. Where's the road?"

"Go right ahead, then turn to the right and follow the telegraph wire. It will take you right into the Port," said Clarke, pointing out the direction. [Pg 172]

"I suppose you don't know if there is a yacht lying there?"

"Yes there is, or at least there was yesterday. It belongs to a young fellow named Wyckliffe, who sent word he was coming my way to-day, as he expected a lady," answered Clarke, with a smile.

"Well, good-bye, we will be back some time to-day," as they started on their journey.

They found the road very hilly, and monotonous, lined on either side with thick scrub and dotted here and there with the solitary house of a selector. Having completed the ascent of a fairly high hill, they got their first view of Port Arthur, where it lay in a small valley surrounded with rough and mountainous country. Huge masses of ruins lay in all directions, for it was on the shores of this loveliest of bays that the early convict settlement was made. This fair spot, one of Nature's most exuberant freaks, was the scene, in that fearful past, of many a deed of atrocious barbarity. Very few houses still remain entire. Many familiar English trees surround the blackened ruins of the little church, which was destroyed by fire some years ago. Round its deserted walls the ivy still clings, hiding its ruins with a tender cloak of greenery as one who says, "*Je meurs ou je m'attache.*" [Pg 173]

"I can't see anything of the yacht," said Reg, as he glanced anxiously round the bay.

"No, none of the boats there could be called a yacht. Say, where's the hotel?" asked he of an old fellow standing by.

"That's it, straight ahead," said the man, pointing to what appeared to be a private residence. In former days it had been the house of the Governor of that noble settlement.

"Good-morning sir," said Hal, to a man who was holding up the door of the hotel with his shoulder.

"Good-morning gentlemen," and he straightened himself and stood on one side.

"This is a pretty place."

"Yes it is, sir."

"We were expecting to find a friend of ours here with his yacht, but we can't see anything of him."

"What was his name?" asked the landlord, for it was he.

"Wyckliffe," answered Hal, carelessly, though the nerves of both he and Reg were strained to the utmost. [Pg 174]

"He's gone, gentlemen. You are too late."

A smothered oath burst from Reg's lips.

"How long was he here?" asked Hal, entering and sitting down.

"Let's see, this is Thursday. He came here on Tuesday evening, and sailed the yacht round from Hobart. But I say, gentlemen, do you happen to know anybody named Dick Burton?" said the landlord, with a cunning smile.

"Yes, why?" said Reg.

"Well, he sent this wire to Wyckliffe," and he took down a telegram from a shelf behind him, and handed it to Hal, who read:—

"Wyckliffe, Launceston, or Hobart. Two men enquiring. Morris one. Fancy they left for Tasmania. Dick Burton."

"How did you get hold of this?" asked Hal.

"Well, that's a long story. Do you want breakfast?"

"Yes, we do."

"Then I'll go and order it, and come back and tell you all about it." [Pg 175]

"Done again!" said Reg, looking at Hal, when the landlord, whose name was Camden, had disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

"Yes, there's no doubt of that, old chap."

"Now then, gentlemen," said Camden, returning, "I suppose you are D's.?"

"No, we are not, rest assured of that."

"Last Tuesday night a yacht sailed into the bay and anchored off shore. I recognised it as belonging to Macpherson, of Hobart, who was in the habit of letting it out. A small boat put off and brought ashore a young fellow in flannels, who came up to this house and called for a drink, asking me to join him. In the course of conversation he told me he intended making a few days' stay here, and visiting the ruins. He put up here till yesterday, and made himself very agreeable, and became quite popular, for he seemed to have plenty of coin, and was very free with it. He appeared to make the acquaintance of most of the girls in the neighbourhood, and be very popular with them, too. Well, about two o'clock yesterday we were all in here, and Wyckliffe was in the middle of a funny yarn when the old postmaster came in with a telegram for him, which he said had been sent on from Hobart, where it had been delayed. Wyck took the telegram, but before opening it said, 'Now, boys, drink up, for I have a lady visitor coming, and we'll drink to her safe journey.' The toast was drunk, and Wyck leisurely opened the telegram. I never saw such a change in a man in my life. In an instant he was turned from a jolly, good-hearted fellow, to a noisy, angry bully. His crew were all in the bar drinking, and, by Jove, he made the fellows fly. 'Make up my account at once,' says he to me, and 'get ready to sail on the spot' says he to his men in the same breath. He fussed and fumed about, and seemed fairly mad with rage. The fellows here really thought he was mad, for several tried to persuade him not to start, as they feared dirty weather, but he snapped them up and took no notice of them. In his anxiety he dropped the telegram, and without being seen I pushed it under the counter with my foot. An hour later the yacht was under sail, with two reefs in her mainsail and a small jib set."

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They had followed this narrative with interest, and as they went into breakfast Camden asked:

"If you are not connected with the police, who are you?"

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"We are merely here to save a young lady from that villain's clutches," said Reg.

"Then I am glad you came," said Camden, heartily, "for I should never have felt easy if I had been in any way connected with that business."

They sent a wire to Goody and sat down to an appetising breakfast of fried flounders, a dish that an epicure in need of a new sensation for his appetite is recommended to journey to Port Arthur to try. Hal and Reg both did excellent justice to the fare, much to the satisfaction and delight of Mrs. Camden, their landlord's wife. After their repast they decided to take the chance offered them of inspecting the prisons, and asked Camden to procure them a guide.

"There's the very man for you," said Camden, pointing to an old fellow sitting in the bar, whom they at once recognised as the man they had met when entering the Port.

"What's your name, old chap?" asked Hal, going towards him.

"My name is Thomas St. Clair Jones," he answered, with dignity.

"Well, Mr. Thomas St. Clair Jones, have another pint."

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"I'm not in the habit of drinking with strangers, but as you are a gentleman like myself, I don't mind," and he graciously handed his pot to be filled.

"Now then, Jones, button up your coat, pull up your breeches, put your hat on straight, and lead the way," said Hal, in an imperious voice. To the surprise of Reg Jones did exactly as he was told, pulled himself together, and obediently led the way out.

"I thought as much," said Hal to his friend. "He's a lag and has been used to obey orders."

The procession halted in front of a dilapidated-looking building, commonly known as the Police Station. In answer to a knock an antiquated sergeant appeared and entrusted Jones with the keys after a whispered colloquy in which one could distinguish the word "halves." Jones preceded them with the keys, but had not gone far when Hal called out to him:

"Say, Jones: what were you sent out for?"

Jones cast a withering glance at the speaker, which softened from indignation to injured innocence in so dramatic a manner that Hal almost felt sorry he had spoken. Then he silently turned and resumed his road to the prisons.

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"Jones, come back," said Hal, in his voice of authority, which again was instantly obeyed. "I ask again, what were you sent out here for; and I may say if you do not answer my question this yellow boy will stay in my pocket."

"I came out here on a visit, sir."

"Jones, you are a liar. Come on, Reg, he does not want this money."

"Oh! well, sir, since you put it that way, and since I know you are gentlemen, I will confide in you. It was like this: One day I was standing at a street corner wondering where my next meal would come from, when a swell joker comes along, and says to me: 'Do you want to earn a bob?' 'Rather, sir,' says I, 'how?' 'By just follering me and carrying this parcel.' 'Right!' says I, and I started off after him, pleased as anything at earning a bob so easily; but I had not gone far when a bobby comes up and says, 'Here's the man,' and he arrested me, what for I don't know. All I do know was, that I was brought before a beak and charged with stealing. I told him the whole story, but all he said was, 'ten years' penal servitude.' That's how I come out here, so help me G—"

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"I don't wonder at the magistrate not believing you, Jones. You are an infernal, grey-headed, mouldy old liar. That yarn is as old as the hills, and since you cannot speak the truth we will go by ourselves," said Hal, coming forward and taking the keys from his hands.

"Hold on, Hal," said Reg. "Don't be too hard on the old chap."

"My dear Reg, I really can't stand such——"

"Oh, give him another chance. Come here, Jones. You see you have disgusted this gentleman. Now, out with the whole truth, or you'll lose your tip."

"Well, I can't see what it's to do with you," said Jones, in a sulkily aggressive tone. "But if you wants it so very particular, I'll tell you. I was poaching, and was nabbed. A keeper happened to be wounded, and they said I did it. I didn't say I didn't do it. That's all."

"That's better, Jones; now we are satisfied."

They spent an hour or two wandering with great interest over the ruins: now inside the huge penitentiary, now in the prison church. Everywhere ruin and desolation stared them in the face. All over the settlement vast walls lay crumbling to pieces, due almost as much to the destructive curiosity of the thousands of tourists, who flock here in the summer months, as to the effacing fingers of Time.

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Camden met them on their return, and told them they had just sufficient time to dine before a butcher's cart would start for Port Arthur, in which they could have a lift to Norfolk Bay. Two hours later they were again on the *Tarantula* making for Hobart.

CHAPTER XIV

[Pg 182]

EASTELLA.

When the boys, as Goody always called them and we will follow his example, left, he returned to his hotel to think the matter over. So much had occurred in such a short time; momentous events had succeeded each other so rapidly that he felt bewildered and unable to think coherently, so he retired to rest to sleep away the cobwebs in his brain. He awoke somewhat refreshed, and decided to pay a visit to Mrs. Eastwood, and, if possible, to see his daughter. Hal's telegram announcing Wyck's escape, was put in his hands as he was leaving the hotel. "Well," he mused to himself, "I am just as well pleased that he has got away, for it would have brought about a scandal, and my name and May's must have been made public; but there can be no doubt those boys have not only saved my life, but my honour too."

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At Eastella he received a cordial welcome, for Mrs. Eastwood and he had been friends for many years. Her sympathetic soul soon noticed that he was in sore trouble, and he was at once invited to her little office where they could talk undisturbed.

"Sit down, Mr. Goodchild, I want to give you a lecture. What have you been doing to my darling May? you who used to be so fond of her, that she has to run away to me; and she comes here so altered. All her light-heartedness is gone; she never goes out; receives no friends; and does nothing but mope inside the house. The only time she brightens up is when she asks for letters or telegrams. In fact she is breaking her heart, and you, though you won't own it, are doing the same."

"You are altogether mistaken, it is not——"

"No, of course it is not your fault; how could it be? No, sir, you need not try to throw dust in my eyes. I have known both of you for so many years, and I think too much of you both to see this going on without attempting to put matters straight."

"It's not I she's breaking her heart over. It's Wyckliffe: he's the man who has come between us, and who alone has done all this mischief. You had a gentleman here last night. I don't know what he told you."

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"He did not say much. He referred me to you. But what became of him? Like most young fellows, I suppose he went out exploring the city by night, and lost his way."

"No, there you wrong him, madam, for as soon as he heard Wyckliffe was at Port Arthur he came back to me, and then hired a steamer to take him and his friend down there. I saw them off last night, and, see, here is a wire I got this morning. It reads:

'Mr. Goodchild, Hobart.

He has left here. Destination unknown. Suspicions well grounded.—Winter."

"I shall feel obliged if you can give me a little explanation, for Mr. Wyckliffe was staying here for several days, and I took a great fancy to him. You connect your daughter's ill-health with him; and finally you produce a telegram saying 'suspicions well-grounded.' I must say I cannot understand it. Help me to do so," said the lady, shifting about in her chair, in the fidgetty,

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uncomfortable way women have when they are puzzled.

"Well, the fact of the matter is that this fellow Wyckliffe is an English adventurer, and a scoundrel of the blackest dye. He passes as a gentleman, and his intentions from what I can learn are never of a very honourable description. Mr. Winter and his friend Morris are on his tracks for an affair something similar, but as they will both be here to-night, I would rather leave them to explain. I wish now to see my daughter to try and bring her to reason."

"And God grant you may," said Mrs. Eastwood, fervently. "You will find her in the Blue Room on the first floor."

Goody left the office, and hurrying up the stairs paused before a door painted a sky-blue colour. He knocked and a melancholy voice bade him enter. Opening the door, the sight that met his eyes almost unmanned him. Seated, or rather reclining as if she had flung herself there, in an arm-chair was his daughter, clad in a loose dressing-gown, carelessly thrown on. She presented a most forlorn appearance. All her bright, healthy colour had disappeared from her cheeks and her whole appearance was that of one suffering from severe mental worry.

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"Is that you, father? I thought it was Mrs. Eastwood. Why have you followed me?" she said, in a low, sad voice.

"My darling girl. I could not stay away any longer; it was killing me," said the old man, in a despairing voice, as he embraced her fondly. "May, darling, tell your old dad your troubles, and let him help you to bear them."

The old man's appeal was intensely pathetic in its simplicity, and would under ordinary conditions have touched a harder heart than his daughter's; but she remained deaf to it; her manner was icily cold; the fond embrace was not returned, and though she kissed him, it was done mechanically, and the touch of her lips chilled him and made him shiver with apprehension. Her nature seemed frozen under some strange spell, and the old man stood helpless and bewildered by her side.

"Won't you confide in your old dad, May?" he asked again.

"My dear father, it hurts me to see you crying; but I cannot, I cannot do what you ask."

"You mean that you cannot trust your father, May."

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"It's not that, father. You do not understand," and she restlessly turned her head away and almost moaned. "I wonder if Mrs. Eastwood is coming up?"

"If you want her, my dear, I will tell her," said the old man, now becoming visibly annoyed.

"Yes, I do, father. I do want her," and she lay back again and covered her face.

Goody left the room without another word in an agitated state and, meeting Mrs. Eastwood on the stairs, told her May wanted her, then he quitted the house and took a cab back to the "Orient" to await the arrival of the boys. He reached the hotel not in the best of humours. He was one of those simple-minded men unused to the analysis of complicated emotions, and by turns his grief had changed to anger, his anger to complaint. Fretfully he muttered to himself that it was too bad that after all these years of unchequered happiness a stranger should step in and destroy everything at one blow; that he should be made to feel he was no longer an element in his daughter's happiness. And his anger increased as his sense of injury grew stronger, until he clenched his fist and thundered to the empty room:

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"May, you have turned against me; you have shown me you no longer want me. Well, then, I will shew you I no longer want—"

Here he came to a sudden pause. His voice trembled, his anger wavered, for, by a sudden wave of memory, he caught himself listening again to the voice of his dying wife as she handed over to him the care of the child whose advent they had welcomed so much in the long past. At the magic touch of the dead woman's memory his rage disappeared, his heart softened, and tears coursed down his cheeks, and he vowed not to forsake his daughter yet, and prayed for a way out of his difficulty.

As if in answer to his unspoken wish, he heard footsteps approaching and, with a glad cry of welcome, he grasped the hands of Hal and Reg. They, in their turn, noticed his altered appearance, and asked if anything had happened.

"I called on her to-day, and was given to understand I was not wanted," he said in a sad voice.

"We'll fix that all right, Mr. Goodchild," said Hal in his hearty way. And then he told him all that had happened during their trip to Port Arthur.

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"Do you think he was referring to May when he spoke of a young lady joining him?" asked Goody when Hal had finished.

"I do, sir."

"And what conclusion do you draw from that?"

"Only the worst, sir, I am afraid."

"And you have no idea where he has gone now?"

"None, whatever. We called at the telegraph office and asked the shipping agent, but without result."

"I hope the scoundrel will be drowned."

"I hope not," chimed in Reg, emphatically.

"I don't think you need fear that," said Hal with light cynicism. "Fellows of his stamp have nine lives. If he were a useful man in the world then I should despair."

"What do you intend doing now?" asked Goody, anxiously.

"We intend going to Eastella and bringing your daughter to reason," said Hal, with determination.

"I admire your perseverance, but I am afraid you will be doomed to disappointment, for she always had a will of her own, but I never knew how strong it was until now." [Pg 190]

"Never fear, sir. So far we have succeeded and I have no doubt our success will continue."

"And what shall I do?" asked Goody.

"Well, if you have any friends here, I suggest you should go to them for a day or two."

"You don't mean to desert me?" asked the old man, with a perplexity almost comic.

"Not by any means, sir. But we intend to live at Eastella, and for many reasons it would be better for you not to go with us. If we left you alone, I am afraid you would fret and worry, so I thought if you had an old acquaintance who would cheer you up—"

"Now I understand. I have plenty. There's old Brown, for one—he and I were schoolfellows. I know he'll be glad to see me."

"That's right. Let us know where she lives. And now get ready and rely on us to wire to you when it's time to come back and open your arms to take your daughter back to your heart again, from which you will find she has never really been estranged." [Pg 191]

That evening all three had left the "Orient"; Hal and Reg for Eastella, and Goody for his old friend's house at Broadmeadows.

CHAPTER XV.

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MAY.

As soon as the boys had made satisfactory arrangements about their rooms they had a long interview with Mrs. Eastwood, and as she was considered almost one of the Goodchild family, nothing of importance was kept back from her. It was arranged that Hal should be introduced to Miss Goodchild at the earliest possible moment. Fortune favoured their plot, for while they were together the lady herself appeared to enquire for letters, and with obvious reluctance underwent the ceremony of introduction to the two visitors.

May Goodchild was a tall, good-looking girl, with fair hair and pleasing features. Her face shewed her to possess a strong capacity for strong emotions, an intensity of love or hatred, both equally dangerous when roused. Hal's sharpened faculties of observation had made him a keen physiognomist and, in the brief moment of introduction he flattered himself he had read the chief points of her character. [Pg 193]

She was about to leave the room, after looking at the letter-rack, when Hal who had been gazing at the rack, remarked in a casual manner to Mrs. Eastwood:

"Wyckliffe must have a large number of correspondents to judge by the heap of letters waiting for him here."

Miss Goodchild paused. She was on the *qui vive* instantly.

"You know Mr. Wyckliffe, don't you, Mr. Winter?" said Mrs. Eastwood, taking the cue.

"Oh yes, rather! known him a long time. I heard from him the other day," answered Hal, boldly.

May walked away, but not hurriedly, and Hal, seizing his opportunity, followed her out of the room.

"What a delightful morning, Miss Goodchild."

"Yes, it is," she answered. Then after a pause, she added, "Mr. Winter, you said you had heard from Mr. Wyckliffe. Can you tell me when he will return, as he is a friend of mine." [Pg 194]

"Now I remember, Miss Goodchild. I have important news for you concerning him."

"What! news of him for me. Oh! tell me at once, please," and her whole face lit up with expectation.

"It is rather a long story," said Hal. "If we could talk together privately it would be preferable."

"Oh, I'll arrange that. You can come to my sitting-room. I'll just run and tell Mrs. Eastwood," and away she flew in a happy, childish way, very different to her languid manner previously. Mrs. Eastwood could scarcely believe, her eyes as the girl rushed into the office, crying:

"He has news for me. I am taking him to my parlour."

"This way, Mr. Winter," she cried out, as she re-appeared and ran up the stairs. "Do hurry, I am so anxious. There, come this way and sit down. Now we are quite private. Go on."

Her haste had left Hal breathless, and he was rather taken aback, as he had scarcely had time to formulate his plan of action.

"Before I commence, I wish to ask your permission to—"

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"It is granted," she said, hurriedly.

"Your permission to speak in an open and candid way, and that you will hear me out to the end."

"Most decidedly, but why this precaution? You said Wyck was a friend of yours."

"Pardon me, Miss Goodchild, I never said he was a friend of mine. He is anything but that."

"But you will bear in mind, sir, he is a friend of mine, and if you have anything to his disparagement to say I would rather not hear it for I love him. There now it is out."

"I am obliged for your candour, but as what I have to say is not to his credit, I had better leave."

"No sir, since you put it that way, I will hear you."

Once more was the tale repeated, but never before with the strength and pathos that Hal put into his voice now. At the conclusion, neither spoke for some moments. At last, May broke the silence:

"You can prove your statements, Mr. Winter?"

"Yes, unfortunately for my friend I can. They have left undoubted traces behind them."

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"If you can prove them, and Wyck turns out the villain you say, think for a moment what the result will be. I am no ordinary girl full of puling sentiment. I love or I hate, and if my love is trampled on, there is a dangerous woman to be faced who will thirst for revenge. So be careful," and her voice took a stern, menacing tone.

"Would you like Mr. Morris to corroborate all I have said?" asked Hal, struck with the change in her, and feeling she was all she described herself.

The waiter was summoned, and bidden to fetch Morris.

"Reg, I have told Miss Goodchild all about Wyck. Will you give her your version?" said Hal, as Reg entered the room.

Reg told his story, and Miss Goodchild listened attentively, and said:

"Your accounts certainly tally, but you can give me, doubtless, further proof. You have now a desperate woman to deal with, and if you have lied to me, I will be revenged on both of you."

Hal for a moment was nonplussed. He had not doubted that his statements would not be believed. [Pg 197]

But Reg came to his rescue.

"We could procure that telegram from Port Arthur, and we could get the landlord to certify to his story."

"That is certainly a small point in your favour, but is it the best proof you can produce?" asked May.

"No, I have a letter here addressed to Wyckcliffe. I know the hand-writing, and I am confident it would afford you conclusive proof that he is involved with other ladies."

"Do you mean to say you would be mean enough to suggest that the letter should be opened?" asked May, in a disgusted tone.

"Yes, I mean it, since you doubt our word."

Here Reg deliberately tore open the envelope.

"Mr. Morris, you are a thief," cried May, excitedly. "Had I known you were capable of such a low action, I would never have received you here."

"Miss Goodchild, your hard words are uncalled for, but in spite of them I shall go farther yet. We met your father when your conduct had left him heart-broken, and we promised him to save you from the clutches of this scoundrel Wyckcliffe. And we will keep our word with or without your assistance. Your conduct to your father has been disgraceful, and it is not for your sake that we

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do this, but for his. And now I shall put the police on Wyck's tracks, and have him arrested. It is not the course I wanted to pursue, but having gone thus far I will go on to the end. Are you coming, Hal?" said Reg, as he got up to leave.

"Really, Reg, I think you ought to control yourself in this lady's presence, and not be too strong in your expressions," said Hal, going to him.

"Stay, Mr. Morris," said May, rising. "You are quite right in every word you have said about me. It is quite enough to convince me you are in earnest and, to show my belief I will read that letter."

Reg passed it to her, without a word, and she read aloud:

"Melbourne,
"Sunday.

"My own darling Wyck,

"Your poor little Kitty is crying and fretting for you; come back to her, my darling. I received your last letter, and roared over the contents. What fun you must have had with that old chap Goody, and his daughter. I would have given anything to have seen the old fellow lying on the deck yelling. But I say, my darling, I'm not jealous, but I did not like the other part of it. What a hussey the daughter must be! You say you are going to take her yachting, and that's she's a proud sort. I guess she won't be so proud when she comes back. You are a terror for girls, but I won't be jealous, as I know you only love me. But be quick and come back. I forgot to say that two fellows looking like toffs have been enquiring for you, and from what I can learn they don't mean you any good. They tried to pump Dick, and he sent you a wire, which you will have had long ago. My dear boy, do be careful. I am rather busy, but your little wife sends you hundreds of kisses. Good-bye, my own darling,

"Your ever loving

"KITTY HARRIS."

May read the letter through calmly, without a tremor in her voice. There was a supercilious curl of contempt on her lips as she finished. She gave vent to neither grief nor rage, for she was made of sterner stuff than those of her sex who faint and give way under stress of disappointment. A change had come over her whole being, one of those subtle changes that a moment of crisis can produce. The fickle, light-hearted girl had disappeared, the injured woman came to the front. There is this peculiarity about Australian girls. Outsiders consider them empty-headed and frivolous, for they have a light, lackadaisical manner of spending their lives, but lying dormant beneath is a nature with a purpose which once roused is relentless in its desire for exacting satisfaction. May Goodchild was a typical daughter of her land. She had given her heart honestly and wholly to the man she loved; she found he had accepted it only to trifle with it and dishonour her. It was enough. There was no trait in her nature to lead her to repine; it was entirely controlled by a dominant desire to punish the traitor. Hal could scarcely believe that this stern, resolute woman was the same woe-begone inanimate girl he had interviewed. She examined the letter carefully, noting its date and post-mark, and putting it into her pocket, said:

"I will keep this letter, Mr. Morris."

"I do not want it," said Reg. "Pray please yourself."

"I must apologise for my rudeness," she said, simply. "But you must allow I should not be the woman I am if under the original circumstances I had not defended the absent. Now all is changed; you have convinced me of his duplicity, and gentlemen"—here she held out one hand appealingly, and tears welled in her eyes—"an Australian girl thanks you with her whole heart for saving what is her most precious possession. By your help I have been able to free myself from a spell that bound me hand and foot. You have opened my eyes, and believe me, you will not find me ungrateful. Now, one more favour; will you kindly send for my father at once."

"We will wire at once," said Hal, leaving the room with his friend.

They despatched the message, and started for a stroll in the open air.

"Reg," said Hal, "you are improving. By what lucky chance did you get hold of that letter?"

"I am afraid it was hardly justifiable, but things were desperate," he said. "You see, when you and the girl went upstairs, I felt that your impetuous nature might have let you overlook the fact that we had no proofs against Wyck, so I determined to lay hands on some of his letters, and use them against him. By means of a little steaming I opened three; two were invitations, the third, which you have heard read, answered my requirements."

"Then you knew its contents all the time?"

"Of course, or I should not have presented it."

"Well, it has done our business for us," said Hal, satisfied.

"Yes, and Wyck has a dangerous customer to meet should he cross her path again. Her nature is of different construction to my Amy's, for she has strength and determination to shake herself free, and to turn the strength of her love into bitter hatred, whereas my poor girl succumbed."

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HOBART.

The next morning the boys had the satisfaction of seeing Goody and his daughter off by the first train. Neither Hal nor Reg was present at their reunion, and when they saw them together, they realized it was complete. No two people felt more indebted to their benefactors than this couple, and words failed them to express it. But their manner, their faces and their attitude to each other showed what was in their minds, though the only words that passed were a cordial, "Good-bye; God bless you," from Goody, and a few heartfelt words of thanks from his daughter.

The boys held a long consultation as to their future movements, but were unable to come to a more decisive conclusion than that they should wait results.

"Wyck," said Hal, "left in a small boat; he may be wrecked; he may be blown out to sea; he may run for shelter into one of the neighbouring bays on the East coast. We had better make arrangements with the telegraph station to inform their officers that if any boat answering to the description of Wyck's should turn up, we are to be informed of it immediately. Meanwhile, we will stop here." [Pg 204]

Mrs. Eastwood had had a long conversation both with Goody and his daughter, and this resulted in her holding a high opinion of the boys. As she moved in the best society of the district she determined to make their stay as enjoyable as possible. She procured them tickets for the Mayor's ball, an annual affair of great moment. They acknowledged to the full her kindly intentions, but explained to her why they avoided any pleasure or society that might draw them away from the fulfilment of their compact. A more practical objection was the fact that they had brought no dress clothes with them, but seeing the good lady's disappointment, Hal suggested that, as they should like to have a peep at Hobart society, they might gaze down upon it from the gallery.

This they did do, and Hal after taking the keenest interest in the animated scene below him, and commenting on all the features of the ball, was struck with remorse to find Reg sitting by his side with a pained face. The memories the scene called up were too bitter, and it was with a sense of relief when Hal got up hurriedly and left. [Pg 205]

"I'm sorry, old chap. I'm a brute," he said, when they were outside.

"Don't talk like that," answered Reg. "You are one in ten thousand. Where could one find another fellow such as you are, gifted with all that makes life worth the living; ready to throw up everything to help a chance stranger. It's I who am the brute, old fellow, to expect you to be tied to the vow you made."

"I don't like you to say that," said Hal. "I shall never regret having met you, and I thank my stars we were thrown together, and that I am able to help you."

A silent hand-clasp was Reg's only answer, and as Hal gripped his in return, both knew that the bond between them was stronger than ever.

In reply to Mrs. Eastwood's enquiries, Hal said he found looking-on most enjoyable, and agreed there was as nice a lot of good-looking girls present as one could find. [Pg 206]

"Would you care to go to the Mayor's garden party this afternoon?" she asked.

"What, a garden party to-day, after dancing till three in the morning! In England they would just be thinking of having breakfast," said Morris, in surprise.

"Ah, we do things differently in the colonies."

"And a very good thing you do," was Reg's emphatic reply, as the obliging lady left them together.

"You seemed to find scrutinising those fair damsels an interesting occupation last night, Hal," he observed to his friend.

"So I did, my boy. You see, Tasmanian women have many points of difference compared to those in the other colonies. Tasmania is only a small island and the inhabitants, especially in the South, do not trouble themselves much about business or anything that conduces to worry. They pass their days in happy serenity so long as they have enough to live upon. Being a very healthy country, the birth-rate is enormous, considering the population. It is no uncommon thing to find families of fifteen to twenty, all alive and well, girls, of course, preponderating. Now, as Tasmania has no factories or important industries, the boys when they grow up emigrate to other colonies to make a livelihood; the girls remain behind, so the proportion of women to men is about ten to one." [Pg 207]

"No wonder Wyck came on here," said Reg, grimly.

"The Tasmanian girls," continued Hal, not deigning to notice the interruption, "are noted for their

beauty. Nearly all the beautiful women in Melbourne and Sydney are Tasmanian born."

"Well I cannot say I am much struck with their beauty. They have nice complexions, but not beauty of form," objected Reg.

"Wait a minute, I am coming to that. I always compare Tasmanian girls to Tasmanian race-horses, though perhaps the former might not feel flattered. They have here some of the finest studs in the colonies. There are sires whose foals have won all the leading events of the neighbouring colonies, but strange to say none of them can do anything in their own country. It is only when they are sent to the training stables in Melbourne and Sydney to be properly brought up that they turn out well. So it is with the girls; they have to be finished off in Melbourne and Sydney. Their rosy cheeks and fresh complexion are retained, but their *gaucheries* of manner and clumsiness of figure are pruned away."

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"There's a deal in what you say, Hal, but I have a liking for this little spot. Everything surrounding you is so peaceful; the scenery is so beautiful that it is an island paradise."

"Yes, it's a nice place to live in, if you have money to spend; otherwise it is dull."

"Like all pleasure resorts. But there is a delightful air of laziness about it. Nobody seems in a hurry. It is such a contrast to the bustle of Melbourne."

"And such a harbour, eh?"

"Yes, it's the finest I've ever seen."

"If you ever get to Sydney you will see one better."

"Here's a note from the telegraph office for you," said Mrs. Eastwood, hurrying in.

Hal opened it and read:

"Sydney.

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"S.S. *Flora*, from Hobart, arrived to-day with Villiers Wyckliffe and crew rescued from yacht totally wrecked.

"Agents—T. S. W. Coy."

"That's awkward. Sydney is a long way off and it gives him a good start. What's the paper say, Reg?"

"*Corrinna* leaves Launceston for Sydney to-morrow at noon. Train leaving here at 7 a.m., arrives there 11.30."

"I'll wire Goody another copy of this telegram."

"No bad news, I hope, gentlemen," asked Mrs. Eastwood, entering.

"In one sense it is good, in another, unfortunate," said Hal, handing her the telegram to read.

"It's a pity he was not drowned," she answered, mercilessly, handing the telegram back. "However, it will cost him a pretty penny, as Macpherson valued his yacht very highly."

"We shall leave by the first train to-morrow. I am now going to wire to Mr. Goodchild."

The next morning they were up betimes, and had considerable difficulty in settling their account with Mrs. Eastwood.

"I am sorry you treat your stay beneath my roof as a matter of business," she complained, "You have repaid me twenty times over by what you have done for the Goodchilds. They are my oldest friends, and I look upon May as a daughter. You have made some good and true friends, who will be heavily indebted to you until you give them one day an opportunity of shewing some acknowledgment."

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"You are making too much, Mrs. Eastwood, of the service we have been able to render them. We have our work marked out for us, and until it is finished there is neither rest nor leisure for us. When it is finished we shall come and stay with you and your friends, for more hospitable people we have rarely met," said Reg, as he bade her good-bye.

After an uninteresting train ride they reached Launceston, and found, to their surprise, Goody waiting for them.

"Are you going on to Sydney, to-day?" he asked.

"Yes. How is Miss Goodchild?"

"Very well, thanks. She and I are going over too. You had better come to my trap here," and he led the way to a handsome barouche.

"My daughter is down at the steamer making arrangements," he said, when they were seated, and being driven to the wharf. Goody still had an anxious look about him, and seemed somewhat disturbed.

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"Here we are, boys, jump out, and never mind the luggage. George will see to that." With

astonishing activity the old man ran up the gangway, followed by the boys, and found May waiting for them. Their greetings were of the simplest, and May calling the chief steward told him to shew the gentlemen their cabins, while Goody handed Hal an envelope as they followed. On opening it he found it contained their tickets to Sydney.

"I say, Reg, they seem determined to run the show here," said he. "We have done nothing but what we were told to do since we left the train. What do you think of it?"

"I think we had better appear grateful. They are evidently anxious to do something in return."

They arranged their berths and returned on deck as the ship was leaving the wharf. Goody and his daughter seemed to be popular, judging from the number of friends who came to see them off. Once started, the two were always together, and it was pathetic to watch the way in which the old man's eyes rested continually on his daughter. He told Reg they had only made up their minds to go to Sydney when the wire reached them. His daughter wished to go, as she had some plan in her head which she wouldn't let him know of yet, and he continued, sadly, "she will never be to me what she once was. She was then an innocent child, now she is a resolute woman. She seems ten years older in her manner and speech. She is going to a cousin of hers who has the reputation of being a bit lively, but is an excellent girl at heart."

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"I cannot tell what steps I shall take," said May, at the same time, to Hal. "That depends on my cousin, Hil. I shall follow her advice, for I have not the slightest doubt that she'll assist me to be revenged."

"Do you mean to follow Wyck up as we are doing?" asked Hal, laughing.

"I can't say what I shall do until I see her."

"Of course you will give us your address, so that we can keep you informed if we accomplish anything."

"'Grosvenor Hotel' will always find us."

"I should like to know if we can be of any assistance to you before we arrive, because we have our work to do, and goodness knows where Wyck will be by the time we reach Sydney, and we may not see you again for some time."

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"If I wanted anything ever so badly, I would not ask you for it, for you have your own work cut out, and in doing that successfully you will greatly please both me and my father."

May evidently wishing to take an independent course, Hal did not trouble her further. He felt the friendship now established between them was likely to be a lasting one, for Australians never forget a kind action.

CHAPTER XVII.

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SYDNEY.

At day-break the steamer entered that splendid harbour, second to none in the world, and made for Port Jackson. The magnificent scenery and its ever-varying vista of lovely views were unheeded by the boys in their restlessness to get ashore and find traces of their quarry. As soon as the boat was made fast, they hurried ashore with their baggage and passed rapidly the sleepy inspection of a Customs' official. Hailing a cab and directing the driver to Tattersall's Hotel, another surprise awaited them, for, seated by the side of the driver, was the familiar face of Terence O'Flynn.

"Hallo, Terence. What are you doing here?" asked Hal, in astonishment.

"Just over for a holiday, your honour," answered he, at the same time giving an expressive wink, so Hal said no more but jumped in.

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Arriving at the hotel, Terence carried their baggage inside, followed closely by Hal and Reg.

"I was after following Dick over here, sir," he said, hurriedly. "Wyck left for Brisbane two days ago. I wired to Hobart, but, having no reply, so faith I reckoned you had left. I should like to have a talk beside you, but sure I want to do another trip with my mate, I will come back in a quarter-of-an-hour."

On his return the three adjourned to a private room, and Terence told his story.

"'The devil' says I as I read about Wyck being picked up and landed at Sydney. I had been keeping a sharp eye on Dick, and when I sees a boy bring him a telegram I guessed something was in the wind, so when he put a pal on his cab, I followed suit. We both came by the express, and I took good care Dick should not spot me. When we arrived, he calls a cab, as bold as brass, and sings out, 'Grosvenor Hotel.' I didn't follow him there, but went to Moloney's house. That was Moloney's cab we were in, for Jim and myself are old friends. Yer see, him and me was courting the same——"

"Never mind that, Terence. Go on. What did you do next?"

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"I just kept my eyes on them, and several times see them together, and the day afore yesterday I see them going to the wharf, and Wyck goes aboard one of the Queensland boats. Dick stayed till the boat left, waved his hat like mad, and then went off to a pub and got awfully tight. Next day he went back home by the train, and I would have gone too, only Jim got me to stop for his baby's christening, as I was to be godfather. I did stop yer honours, and we did christen that baby, both inside and out. Jim and meself went on the spree, and a right good time we had, so help me——"

"Never mind that, Terence. Has Dick had any more soft lines since?"

"No more that I know of, your honour."

"Did he not have one to St. Kilda?"

"Och, moi! I knew it: by jabbers I did. Directly I heard it, I knew it," shrieked Terence, excitedly, and he lay back, and went off into one of his laughing fits. He rolled in his seat, and swayed to and fro, fairly roaring with laughter. Hal and Reg looked on in quiet amusement, and when Terence had subsided somewhat, Hal said, sternly:

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"Terence O'Flynn, when you have finished your laugh, you will, perhaps, let us into the joke."

"Beg pardon, your honours," jerked out Terence. "But it was a joke. Poor old Dick," and off he started again.

"Go on, Terence, have another try," said Reg.

"No, no, but you know the joke. I know you did it, and ye did it well, too."

"If you will tell us what it was, we shall be able to judge," said Hal, quietly, which sobered Terence.

"I'll tell you, then. It was a couple of days after you'd left for Tasmania, when Dick comes up to me and Joe Gardiner—that's another cabby. He comes up smiling, in fact regular grinning, and flashes a letter in front of us. 'See here, chaps,' says he, 'this is the sort of game that pays. Darn your shilling fares, says I; this is my style.' The letter was from some toff, 'cause it come from Menzie's Hotel. It asked Dick to meet him at St. Kilda. 'See what it is to have a connection. This 'ere chap was recommended to call on me, and I knows his game. I've just got to get a good turn-out and drive down to the beach, call at the pub and get a letter which will give me instructions where to meet him. Then I picks up a flash gent with a little, innercent girl, and they'll get into the cab. 'Straight home, cabby,' he'll cry, 'we've missed the train.' That'll mean that I'm to go in the opposite direction where there ain't no houses, and if I hear screamers I never listens. Then I get home about three; there's a big row, but I get a tenner for the job.' 'Well, Dick,' says Joe, who is a good-hearted sort of chap, 'if I thought anything of that kind was going on in my cab, a hundred wouldn't buy me, but I'd take the horse-whip to him.' 'Shure,' says I, 'I would put the blackguard in the sea, and drown him just.' 'Ha, ha,' laughs Dick, 'it wouldn't do for us all to be so soft, else half of us would starve. Now I'll just tell you chaps how I serve my customers. I just go round to Wallace's and get the best turn-out he has, and I guess we'll cut a dash.' Then he got in his cab and drove away. Neither me nor Joe envied him his tenner. Next day Dick came up to the stand looking terrible black. He cursed and swore, and looked as if he'd had a big drop too much. 'Have a good time last night,' says I to him, civil like. 'No, blast yer; go to—' he says. I never spoke no more, but after a bit he comes up to me and says—'Terry, those beggars had me last night; it was a put-up job.' 'Go on,' says I, 'the infernal scoundrels, how did they do it?' He swore a terrible lot, and 'twixt his swears I made out that he had hired a turn-out that cost him thirty bob, and drove quietly to St. Kilda, smiling all the way. He waits till nearly eleven, and refused two good fares, then goes to the Pier Hotel, and asks if there is a letter for him. The barman hands him one, and he was so pleased he called for drinks all round and spent about three bob that way. Then he says good-night, goes to a lamp-post to read his letter, which said something about swindlers being swindled, and policy being the greatest honesty, or something like that. He was out till nearly three, and never earned a bob. Joe had come up behind, and heard the yarn, and we both let out a yell. Dick he swore awful, and jumped on his cab and drove away. He got fined for being drunk on his cab that night. And now it's all the joke on the ranks. 'Going St. Kilda, Dick'—'Any more ten-pound jobs, Dick,' and he does get blooming wild." Here Terence roared again, and this time the boys joined in.

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"Have another drink, Terence. You told that well," said Reg.

"But it was your honours that did it, I know."

"Yes, we did it, Terence," answered Hal, "Dick had us and we returned the compliment, and here's a tenner for your trouble. Now you had better go back to Melbourne by to-day's express and keep your eye on Dick. Our address will be Brisbane."

"Right, your honours. I'm off."

"I have been looking through the "Herald," said Reg, when they were alone, "and I find there are two companies trading between here and Brisbane, the Howard Smith line and the A.U.S.N. Company; one has a boat leaving to-day at twelve, the other at two."

"That's good. We will have a look at the boats and see which we like best, and as there is no time to be lost, let us start at once."

The *Buninyong*, of the Howard Smith line, and the *Maranoa*, of the rival company, were both examined, and the preference given to the former.

"Sydney seems a delightful place. I am almost loth to leave it so soon," said Reg.

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"We'll have plenty of time when we have caught our man," said Hal. "I'll now go to the Tasmanian Company's offices and hear all about the rescue."

There he learnt the captain's report, that he picked up Wyckliffe and four men off a raft, about six hours from Hobart. The rescued reported they had been capsized while trying to fetch Maria Island.

At twelve o'clock the *Buninyong*, with a full passenger list including the boys, sailed for Brisbane.

CHAPTER XVIII.

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THE GIRLS.

Had Reg and Hal not been in such a great hurry when they landed at Sydney, they might have noticed a young lady not unlike May standing on the wharf scanning the passengers very closely. When she caught sight of the Goodchilds, she jumped on board and embraced both May and her father.

"I have had your wires, May, and all arrangements are made," she said, with an air of decision.

"Have you seen him, Hil?"

"Yes, he went to Brisbane two days ago. We will follow him, May," she answered, quietly; then, turning to Goody, said, "you will, of course, stay at the 'Grosvenor', uncle."

"Well, I don't know, Hilda. What is May going to do?"

"I have my carriage here. You had better come with us and send your luggage on to the hotel," said she, in her decisive way, as if she were accustomed to help people make up their minds.

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"As you please," said Goody, with a sigh, resigning himself to the inevitable.

All three stepped into Hilda's conveyance, and were rapidly driven in the direction of Potts' Point and set down at the door of a handsome mansion surrounded by extensive grounds that overlooked the bay.

"Now, uncle, you must excuse us for a little while, as we have a lot to talk about," said Hil, leading May away to her own room, and leaving Goody to amuse himself in the drawing-room.

"Now then, May, to business," said she, promptly seating herself by her cousin's side. "When I received your wires I was rather upset, and spent a good deal of my anger on that man. I went off to the 'Grosvenor,' where I found out he was staying, and saw him come out with a low-looking fellow. They both got into a cab on which was a lot of luggage, and I guessed he was off, so I hailed another cab and followed them. We came to the wharf where the *Glanworth* was lying, and they went on board. I waited till the boat sailed, saw him bid good-bye to his companion, who seemed very excited, and then came home. That we had to follow him I looked upon as certain, but how? We could not follow him in the costume of ladies, that would make us look ridiculous."

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"How are we to go then?" asked May, impatient with excitement.

"Please don't interrupt. You shall hear all if you are patient," said Hil, smiling. "I thought over it a good deal, and then the idea struck me that we would go to Brisbane as ladies disguised and, if he cleared to the country, we would follow as men."

"Oh, Hil!" cried May, laughing.

"Of course, you know when I am out on my station and there is a buck-jumper to ride I always wear trousers, as one can get a better grip."

"Yes, I have heard father speak of that. Now, go on."

"Another thing, I have done a lot in private theatricals, and I invariably take a man's part, and I flatter myself I am so *au fait* at the make-up that I can easily pass as a man. I have several suits of men's clothes among my 'props,' and as you are about my size, they will fit you well. Now, what do you say?"

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"That you are a darling old girl. Come here and be hugged."

"Then that's settled. Now we had better leave to-day. There are two boats starting, one at twelve and the other at two and, as they are both good boats, I think we had better go by the later one, as it will give us more time to get ready."

"I am quite agreeable, my dear. But we must tell dad what we intend doing."

"Not about the men's clothes."

"No, that we will keep to ourselves. What fun it will be!"

"Well, have you settled your plans?" asked Goody, as they entered the drawing-room, which they found him pacing restlessly.

"We leave for Brisbane to-day," said May.

"So you are going to leave your old dad again," he asked, sorrowfully.

"Yes, father, duty calls us and we must obey."

"Uncle," said Hil, coming to him and taking his arm, caressingly. "Your daughter was saved by two Australians from the clutches of one of England's gentlemen. If you were young and strong it would be your duty to avenge your daughter's wrongs; if you had a son the duty would fall on her brother, but you are too old for work of that kind and consequently the duty falls on her."

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"But, my dear girl, I—"

"Stay, uncle, hear me out. She does not go alone, for I go with her. She is my cousin, for her mother was my mother's sister, so we are of the same blood, and our blood calls out for revenge."

"Really, you are—"

"We are going, yes; I'll tell you why. An Australian girl has been wronged by an Englishman and, though we may be proud to count England as our mother-country, we are not going to allow her sons to insult us with impunity. We Australians are made of as good grit, and one day we shall put Australia in its true place, when we have Australia for the Australians."

"Hear, hear, Hil! That's the true Australian sentiment."

"My dear children, you are young and foolish and do not know what you are talking of," said Goody, becoming annoyed.

"Don't we," continued Hil, with imperturbable good-humour. "We leave loyalty and bowing down to Her Most Gracious Majesty to you old people. When our young generation grows strong enough to assert itself, you'll see what you will see," and she touched a bell and ordered refreshments.

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"It's eleven o'clock now, Hil," said May.

"Then we must be getting ready. You will go to the hotel, uncle, and we will send you word how we are getting on."

"Yes do, father," said May, throwing her arms round his neck. "Let me go this time and then we will stay at home together, and never be parted any more."

"As you will, my dear," said he, giving in, with evident reluctance.

"Now then, May," said Hil, when they had bidden the old man good-bye, "I want you to tell me how you became mixed up with that fellow, for I must confess I saw nothing striking in him."

"I'll tell you all about it. My father and I started on our journey as usual. When we were on deck, it came on to blow and we decided to go below. I was going down the companion-way, dad following behind, when he trod on my skirt, which gave me a sudden jerk, just at the same moment that the ship lurched, and I lost my balance and fell. I had noticed a young man waiting below for me to come down. He saw my danger and, instead of falling on the floor, I fell into his arms. I came down pretty heavily, for we both landed on the floor, I on the top. Several men came to our assistance, and when I was getting up, I found a button of his coat had become fixed in my hair. I had to lean over while he released it, and in doing so my face came close to his, and, looking up, I found him gazing at me in a curiously fixed way. Here the strange part of it comes in. I found it difficult to take my eyes off him and, as he gazed, I felt a peculiar sensation through me, and instantly realized he was to be my fate. As I left with dad my brain seemed to be fixed on him. I seemed to belong to him and, when he asked me to walk on deck with him, I was literally powerless to refuse. The rest you know."

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"Did you see him in Tasmania?" asked Hil, thoughtfully.

"Yes, twice. He came to our place unknown to dad. We were to have met again on the following day, but he sent me a note, saying he was going to Hobart, and he wished me to join him. I could not resist, so I went two days later."

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"But what about the yacht?"

"He mentioned in the letter his intention to go for a cruise, and that I was to meet him at Port Arthur. I was preparing to get ready when Reg and Hal—I mean Mr. Morris and Mr. Winter—came on the scene, and here I am."

"They are fine fellows, and they don't belie their looks," said Hil, seriously.

"Why, how do you know?"

"I watched them closely as the boat was coming alongside the wharf. I picked them out at once."

"If they had waited we might have given them some information."

"Let them find out, my dear. We'll shew them we are as good as they."

"But what if they should find out and go by the same boat."

"Then we will go by train. But come now and I will shew you our clothes, besides we must have our hair cut short, so that we will be able to use a wig when we resume our discarded sex."

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An hour was spent in arranging their trunks and getting all necessaries together, and then they drove to the steam-boat offices and took a double-berthed cabin in the names of Miss Walker and Miss Williams, having previously found out that neither Hal nor Reg had booked berths.

"I noticed, May," said Hil, nudging her and smiling maliciously, "that you let slip their Christian names. Hal and Reg. They are very nice names. Which do you like the better of the two?"

"The names or the men?" queried May.

"Say the men for argument's sake."

"Well, I think I rather like Reg, although both are good fellows. I felt for Reg though, awfully, when he told me his sad story."

"And Hal?"

"An awfully nice fellow and, I should say, very clever and a valuable help to Reg, I should think. While Reg is all earnestness and determination Hal seems to be quick at grasping situations and between the two, to say nothing of ourselves, Wyck is likely to have a bad time."

"Be quick and let us get out of sight, for what would Society say if I was discovered going on this errand? There are so many of the Mrs. Grundy type who would be delighted to put it in print."

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"But, surely, you don't mind?"

"No, my dear, I once taught Society a lesson it will not forget. I was thinking of your father, he is propriety itself."

"Quite right, Hil, we must not be seen and, as I think we have everything now, we had better lose no time in getting on board."

Thus Hil and May, whom we shall know for the future as "the girls" went on board the *Maranoa*, and at two o'clock the good ship left the harbour for Brisbane.

CHAPTER XIX.

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HIL.

While the two steamers are ploughing their way to Brisbane, the one with the boys, the other with the girls, on board, it will not be amiss if the narrative pause for a moment for the purpose of presenting the reader with an ampler picture of the singular personality of Hil.

Hilda Mannahill was the daughter of the late Samuel Mannahill, who died when she was ten years old. Three months later she lost her mother. Few men were more respected and beloved than Sam Mannahill, as he was familiarly called. He was a self-made man, who had landed in the colony in the early days, and by dint of hard work and upright dealing had become very wealthy. At his death he left behind him not only a vast fortune, which is a comparatively common circumstance, but also an honoured name, which is less so. After his wife's death the whole of his wealth passed to his daughter, Hilda, who at the time of our story was twenty-three years of age. Hilda would be best described as a jolly girl with no humbug about her. Simple in tastes, unaffected in manner, strikingly self-reliant, and as straight as a die in disposition, her inherited strength of character had been fostered and fortified at the expense of all the weaknesses of her sex, by the manner of her upbringing. Yet, withal, she was purely womanly. In appearance she was tall and fair, her figure slender but firmly-built; she was lissom in all her movements and a general air of independence, in harmony with the frankness of her speech and the directness of her gaze, hung around her. She was a large-hearted girl and no one but her banker knew of the thousands of pounds that were quietly distributed amongst the charities of the city every year: a decided eccentricity, and most directly opposed to the current method, which consists in having the name of the donor published in the leading papers, to be cabled over to England and brought at any cost under the notice of Her Majesty, in case there might be a spare title going begging. Had she wanted a title she could have had one, for it was well-known that a certain sprig of the nobility, when on a visit to the colonies, had graciously decided to make her and her fortune his own. "She is not much to look at, but her fortune is good," he had said to his friend, the Governor, who was complaining that he had given up his home and friends to spend five years penal servitude amongst those ignorant Australian savages. A few days after, therefore, the Honourable—it would be unfair to give his name—presented himself to Hilda, and was about to offer her his hand and heart, when he was stopped midway with the remark—"I am really very busy to-day. If

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it is a situation on one of my stations that you want, I will be pleased to mention your name to my manager, for I do not meddle with those matters myself." It is not known if he ever consulted the manager.

She now owned three large stations, besides city property and countless investments. The management of all this she had taken into her own hands on her coming of age. She then purchased Blue Gums, the handsome mansion in which we have seen her, where she shocked and scandalised Society for the moment by entertaining on her own account. Society salved its conscience by holding aloof from her for a few weeks, then thought better of it, and she was now one of the most prominent entertainers in Sydney. At Government House she was not a frequent visitor, the foppery and toadyism there were revolting to her. As she said, bluntly, "There's too much hypocrisy there for me!"

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As a schoolgirl she was somewhat tom-boyish and a recognised leader in the mild forms of mischief open to the limited capabilities of young ladies' academies. Memories of an heroic pillow-fight, in which she figured as a leader, still linger among her schoolfellows. But her happiest times were the holidays spent in the rough enjoyments of Australian station life.

Life on a station is an interesting phase of colonial existence. There are stations, of course, in these degenerate days, where a great deal of style and vulgar "side" is put on; where the house-servants are in livery; the dinner is served on silver plates, in empty mimicry of a ducal mansion; where all travelling sprigs of nobility are welcomed by the proprietor (who was probably a costermonger before his emigration) to whom he is glad to introduce his daughter with the scarcely-veiled recommendation that she has fifty thousand to carry in her hand to the right man, provided he has good English blue blood in his veins and none of the inferior colonial trickle. Fortunately for Hilda, she spent her holidays on a typical Australian station, managed on Australian lines, by an Australian owner, with Australian hands. Here she became an expert horsewoman and her fearless nature had full play in its stirring daily work, of which she always took her fair share. Her bosom friend and fellow-conspirator at school was Susan Tyton, the daughter of old Tyton, the owner of the station "Cattle Downs," and the two girls invariably contrived to be there during the annual muster, in the work of which she had been known to perform the duties of an experienced stockman.

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May had once listened, with vivid interest, to the following description by an old stockrider of one of her feats. He said—"I can see old Tyton now, coming out of the house, followed by the two girls, his daughter and Miss Mannahill. 'Now then, girls, if you are ready,' says old Tyton: and we bring them two of the horses. They have no ladies' saddles, no pommels to hold on to, only just a man's saddle with one stirrup, and it was a treat to see them spring into them and settle themselves down and quietly wait orders. They used to dress in short habit and leggings. The stockmen take one direction, and Tyton with his party take another, at full gallop, a pace they keep up for a mile or more. There is a big double in front of them and Tyton calls a halt, but the girls either do not or will not hear and, tightening their reins and over—up—over! they both fly the two high fences and calmly turn their horses' heads and open the gates for the others. They meet old Tyton's severe look with a smiling—'Don't be cross, we won't do it again. It was too tempting.' The old chap is too proud of them to say more than warn them not to take too much out of their horses. 'Gad!' adds the old fellow, 'I'd like some of them fashionable ladies who talk of their riding to see you two.' After a couple of hours' riding, they come across some black boys who have been keeping the cattle from going back to the hills. They now know that the outside boundary is reached. Fastened on each of their saddles is a stock whip, which each now takes off, and a few preliminary cracks are given. Fancy your town girls cracking and handling a whip sixteen feet long! After a short halt for a spell, Tyton himself gallops along the ranks and orders all to push on. That is the signal for a general shout, cracking of whips, barking of dogs, and yells from the niggers: soon there is one vast crowd of living animals in front of them. Now and then a refractory beast breaks away and rushes the ranks, but the horses are on the alert, and they soon round him in, for there is no tugging required—you merely stick to your pigskin. Hil and Susy are doing their share along the line and are about four hundred yards apart. Presently a small mob, led on by a huge black bull, charges right between them, and, followed by others, dashes back towards the mountains. The girls' horses are after them, but do not, as you may suppose, attempt to head them. They are quite content to ride alongside the leader, who, being in good forward condition, begins to blow. A signal is given, and both girls take a fierce grip of their whips, and make direct for the bull; he is nonplussed, seeing two horses coming in opposite directions and gradually slackens down until he comes to a stop, and there he stands pawing the ground, his tail erect, his eyes glistening. Like a stroke of lightning two horses pass him, and before he knows what's up he feels a couple of severe cuts across his head. This is repeated, and very soon he is glad to be allowed to turn back and go on peacefully. The girls meet and begin chatting on some outside topic, without a comment on their smart work. Gradually they draw closer to the ranks, and are once more in the line, having brought back the deserters. The big paddock, where the yards are, now comes in sight. It is recognised by some of the older cattle who have been in before, and they pull up and sniff the air, which means danger ahead, and puts the whole mob on the *qui vive*. This is about the most anxious time of all—to get a leader who will go easily: but should he turn obstinate they would rush the line, and the whole week's work would have to be repeated. Besides, in a mob like that, numbering close on ten thousand, hundreds would be either killed or seriously injured in their mad career. All seemed to recognise the dangerous situation, and Tyton begins to get anxious, especially as some of the leaders are snorting and shewing fight. Now it happened that that black bull and his party were one of the mobs nearest to the entrance; there was a clear run before them direct, so without consulting any one, the girls

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galloped into the mob, which separated before them, and got on to that bull again. A couple of smacks were enough. He was only too anxious to get out of their way, and made straight for the run, followed by his mob. The others followed suit, and the whole mob were in the big paddock. While this was going on, Tyton was a picture. He neither spoke nor moved. 'They're mad. They'll ruin all. Why, they've started the mob, the others are following. Oh, it's all right. Hurrah, we are saved! Hurrah, boys! Hurrah!' This is taken up, and even the black boys join in."

It was daring acts of this kind which had made Hilda the heroine of her own and Cattle Downs stations. Many were the tales told by the station hands of her feats of horsemanship and of the incorrigible buck-jumpers she had tamed. Moreover, she could box any man on the station. There was a certain amount of bush-romance attaching to her name, enough to have made her a legendary figure had she lived in mediæval times. And yet, withal, she was a thorough girl of her century, educated and refined, but endowed with a masculine strength and a rigid uprightness of character. She was a genuine product of the land which gave her birth and she shared with the fullest enthusiasm in the aspirations and ideals of young Australia.

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CHAPTER XX.

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BRISBANE.

True to her time, the *Maranoa* reached Moreton Bay, and entered for the mouth of the Brisbane river. Here the scenery was of an uncommon and striking description, but as they neared the town the river dwindled to a mere mud-hole, similar to that at Launceston. After some delay she was made fast alongside the *Buninyong*, which had maintained, during its voyage, the two hours' start it had had. Hilda had visited Brisbane before, and knew her way about, so the girls had perfected all their plans during the voyage, and on landing, immediately crossed over to the Grand Hotel, and engaged a room.

"We cannot say how long we shall stay, but should we go, our luggage can remain here until we call or send for it," said Hil to the maid who showed them their room, which they entered and locked the door.

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"Now then, May, we'll try on our new rig-out."

"Shall we dress now?"

"Rather—you try on that," answered Hil, as she drew from her portmanteau a man's suit of tweed.

Amid a good deal of laughter, they dressed themselves in their new garb. Hil had neglected nothing, and had even provided two pairs of specially-made corsets which enabled the waist to appear even with the hips, instead of tapering. Loose flannel shirts, with collars attached, obviated all differences of appearance about the bust. Padded boots, two sizes too large for them, met the difficulty of small feet.

"Now for the finishing touch," said Hil, as she fixed a small downy moustache on May's upper lip and handed her a pair of eye-glasses. She wore herself a similar appendage, somewhat heavier, and carefully darkened her chin. The result was most satisfactory. Then producing two long macintoshes, which completely enveloped their figures, and fixing veils round the tweed caps they wore, they repacked their portmanteaus, watched a favourable opportunity, and slipped out of the hotel and proceeded to a quiet bye-street near the wharf. Here their macintoshes and veils disappeared into the river, and two spick and span young gentlemen emerged into the main thoroughfare again. The feeling was peculiar at first, but as no one appeared to take particular notice of them, they soon felt complete confidence in their disguise.

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"Let's get a smoke, Hil," said May, stopping at a tobacconist's, "it will heighten the illusion." And quite in the regulation manner they strolled along, puffing cigarettes.

Their confidence became so great that they returned to the hotel and enquired if two ladies had arrived. The porter answered in the affirmative, but said they were out at that moment. They continued their way, and entered the saloon of the "Royal."

"What are you drinking?" asked Hil.

"Brandy and soda, please," said May, as she squeezed the barmaid's hand on the sly.

"Let's sit down," said Hil, "and fix on our names. Mine is Percy."

"And mine is Jack," promptly answered her companion.

They sat at the table smoking and sipping the drinks before them, occasionally ogling the barmaid, when both were rather startled at the entrance of Hal and Reg. A covert kick from Hil made both extremely cautious.

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"What will you try, Hal?" said Reg, with a casual glance round the room and a critical one at the ladies behind the bar.

"Ale, thanks. I wonder if there is an English boat in."

"That's meant for us: new chums," whispered Hil to May, and picking up the *Evening Observer*, she glanced over the contents.

"They seem to be pretty friendly," said May, pointing to the boys, who were monopolising the barmaid's time and attention.

"What'll you have, Jack," said Hil, aloud. "I say, miss, when you are at leisure—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," answered the barmaid, coming forward.

"Same again, miss, please."

"Very little brandy," put in May, for she noticed the spittoon by her side was nearly full and would not carry much more.

Reg picked up the paper which Hil had laid down, and looking down the columns gave a start at something that met his eye. Calling Hal aside, he shewed it him. Hal merely nodded his head and, shortly after, they left. As soon as they had gone, Hil took up the paper again, and looking at the column Reg had pointed to, turned to May, and said:

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"I was wondering what had startled those two and I believe it must be this."

May looked at the column she indicated and read:

"W—k, come to-morrow. All safe, S—l."

"Nothing in that, Percy," answered May. "That girl's name is Sal, she's in it," she added, in a lower voice.

"They look like detectives, those two," said Hil sharply, out loud, turning round to watch the effect of her announcement.

The lady, who wore her name conspicuously engraved upon her ring, coloured and seemed disconcerted, and shortly after quitted the saloon.

"Come for a stroll as far as the Post Office," said Hil, as she saw Sal return with a letter in her hand.

"Are you gentlemen going to the Post Office?" she asked, sweetly.

"Yes, we're going to try our luck again."

"Would you mind taking this letter, and handing it in to the Telegraph Department. Here is a shilling to pay for it."

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"I'll take the letter, my dear, with pleasure, but not the shilling," said Hil, patting the girl affectionately on the cheek.

"You'll see it's sent off at once, for it concerns a young lady whose mother is ill."

"I'll go as fast as I can carry it. Come on, Jack," answered Hil, leaving the saloon hurriedly, followed by May.

Outside, she turned to her companion, and asked:

"Do you know what I have got here?"

"Wyck's address."

"I think so, we'll see," and she tore the letter open hurriedly, as if the action hardly commended itself to her. Taking out the enclosure, she read:

"V. Wyckcliffe, Royal Hotel, Toowoomba. Two men enquiring for you. Go to back country.—Sal."

"Where's Toowoomba, Hil?"

"It's on the overland road to Sydney, about five hours' journey. Have you a guide?"

"Yes, here we are. Express leaves at 6.30."

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"Good! Come, we will have to change our rig. He'll strike off for the back country, the wire shews that. We shall want moleskin trousers and rougher clothes."

"Why? Won't these do?" asked May, not liking the idea.

"Not for the bush, May. Of course, we will go in these and take the others with us in case of emergency. Come on, time is precious," and she led the way to an outfitter's.

The boys left the hotel for the purpose of consulting freely together outside. As they paced the street, Reg said:

"That certainly seems strange. W—k may stand for Wyck, and S—l for Sal, for that is the barmaid's name. If it is so, he is still in Brisbane."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Hal, thoughtfully.

"Would it not be as well to question that girl about it?"

"Why, of course, of course. What are we thinking of?" and Hal turned back and once more entered the hotel.

"Do you know where Wyck is now, miss?" he asked in a familiar manner.

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"No, I don't," answered she in a flurried way, blushing to the roots of her hair.

"Yes you do, miss," said Reg, laughing. "He is a friend of ours and we want to see him badly."

"I don't know who you mean," she answered, becoming very red and angry. And the boys seeing there was no chance of finding out anything went out again.

As they passed the Post Office they called in on the chance of finding something, and were gratified at having a telegram handed to them, which read as follows:

"Morris and Winter, Brisbane. Wyck at Toowoomba. Saw wire Dick. Says going bush. Terence O'Flynn."

"What's the guide say, Reg?"

"Express 6.30. It's now 4.30."

"What's he making for the bush for? He thinks he will escape us that way. If he does he's mistaken, for he's tumbling right into my arms," remarked Hal with a grim smile.

"I must say he is a bit smarter than I gave him credit for," said Reg.

"This is not a bad place, Reg, is it?"

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"No. It's a bit warm. What are the people like—same as down South?"

"No, my boy. They are like the climate—warm—and they make it so if anything displeases them. They are the most independent and democratic lot in the colonies and, when the great smash comes, I shall be much mistaken if the voice of Queensland is not the first to cry 'Australia for the Australians.' But now to business. If we are going in for bush work we must have a bush outfit, so come on," and they walked towards the same outfitter's at which ten minutes previously the girls had rigged themselves out.

They were hardly out of sight of the Post Office when a hansom-cab drew up at the door, and a young man, looking furtively round, hastily alit and hurried into the office to enquire for letters. One was handed to him with the letters O.H.M.S. upon it, which he opened, signed the certificate enclosed and received from the savings-bank clerk a sum of money in gold. Pocketing the money, he hurried into his cab and drove away. The man was Villiers Wyckliffe, and there was anything but a pleasant look on his face, for at heart he was an arrant coward. "Confound those fellows," he muttered to himself, "they may get here at any time. I had to come back here for money, but I'll go back to Toowoomba again, as it is a handy place to make for the open country at a moment's notice. Who in the deuce would have thought that a fellow would make so much fuss over a girl as that fellow Morris is doing. He and his friend mean mischief, for Dick told me of their carryings-on at Melbourne. If they track me I'll shoot them down like the dogs they are. If I could only get away I'd go back to England, for people are not so particular there. Damn Australia, I say! I wish I had never seen it." His face had grown black with anger, and falling back, he fell to commiserating his lot. "There are so many pretty girls here," he murmured. "And these confounded fellows are spoiling all my fun." Here any further reflections were disturbed by his arrival at the "George."

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"Call for me in time to catch the 6.30 express," he shouted to the cabby, as he hurried inside.

"Let's come in here for a drink," said Hal, leading the way into the saloon of the "George," some ten minutes later.

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Calling for drinks, they were surprised to see the two new chums that they had noticed before, sitting there.

"We meet again," whispered Hil to May.

"Well, here's luck, old chap," said Hal to Reg. "I wonder how old Goody and his daughter are getting on."

A kick passed between the new chums, who sat as if they noticed nothing.

"Yes, I wonder. She and her cousin are going on the detective business as well, eh? That's a good joke; but she's a jolly girl," answered Reg.

"I'd like to meet that cousin of hers," replied Hal. "From all accounts, she is a bit of a star."

"I think we ought to wire them that we have left Sydney. They'll be wondering what has come to us."

"Yes, I should like to let them know. To tell the truth, I thought they wanted to join us, or something of that kind, and, much as I like women, I could not stand that," said Hal, smiling.

"It's time to go, old chap. Ta-ta, miss," and they left to get ready for their journey.

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As soon as they were gone, the two new chums looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"So, you're a jolly girl, May!"

"And you're a bit of a star."

"Come, let's get ahead of them at any rate. We'll see if girls are so much in the way, Mr. Hal. I consider it a gross piece of impertinence," said Hil, leading the way with an air of injured dignity.

"A nobbler of brandy please, miss, and let me have a flask too," said Wyck, hurriedly entering the saloon, for his cab was waiting to take him to the station.

The 6.30 express started for Toowoomba, taking five people, divided into three parties, each party quite unaware of the presence of the others. A lady had shadowed the boys to the station, and seeing them enter the train, left hastily for the Post Office, whence she despatched the following telegram:

Wyckliffe, Toowoomba. They left by to-night's express for Toowoomba. Danger.
Sal.

CHAPTER XXI.

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TOOWOOMBA.

Toowoomba being the junction of the Western Line and the chief town on the Darling Downs, the station was a larger one than ordinary. As the express steamed in all was life and bustle, for the down-train had arrived at the same time on the opposite side. Wyck having only a rug to look after, and knowing the run of the place, jumped out directly the train stopped and, calling a cab, drove to the Royal Hotel. Arriving there, he looked at the rack, and saw two telegrams addressed to himself, which he opened eagerly.

"By Jove, they're here!" he said to himself, and to the barman he cried, "Brandy!"

"You'll take the same room, sir," said the barman, handing him the drink, and wondering at his hurried manner.

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"Say, George, if anyone calls for me I am not in," said he, laying half-a-crown in close proximity to George's hand.

"I'm fly, governor," said that worthy, pocketing the half-crown.

Wyck hurried upstairs to his room. Locking the door he sat down on the bed to think matters over. His limbs were trembling with nervous apprehension. Every step that passed his door made him start, and several times he had recourse to his flask to calm himself. The liquor had the desired effect, and lighting a cigar, he smoked on in silence. The smoke grew less, the cigar went out, but still he was gazing into space. A step passing his door woke him from his reverie. He took another long pull at his brandy-flask and shaking himself together walked to the looking-glass, and addressed his own image thus:

"Now, Wyck, my boy, you'll have to get out of this, and there is only one way of doing it, and that is to disguise yourself. Your moustache must come off first," and he gave that handsome appendage an affectionate farewell twist. "We must part, so here goes," and opening his dressing-case he set to work, and five minutes later was a clean-shaven man. Then he began to make elaborate preparations for his character in the bush by ripping his trousers and blackening them here and there. After a considerable amount of destruction had been done he considered his disguise satisfactory, and prepared for bed. To guard against over-sleeping himself he tied a string to the boots outside his door, and fixed the other end round his wrist. Then, taking a final sip from his flask, he jumped into bed and was soon fast asleep. He seemed scarcely to have dropped off before he was dreaming that Morris had him by the wrist and was sitting on his chest.

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"Mercy!" he gurgled, at the same time rising in bed and wrenching his arm free, a process which brought forth the expression of a loud oath from outside the door.

"What's your game?" called out the owner of the voice, and Wyck woke fully and remembered. Springing out of bed he called the boots into his room.

"What's your game, young fellow?" repeated that worthy.

"I wanted you to wake me. Come, have a nip."

"Don't mind if I do, boss."

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"What's your name?"

"Bill Adams. Here's luck, boss."

"Say, Bill, can you hold your tongue?"

"All depends."

"Here's a sovereign," said Wyck, handing him one.

"I can hold it as tight as wax, boss."

"Then listen. I got into a bit of a mess over a girl, and there are some chaps after me. They came by the express last night, and if I'm here they'll find me."

"Then you'd better get out of here."

"That's just what I want to do. How is it to be done? See I have shaved my moustache and altered my clothes."

"What did yer cut them for?"

"I want to be a tramp."

"Let me fix yer up. Just yer stay here," said Bill, disappearing to return a few minutes later with a swag, which he laid on the floor and opened.

"Now then, just you put on these breeches, shirt and boots."

Five minutes later Wyck did not recognise himself, as he looked in the glass.

"Now then, boss, if you're smart, there's a goods train leaves for the West at six, you can catch that." [Pg 258]

"Will you take charge of these things?" asked Wyck, strapping up his portmanteau, flurried with the success of his scheme.

"Yes, I'll watch 'em for you."

"Which way do I go?"

"This way," said Bill, leading him to a back entrance, opening on a lane leading to Ruthven Street.

"Here's another for you, Bill, and if you look after my things I'll give you a couple more when I come back," said Wyck, handing him another sovereign.

"Right you are, boss!" and as he closed the door upon him, a grin spread over his face, and he said to himself:

"Two yellow boys for old Joe's swag, eh? Wonder what old Joe'll say when he comes to look for 'em?"

Wyck reached the station safely, and asking how far the train went, was told "Roma."

"First, Rome," said he to the porter, without thinking.

"Roma, you mean, boss. Besides there ain't no first class on a goods train," said the porter, with a grin. [Pg 259]

"You know what I mean," replied Wyck, annoyed.

"All right, here you are, boss," he answered, handing him a ticket, and noting his white hands and the chink of gold in his pocket.

"Hullo, mate! how far are you going?" asked a genuine tramp, as he joined him in the van.

"I beg your pardon," said Wyck, forgetting his character and disgusted with the fellow's familiarity.

"Hoity toity! here's a joke," said the old tramp, much to the porter's amusement, as the train moved slowly off, bearing Wyck to the bush.

The boys were not long in following Wyck out of their train, but as they thought he might get in at Toowoomba they kept a close watch on all passengers travelling North and South. Reg tipped the conductors of both boudoir cars, in order to look through them, and when both trains started again, they felt satisfied he must be still in Toowoomba, unless he had left previous to their arrival. Off they went to the nearest hotel, and engaged a double-bedded room, in which they locked themselves. [Pg 260]

"What's the programme now, Hal?" said Reg.

"If he's here we must nab him. When does the first train start to-morrow?"

"The guide says, 10.30 South, and 1.50 West."

"We'd better get up early and go round the town. You can put on your rig and appear as a stranger looking round, while I'll put on my bush rig and go amongst the swaggies and loafers in the bars. They generally have their eyes open and my idea is that our man will have got hold of one of them for information," said Hal, pulling out his bush togs.

"What shall I do, then?"

"Just knock around and keep your eyes open. He may drive away. Of course he may have got away by now, but it's our only chance."

The next morning by half-past six both had left their room to commence their search. Hal did not need any coaching in the manners or ways of a bushman. He had seen too many of that fraternity during his travels. With a slouch hat, a grisly beard, a crimson shirt, a clean pair of moles with straps fastened below the knees, and a rough pair of boots, he looked the typical bushman in search of work. His hands were stained and looked sunburnt and dirty. He walked with a slow, long stride, first into one public-house, then another, calling invariably for a quid of tobacco in preference to liquor. He struck into conversation with several of his own kidney, and interviewed boots and barmen, without finding out anything of service to him, but still he kept on patiently until he came to the "Royal," where he found an old man sweeping the bar.

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"Good-day, boss," said the sweeper.

"Good-day. Have a drink?"

"Don't mind if I do have a pint," said he, readily.

"I'll have rum," said Hal.

After a little desultory conversation and the drinks had disappeared the sweeper, whom the barman addressed as Bill, returned the compliment, and put down a sovereign in payment.

"Hallo, Bill, where did you make this?" called out the barman, considerably astonished to find Bill with a sovereign in his possession.

"Never you mind. Give us a drink and have one yourself," he answered.

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The drinks were served and Bill received his change, but still the barman seemed curious.

"Where did you get it, Bill?" he asked again, coming from behind the bar, which gave Hal an opportunity of getting rid of his rum.

"Never mind," said Bill, huffily. "Can't a fellow have a sovereign without you troubling yourself?"

Hal now became decidedly interested, and ordered another round of drinks, this time including the barman. The barman returned the compliment, and Bill, having four pints of beer inside him, began to talk volubly on his strong point—thoroughbreds. Still the barman seemed to think he ought to have a share of that sovereign, and again plied Bill with questions.

"Tell us, Bill. Did you prig it?"

"Prig it! You go to the devil. Come on, mate, let's have another drink," and Bill began to show signs of intoxication.

"Rather, Bill," answered Hal, pretending to be similarly affected. So far, he had succeeded in throwing his liquor down a hole in the floor.

The landlord now appeared on the scene and began to rate Bill for neglecting his work.

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"I ain't a-going to chop your wood, I ain't; eh, mate? We ain't a-going to chop wood."

"No, that we ain't," said Hal, with a lurch.

The barman stopped the retort rising to the landlord's lips by whispering, "plenty of stuff," in his ear. Thereupon the latter asked where Mr. Wyckliffe had gone.

"Who?" said Bill. "He's No. 5, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, he give me two bob, and went away early."

"Where did he go to, Bill?" asked the barman.

"Don't know, and don't care. Give us another drink." After which he staggered away, followed by Hal, to the back, in the direction of the stables.

"I'm going to sleep," he said, entering a small house attached to the coach-house, where a lot of bags were strewn about.

Hal staggered after him, and noticed a portmanteau and a rug in the corner. Bill tottered to a rude bunk, on which he fell, and was soon fast asleep and snoring loudly.

Hal hearing him mutter, leant over him and managed to make out the following:

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"Get up—six o'clock train West—Go to 'ell—two yellow boys," from which he drew his own deductions. Then he proceeded to examine the portmanteau, which he found unlocked. He could hardly restrain his joy when he found lying underneath the things Wyck's famous ebony stick. It was beautifully mounted and polished and its numerous notches were carefully cut. The temptation was too great to resist and Hal calmly appropriated it, slipping it down the leg of his trousers, then he staggered out of the yard down a lane towards the creek. When he was well out

of sight he carefully pulled off his old coat, and took from the pocket a silk coat and pair of overalls. These were quickly donned, the wig and beard disappeared, and he straightened himself out and walked back through the yard into the street, looking like an ordinary tradesman.

Reg was waiting for him when he got back.

"He left by this morning's train for West," said Hal.

"I thought so. I enquired at the station, and they told me a goods train ran twice a week at that hour, and one had gone this morning, but the man who was on duty then had gone home." [Pg 265]

"What's the next train, Reg?"

"1.50."

"Well, we'll go by that. But, come here, I have something to show you," said Hal, leading the way to their room, and producing the stick.

"My God! the stick," cried Reg, and taking it in his hands, looked as if he could have smashed it to a thousand pieces.

Hal left him, thinking it was better for him to be alone with the bitter reflections the sight of the stick had caused.

When the girls left the train they did not go to a hotel, but to a boarding-house near the station. Several rough-looking men were loitering about the door and on the step sat a dirty, fat woman.

"Good-evening, missus. Got any beds?" said Hil.

"Yes, come in, gentlemen. What price do you want. I've got 'em from sixpence to eighteen-pence."

"Let's see the eighteenpennys, then."

"This way," said she, leading them along a long passage. "Here you are, a fine double-bed fit for a hemperor," and she flung open a door on which "*Privit*" was marked. [Pg 266]

"Tell you what I'll do. Half-a-crown for the two of yer," said she.

"All right, missus," said Hil, laying down her luggage.

"No, it ain't all right. Not that I doubts you, but you'll have to sugar up afore you touches it."

"Here you are then," answered Hil, handing her the money.

"Want anything to heat!"

"No, thank you. Good-night."

"Suppose you are new chums, ain't you?"

"Yes. Good-night, we're going to bed."

"Well, good-night!" she answered, disappearing reluctantly.

"What a relief," said May, as she took off her large boots and divested herself of her male attire.

"How do you like being a man?"

"Oh, it would be all right when you got used to it, I suppose, but I must say it is a little awkward at first. I'm chafed all over."

"I'm out of practice, too, but on the whole I consider we did very well. I don't see that we can do much good by getting up early to-morrow. The first train does not leave before half-past eleven." [Pg 267]

"I think eight o'clock time enough," said May, who was completely tired out, although she would not give in.

"Well, we'll have a well-earned rest," said Hil, turning in alongside her friend.

"Do you gentlemen want breakfast?" said a voice at the door, the next morning.

"What's the time?"

"Past eight o'clock."

"All right. We'll be out in a few minutes."

When they appeared breakfast was in full swing, and a large proportion of the men round the table wore the railway uniform. As they entered, Hil heard one of them say:

"He was the greatest card I ever saw in all my life."

"Who's that, Joe?" asked another.

"Why that cove as went by the six goods. He was wearing togs that did not belong to him, and if I don't mistake he had old Bill Adams's hat on."

"What did he do, Joe?"

"Do," said Joe, laughing. "He comes to the office in a fluster and says: 'First, Rome.' I says: 'There ain't no first Rome, Roma you mean.' 'You know what I want,' says he, and when he took his change I noticed his hands was snowy white: he had a ring on and I could hear the gold chinking in his pocket."

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"What's his name?" asked the landlady.

"I don't know, but I'm going up to the 'Royal' to enquire about Bill's hat."

The girls had listened greedily to all this, and after breakfast they disguised themselves further by changing their wigs, in case they should meet the boys, and went on to the "Royal" to hear the name of the passenger to Roma.

"We'll follow by the 1.50," said Hil, when her enquiries were answered.

CHAPTER XXII.

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DALBY.

As the 1.50 train was preparing to start, four men stood round the ticket-office. They were the boys and the girls. The former had chosen clothes similar to those Hal had used with so much success, while the latter assumed a dress that might be worn by anyone without being conspicuous.

There is no country in the world where it is more difficult to judge a person by his dress than Australia. You may sit beside a rough, vulgar-looking fellow, with an old cabbage-tree hat and a dirty pair of moles, with all the appearance of a tramp; yet he may be a squatter, who could write a cheque for twenty thousand. To a casual observer, the boys would easily pass as shearers or men on the look-out for work, and the girls would pass as easily for new chums. There were plenty of both classes scattered over the country, and neither party was likely to attract exceptional attention.

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"You can only book to Dalby," said the ticket-clerk. "There has been a break-down beyond that point."

"When?" asked Hal.

"Last night. I fancy it is due to some of the shearers, who are out on strike, so, if you are going for a job, you had better look out and join the union."

"We won't trouble them," answered Hal. "We are going for cattle," and he took two second-class tickets for Dalby.

"Two second, Dalby," said Hil, following close behind him.

As the train started May laughed and said:

"Wonder where the boys are now?"

"Probably in Brisbane still. We ought to have returned good for evil, and wired them where Wyck has gone; but I think they had better find out for themselves, as they fancy themselves so much."

"I wonder what our lady detectives are doing," said Reg to Hal, lighting his pipe.

"In bed, asleep, I suppose, dreaming of Wyck."

"We ought to have wired them at Sydney, and given them a hint."

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"No, not at all. It would be ridiculous to think of women in this country. But where's the stick, Reg?"

"It's in my swag. I had to cut it in two, but I reckon now that we have that, we shall soon have the owner, and when we do, God help him."

"Yes, he'll stand in need of all the help he can get," said Hal, looking musingly at Reg's resolute face.

The railway station at Dalby presented an unusually animated appearance on their arrival, for the word had been given that a large number of non-union shearers were coming to take the place of those on strike, and the latter had collected to give the newcomers a warm welcome. As soon as the train stopped a crowd gathered round the carriage in which the boys and the girls travelled.

"Here they are," shouted a burly, red-headed fellow, who appeared to be their leader.

"What's your game, gentlemen?" asked Hal, boldly stepping out, followed by Reg and the girls.

"Are you the black-legs?"

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"What do you mean?"

"Are you shearers?"

"No, decidedly not. Why?"

"Because we heard some black-legs were coming. That's all."

Two of the passengers were injudicious enough to say they were shearers, one of them calling out—"I'm a shearer, and I'm going to work, for I've a wife and family to keep. D—n your unions."

With a war-whoop the whole body, headed by the red-headed bully, made for the two men, who, in spite of the presence of six constables, were doomed to be knocked about severely, if not in danger of being killed, when Hil, in an impulsive moment, rushed forward to their rescue.

"Stand aside, you cowards," she called out, producing a revolver. "I shoot the first man that touches them again." Then the crowd fell back for a moment.

"You dirty cowards," said Hal, coming forward with Reg.

"Who the devil are you?" said the red-headed leader.

"I'm a man, and I'll see fair play. What right have you to kick these fellows?"

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"You're very plucky, all because your mate has got a shooting-iron."

"I can use my fists, too," said Hil, putting up her revolver and standing forward.

"Here put up your hands," interposed Hal and, pushing Hil aside, gave the fellow one from the shoulder that staggered him.

"A fight, a fight," yelled the crowd. "Go it, stranger."

Hal faced his man squarely and, watching his opportunity, landed him one in the mouth that stretched him flat on his back.

"Any more?" asked Reg, looking round, as if he would like his share. But the crowd had had enough and, as the two men who had been the cause of the row had taken advantage of the fight to slip out of the way, Hal and Reg and the girls got away without further adventure.

They found the town a very small one, which had once, like most inland towns, been in a fairly prosperous condition so long as the railway kept away from it; but the advent of the iron horse had caused it to fall, like scores of similar towns, into a deserted condition. Luck favoured the boys, for on calling at Condon's Hotel they got into conversation with an old swag man.

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"Seen any strangers about to-day?" asked Hal.

"What do you call strangers—men like yourself?"

"Yes."

"Well, I see one come with Joe Brown by the train this morning."

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?"

"He had old togs on, but didn't seem used to them."

"Where is he now?"

"Don't know. Last I see of him he was in a buggy."

"What was he doing?"

"Why, driving away, of course. Seemed in a blooming hurry, too, and looked as if he was going a journey by the stuff he had aboard."

"Where did he get the turn-out?"

"Don't know; but this is awfully dry work, boss."

"Sing out then: a pint, eh?"

"Rather, boss."

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Ten minutes later, the boys were in conversation with the proprietor of the livery stables, if they could be called such.

"Well, all I know is that he paid me thirty pound down for the whole turn-out, and I see him driving away with an old shearer, named Joe Brown," said the owner, in answer to their questions.

"Which direction did they take?"

"Looked as if they were going to follow the river: in fact, they'll have to, as water is scarce."

"We want to overtake these fellows. Have you another trap?"

"Not to sell. I've got a fine buggy and pair here. They could prick spots off the others. I want a pound a-day for them."

"Then hitch them up as fast as you like, and put a good stock of feed in, while we go and get ready."

"By George, this is good business," said the man to himself, as he hastened away to get the horses ready.

The boys hurried off to one of the stores, and purchased a stock of provisions, a small tent, and some cooking utensils. An hour later, they drove away in pursuit of the fugitives, following the road along the creek. [Pg 276]

The girls had been unsuccessful in finding out anything. As they walked along the street, they noticed a trap with two men in it drive out of a yard.

"I wonder where they are off to," said May.

"Some squatter's turn-out, I suppose. Let's go to the yard they came out of," answered Hil.

"They've gone after a gent who started this morning," said the proprietor, in answer to her enquiry.

"Which way are they making?"

"Along the river, I think."

"I suppose you have not another trap and horses ready."

"No, sir. I've only got the two, and one of them I sold this morning to the first gent."

"What's on there?" asked Hil, pointing to a crowd round some stockyards.

"Auction, that's all."

"Are they selling horses?"

"Yes, some scrubbers, I think."

"Come on, May. Let's have a look: we can do with a pair of saddle-horses, for we must follow on horseback, or we shall never overtake them." [Pg 277]

"I'm agreeable."

"That's not a bad hack. Rather weak in the fore shoulder. Thirty bob, eh?" "Well it's cheap at that," said Hil, examining the horse. "Now this looks better. Come closer, I like the look of this one," and strolling into the yard she opened the horse's mouth.

"I'll give you a couple of notes," she said to the auctioneer.

"Two pounds, two-ten, three, three-five, three-ten. It's gone. You've got a bargain, young fellow. What name?" sang out the auctioneer.

"Cash," said she, promptly planking down the money.

Several other lots had been disposed of, but nothing seemed to suit Hil, whose practised eye could pick out a blemish at a glance.

"Now then, stand aside. Look out. Hallo there, look out," shouted several of the runners-in, as they drove an untameable colt into the yard.

"Look out, young fellow. Come out," shouted the auctioneer to Hil, who was quietly leaning against the post fixed in the centre of the ring. "Look out," said he again, as the colt ran open-mouthed at her, but a smack on the nose sent him back, and letting fly with his heels, just missed her, as she stepped quietly on one side. [Pg 278]

"Now then," said the auctioneer, with a wink at the crowd, "the breeding of this horse is well-known. What shall we say for her? A tenner? Well then, a fiver."

"Six," said Hil.

"Six, six-ten, seven, seven. Gentlemen, is there no advance? Seven once, seven twice. It's yours, young fellow. What name?"

"Cash," answered Hil, calmly paying up.

"And now, young fellow, that you have got him, might I ask what you are going to do with him," said the auctioneer in a jocular manner, which the crowd greeted with roars of laughter.

"I'll ride him, I suppose," said Hil, quietly.

"You're not the man," answered the auctioneer, emphatically. "I'll bet you a fiver you're not game to ride him now."

"It's a wager. Where's a saddle?" said she.

"I'll find a saddle quick enough," said the auctioneer, smiling; then he added to the crowd, "Gentlemen, we'll adjourn the sale till this youngster mounts the colt."

"Right you are! Two to one he don't stick," shouted an excited farmer by the auctioneer's side. [Pg 279]

"I'll take it," said May, handing a fiver to the auctioneer, which the farmer reluctantly covered.

A saddle and bridle were brought and carefully examined by Hil. When she had satisfied herself they were strong enough, the colt was driven into a race, and after some delay the bridle was fixed on him. It was a considerable time before the saddle could be got on and girthed to Hil's satisfaction. Then the colt was led out.

The excitement now was intense, more especially as the colt began to lash out furiously, to buck and pig in his efforts to dislodge the saddle, for although dozens had tried to ride him he had as yet come off best, and was known as incurable to the country round.

One man held the reins and tried to keep him still, as he danced about, while Hil, with one hand gripping the colt's ear and the other on the saddle, stood watching her chance. The instant the slightest weight was put on the saddle, up went the horse in the air. Hil leaned heavily on him several times, and then stood aside till the colt began to become cunning and stood perfectly still the next time she leant upon the saddle. Hil seeing her chance leapt into the saddle, grasped the reins, and fixed her feet in the stirrup-irons in an instant. The colt was looked upon as a champion buckner, and he deserved the honour, for rising into the air with all four feet off the ground, he gave a twitch that must have dislodged most riders, but Hil and the horse were one. After bucking and pigging all he knew, without succeeding in upsetting his rider, the wary animal tried a new dodge. He reared suddenly and fell back, trying to crush his rider, but Hil was on the alert, for few knew the ways of buck-jumpers more thoroughly and, as the horse came down, she coolly stepped on one side, and was on his back again the instant he had recovered himself. That was too much for the obstreperous animal; he knew he was conquered and gave in to the inevitable, allowing himself to be handled and put through his paces with suspicious docility.

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"I'll trouble you for the stakes," said May, pocketing fifteen pounds.

"I want five from you, sir," said Hil. "Thank you. Now then, boys, if you will come over to the pub we'll blue this fiver."

They adjourned to the public-house and had drinks round. Hil, turning to the auctioneer, said:

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"I'll tell you what it is, boss. I'd not take ten times what I gave for him. Mark my word, you'll hear something of that colt some day."

"Well, I don't mind losing my fiver at any rate, for you certainly have earned it. That colt has been looked on as a terror to the neighbourhood. Nobody would have him at a gift, and it was only because you looked like a new chum that I ran him in."

"I'm very glad you did. Can you fix us up with a couple of saddles and bridles."

"Certainly. Come on over here."

Saddles and bridles were bought and put on their new purchases. Then the girls rode their horses to the hotel stables, where they were putting up. They groomed and fed them themselves, and went off to purchase a stock of provisions and a small tent. These were all rolled in a blanket and fixed to the front of each saddle; quart pots were slung at the side, and they were at last ready to start.

"I'll christen my colt Wyck," said Hil, as they turned in for the night.

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"And mine shall be Liffe," said May.

Daylight the next morning saw them on the track of the two conveyances.

CHAPTER XXIII.

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CAMPING OUT.

When Hil mounted her colt the next morning, that fractious animal could not resist having another set-to, just to convince himself that his master was really on his back. Hil was quite agreeable and having satisfied the creature on that point, she and May started at a brisk canter along the road, following the wheel-tracks, which were still clearly defined. Hil was not disappointed in either purchase, for both horses settled down to their work admirably, and by eight o'clock they considered they were twenty miles away from Dalby. They therefore pulled up at Jimbour Creek, dismounted, hobbled their horses, and let them roam for a feed, while they prepared breakfast. Both had excellent appetites after their ride, and did full justice to the meal their own skill had prepared. During the repast, they heard horses' hoofs approaching, and shortly were joined by two young men of the bush type, probably shearers.

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"Good-day, mates," called out one, as they came near.

"Good-day to you," said May. "Have a cup of tea, the water's just boiling."

It sounded more like an invitation in a lady's boudoir than from the bush, but putting them down as new chums, the pair dismounted and accepted the offer.

"Where are you young fellows making for?" asked one.

"Going along the river. Did you come that way?"

"Yes, we've come in from Condamine station."

"See anything of a buggy along the road?"

"Well, I'm blowed! Yes, we did. Why?"

"We are trying to catch up to one," said Hil.

"We camped alongside two fellows with a buggy last night, and they told me they were after two other fellows, and now I suppose you fellows are after them?" said the stranger, with a laugh.

"Are there two buggies ahead?"

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"Yes, one is broken-down at Campbell Camp, and the other ought to be there by this time. Are you policemen after them?"

"No, not at all. They are friends. We have missed one another. That's all."

"Well, come along, matey," said the younger of the two to his companion. "Good-day to you, and much obliged," and they mounted and disappeared.

"Time to get on, Hil," said May.

"Yes, I think so," and a few minutes later they were on the track of the fugitives once more.

The roads now became rough and hilly, and the travelling much slower. About three o'clock they reached Campbell Camp crossing, and there they found the buggy, broken-down as described. An old man was camped close by, and seemed in possession of the turn-out, as he had the horses tied up close at hand.

"Had a smash?" asked Hil, greeting him.

"Yes, axle bent," said he, coming towards them.

"Seen anything of another buggy go by?"

"Yes, one drove across to the station this morning, with two men in it. They drove a pair of bay horses."

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"We may as well camp here for the night," said Hil, "the feed seems pretty good, and water's scarce ahead they tell us."

"Are you coves going to camp here?" asked the man.

"Yes, we are thinking of doing so."

"That's the style, it's a bit lonely here all day."

"Who's trap is that?"

"It belongs to a young chap going to Chinchilla. He's gone on ahead."

"What sort of a fellow is he?" asked Hil.

"A youngish chap. Seemed like as he was in trouble, for he swore a lot when we broke down."

"What's your name?"

"Joe Brown."

"What time did he start from here?"

"About eight o'clock this morning: but what do you want to know for?"

"Oh! nothing, he's a friend of ours."

"That's just what them other coves said who drove up in a buggy, only they was more inquisitive."

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"Could they be the boys?" said Hil, turning to May.

"No, impossible; and yet they may be, like us, in disguise for all we know."

"Which way did they go?" said she, turning to the man.

"They went to Chinchilla after him."

"Oh, well, I expect we shall catch up with them to-morrow. Come along, May, let's get our tent rigged up."

While they were fixing their tent, a hawker's van, drawn by four horses, drove up. Beside the driver sat a man and a boy. Pulling up alongside the creek, the driver walked towards Joe Brown.

"Are you Joe Brown?" he called out in a loud voice.

"Yes, that's me. What's up?"

"Well, I met a young chap going to Chinchilla this morning, and he told me to try and straighten the axle of his buggy, and take it back to Dalby."

"I've got no objection," said Joe, looking significantly at the other man in the cart.

"Then come and give us a hand to get my team out, and we'll set to work at once," said the hawker, whose name was Abraham Abrahams. [Pg 288]

The girls having rigged their tent and seen to the horses, strolled down to the hawker's trap, and volunteered their assistance.

"Quite welcome, chaps," said Abrahams.

"Come on, Tom, fly round now, you're going to sleep," said he to the man with him, who was trying to unharness a horse, but did not know how to set about it.

"Let me help you," said Hil, pushing him aside and taking the harness off.

When everything was done to the satisfaction of the hawker, all hands were directed to the buggy. While they were engaged on that two more fellows appeared on the scene. They carried their swags on their shoulders.

"Hallo there! What's the game?" said one, as he came up to them.

"A bit of a smash, that's all," answered Abrahams. "Now then, twist her a bit more. Hang on, let's look now," he sang out, as he directed the operations.

"Yes, that'll do now," he added. "Let's get it back in its place before dark, so we can have an early start." [Pg 289]

The axle replaced, all adjourned to their respective tents to prepare a meal. The two latest arrivals chose a camping-ground some twenty yards from that the girls had selected, and soon had a fire lit and their billy boiling.

When all had finished their meal Abrahams suggested they should make a big fire and sit round it and spin yarns. The idea was readily taken up, and a huge log was selected, round which a rope was fixed and harnessed to one of the horses, when it was at once dragged into the required position. Some light wood was gathered, and soon the log was well ablaze, and they disposed themselves in a circle round it. Old Joe was inclined to be a little bit selfish and directly the log was in position, he took a seat on one end of it, and obstinately resisted all efforts to dislodge him. Now it happened that that log had been the home of a large swarm of the ants known as "green-heads." These, as most campers-out know, can sting pretty sharply, and while Joe was disputing his right to the seat, they were gradually being driven by the smoke to the other end of the log. They found Joe's coat-tails an excellent bridge, and swarmed up them. Presently Joe began to feel uncomfortable; then he gave a jump, and finally yelled with agony, and starting up began to fling his clothes off as quickly as possible. The girls found it necessary to retire to their tent to fetch something they had forgotten. [Pg 290]

"How very awkward if they had attacked us," said May.

"Very," answered Hilda, laughing heartily at May's look of alarm.

They gave Joe time to rid himself of the pests, and returned to the fire. Nobody now disputed the right of ownership to the log, for it was fairly alive with ants. Joe was sore all over and in a bad temper, until some one offered to give him some whiskey to rub in his wounds. Joe bargained he should drink it in preference, which he did and was soon restored to good-humour.

For the second time the five people who are on the search for one another found themselves in each others' company and were unaware that this was the case. The two men with swags were the boys. They had left their trap in charge of a man camped half-a-mile down the creek, and disguising themselves a second time, in order not to be recognized by Joe, appeared as tramps. They had started for Chinchilla, but missed the road and had not found out their error until they had gone some fourteen miles out of their way, when they met a tramp who told them. Picking him up, they returned to the creek, hoping Wyck might have come back for his buggy. [Pg 291]

When Wyck's buggy broke down he was in a terrible rage, but he did not take long to form fresh plans and, having told Joe enough to put him on his guard, he went on his way, but not to Chinchilla. When the boys drove up, he was hidden in a hollow log about twenty paces away, where he could see and hear all that took place. Joe was up to snuff and sent the boys on what he considered a wild-goose chase. When he had let the boys get fairly out of sight Wyck walked along the road in the hope of coming across a Jew hawker, whom a horseman had told him was travelling that route. Nor was he disappointed, for Abrahams came in sight. A five-pound note was exchanged, and Abrahams agreed to take him and his buggy back to Dalby. Wyck then got up alongside the driver. Although he was very uneasy, he had no idea his enemies were so close to him, neither had Hil any conception who the man was she had shewn how to unharness the horses. Wyck had palled up with Joe in the train, and retained him to shew the way. Joe in return had improved Wyck's get-up, so that he now looked quite the bushman, as he lounged by the fire. [Pg 292]

In the interval between the yarns all had been spinning, Wyck said to Abrahams, with a wink:

"Wonder how that poor devil is getting on?"

"Which, that fellow who owned the trap?"

"Yes. He'll never see Chinchilla to-night, if I'm not mistaken."

"Where did you meet him?" asked Joe of Abrahams.

"About two miles from here."

"What was he like?"

"Tall, dark, and about twenty-eight," put in Wyck.

"That's my boss," said Joe, taking the cue. "I tried to persuade him from going, but he would go."

"Well, he asked me to take his buggy to Dalby for him, and I am going to do it," said Abrahams. [Pg 293]

"Quite right!" said Wyck.

Four people greedily took in this conversation, and made their plans accordingly. As the fire died low, first one, and then another went to their tents, and the camp was deserted. Wyck slept in the van with Abrahams.

CHAPTER XXIV.

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FRED PHILAMORE.

When the following morning broke, the sky was dull and heavy and the atmosphere close and oppressive. This did not seem to trouble the girls, who packed up their swags, saddled their horses, and were away on the road before the others were astir.

The boys were the next to move, and their surprise was great when they found their new chum neighbours had disappeared.

"They're early risers, and no mistake," remarked Reg, rubbing his eyes.

"Yes. I wonder which way they've gone. However, that's easily settled," and he looked for hoof-marks, which he found, setting in the direction of Chinchilla. But neither attached any importance to the matter.

"We'd better make for the buggy," said Hal. And they shouldered their swags and made for the river once more. [Pg 295]

Wyck, camped in Abrahams' van, found it difficult to sleep on account of the owner's loud snoring. At day-break he lay looking out on the camp through a crack in the cover. He saw the girls rise and depart, and the boys follow them. Thinking it about time for them to be moving, he woke Abrahams and went off to Joe's tent.

"Now then, Joe," he called out at that worthy's tent. "Get up, and let's get off to Dalby. I've had enough of the bush."

"Hullo! where's the other coves?" asked Joe, in surprise, gazing round the camp.

"Gone long ago."

"Which way did they go?"

"Along the river, I expect."

"Now then, boys, harness up. We must make Dalby to-night," said Abrahams, appearing on the scene.

"Do you know what time the train goes?" asked Wyck.

"There's one early in the morning, I think," said Abrahams.

"I must catch that."

"I am just as anxious to get back as you are. I don't like the look of the weather, and I should not be surprised if we had a big rain." [Pg 296]

"You're right there, boss," chimed in Joe. "I've been thinking the same."

After a hasty breakfast, they made a start and reached Dalby about seven o'clock the same evening. On enquiry, Wyck found a train left at eight and, making Abrahams a present of his turn-out, he left by that train, feeling sure he had attracted no notice whatever. Before leaving, he told Joe to wire him any news to "Grosvenor, Sydney," or "Gaiety, Melbourne," under a false name; and Joe, who had lined his pocket considerably during his acquaintanceship with his chum, promised to keep a sharp look-out.

When the girls left the camp, they followed the tracks of the hawker's waggon, and after a couple

of hours' ride pulled up at a water-hole for breakfast. The road was very rough, and they did not reach the station until late. The manager gave them a cordial welcome, considering they were strangers, but could afford no information about anyone resembling Wyck. As they naturally did not care to accept the hospitality offered them, that of the single men's hut, they turned their horses and rode some way back, till they found a good camping-place for the night. The next day looked even more threatening than the day before, and large drops of rain fell before they started.

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"I think we are in for a drenching, May," said Hil, looking anxiously round.

"So do I. Let's clear to Dalby as fast as we can."

As they proceeded on their journey the rain fell steadily, and when they reached Dalby, at a late hour, they were wet to the skin. They saw to their horses, dried their clothes, and made themselves comfortable for the night at the hotel.

"If this keeps on much longer we shall have a flood," said the landlord to them.

Dalby presented a picturesque appearance the next morning, for the Condamine was overflowing its banks and all the low-lying country was flooded. As a wash-away seemed imminent, the railway people suspended all traffic. Twelve inches was measured in twenty-four hours, and by the evening of the second day the country for miles round was a sheet of water. Many houses in Dalby were flooded, and several had been washed away.

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The girls were now locked up, for boats were plying in the streets. The delay made them very wild, but nothing could be done but wait. They were lucky, however, in comparison with the fate that befel the boys.

When the boys arrived at their camp, they found their man still asleep, and waking him up they had a hasty breakfast and started on their journey for Chinchilla. Dobbs, the tramp, said he knew a better road than the one they were on, and they let him have his way. But Dobbs was one of those gentlemen fond of experimenting at others' expense, as the boys found out to their cost, for after hopelessly wandering Dobbs acknowledged he was out of his reckoning. Fortune favoured them, however, for they met a stockrider of the Nankin Run.

"Chinchilla? Why you are out of it altogether," said he, in answer to enquiries. "You are a long way from Dalby, too, and if you take my advice you'll follow me, for it looks like rain. When it rains here, it does so with a vengeance. We've had none for twelve months, and it looks like a flood."

The invitation was offered in a rough, genial way, and the boys were only too glad to accept it. After an hour's drive they came to the station. The boys had been puzzling themselves as to what position the man held there, for he looked more like a shepherd than anything else, in his greasy pants and shirt and dirty, old, cabbage-tree hat, but on their arrival they found he was no less a person than the Honourable Mr. Tomkins, owner, not only of that station, but many more.

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"Now then, boys, make yourselves quite at home. We don't live in style here, for I don't like it. I get enough of that in the cities, for, take my word for it, no tea tastes so well as that brewed in a billy," said he.

The next day the rain set in and, by Tomkins' advice, they did not start, for all the creeks they would have had to cross were now swollen, and on the following day they themselves were living on an island.

"You see, I took the precaution to build my place on high ground. But we shall be kept busy with visitors now," Tomkins said, as a huge snake crossed the floor.

Insects in great numbers and reptiles of the most venomous kind began to make for the house as the waters rose, and all hands turned out to build a wooden barrier round it, which was saturated with kerosene and set on fire. This proved an effective barrier, but, nevertheless, they were kept pretty busy, and their sleep was not of the most comfortable kind. After six days of this kind of life, they were able to start on their return journey, and once more arrived at Dalby.

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There had been numerous cases of drowning during the flood, and the first one to come to their ears was that of a young fellow whose body was found at Campbell Creek crossing, and who had been identified by Joe Brown as a young man who had accompanied him from Toowoomba, named Wyckcliffe.

Going to the Police Station to make enquiries, they found the facts as stated. In addition to Joe Brown's identification, they had found a "W" tattooed on his arm. The body had also, they said, been identified by two young fellows who had left for Brisbane a day or two before.

"Then we are to be cheated after all," said Reg, savagely.

"Won't you forgive the fellow now?" asked Hal.

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"I can't, old fellow. I can't. I feel some satisfaction in having his stick, though. However, Hal, we've done our duty, and he has met his fate. God knows, he deserved it."

They squared up their accounts, and took train direct to Sydney, with the intention of hunting up the Goodchilds.

When the police reported that the body had been identified by Joe Brown and two other men they stated the literal fact. A stock-driver crossing the creek had seen the body floating there with the face battered beyond recognition. He had pulled it out of the water, and rode into town to report to the police, who brought it in. Joe Brown was one of the first to hear of the discovery, and a brilliant idea struck him that he might make a good thing out of Wyck by reporting the body to be his. As soon as the girls heard it they reluctantly went, too. There was a decided resemblance in the build of the dead man to Wyck, but the features were too bruised for them to be certain. However, Joe swore positively to the tattoo on the arm, and that settled the matter, and the corpse was buried as that of Villiers Wyckliffe, a young Englishman out to gain colonial experience.

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The same evening the girls left for Brisbane, but not alone, for Hil was taking the colt with her. Tom, the old groom at the hotel stables, had taken a violent fancy to both horse and owner, that she decided to take him with her to Sydney. At Brisbane they had to explain to him that his master was a mistress, and they sailed without delay for Sydney, none the worse for their experience, but feeling rather subdued at the tragic disaster which had robbed them of the spoil after which they had started.

When Wyck arrived at Toowoomba the first person he looked out for was Bill Adams, whom he found in the yard of the "Royal."

"Hullo, boss, back again! I've got all your togs stowed away," said he, as he led him to his room.

"I had a small black stick," said Wyck to him, after he had inspected the contents of his portmanteau.

"That's all you had, governor," said Bill, with emphasis. And Wyck, seeing it was useless to argue with him, had to accept the inevitable.

"All my luck will desert me now," he said to himself, when he was safely in a train bound for Sydney. "I've lost my fetish."

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At Tenterfield he bought a paper, and saw to his delight that heavy rain had set in in the Western district, and that all the country was flooded.

"I hope those two bloodhounds may be drowned too," he said, as he lay down to sleep.

Nearing Sydney, the next morning, he heard the newsboy crying out "*Herald*. Dreadful floods!" and jumping up, he bought a copy. Opening it, he received a shock, for his eyes caught the broad head-lines:

HEAVY FLOODS IN QUEENSLAND.

27 LIVES LOST.

THOUSANDS OF STOCK DROWNED.

TERRIBLE SCENES.

DALBY COMPLETELY FLOODED.

RAILWAY LINE WASHED AWAY.

He eagerly read the detailed account of the flood from the beginning.

"Hallo, what's this?" he cried, jumping up. "By Jove! I'm drowned! I'm dead," and he read the paragraph again.

"This afternoon a man rode in and reported that the body of a young man was in the creek at Campbell Camp Crossing. The police were informed, and they brought the corpse into the town, which was in a terribly battered condition. It was immediately identified by a shearer, named Brown, as the body of a young English gentleman, named Villiers Wyckliffe, who was touring the back blocks and was bound for Chinchilla station. The body was buried this morning."

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"Joe Brown, you are a brick. I'll drink your health," said Wyck, producing the flask. Then he sat down and read the paragraph again, scarcely believing his eyes. Fortunately he was alone in the compartment; otherwise, fellow-passengers might have thought him mad. He paced the car, whistled, and sang, and called out over and over again:

"By Jove, I'm dead! Hurrah! Hurrah!" Then he sat down again and thought it all out. At last he rose and unscrewing the cap of his flask, cried:

"Fred Philamore, I drink your health. Villiers Wyckliffe is dead, and Fred Philamore, a young English gentleman, out for colonial experience, arrives in Sydney. What a good job I shaved. No one will recognize me now; at least they won't when I've done. I always had a fancy for red hair, and mine will dye beautifully. I'll make the acquaintance of Mr. Morris and his amiable friend, Winter, and if I don't have some fun, it's a caution. I'll make it warm for you, Reg Morris, before I'm done. I'll teach dirty colonials to hunt an English gentleman. Fortunately I know friends of the different Governors. Fred Philamore will have no difficulty in getting into Society: an Englishman

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is a welcome change to the colonials—at least they always say so. Hurrah, Wyck! Good old Wyck, you're dead, and good old Fred Philamore stands in your shoes."

With a lighter heart than he had known for many a day, Wyck stepped out of the train at Sydney.

CHAPTER XXV.

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BLUE GUMS.

"Why wasn't I born a boy, Hil? I never felt so comfortable before in my life as when I wore trousers, and now we have to return to these abominable petticoats."

"You don't regret your sex half so much as I do, for I have been regretting it ever since I was a child," answered Hil, giving her skirts a vicious twitch.

"Shall we go to Teasdale's this afternoon?"

"No, don't. I hate garden-parties."

"It's to be a very fashionable affair, and the Government House party will be there."

"That settles the matter then. We stay away," said Hil, decisively.

When the girls returned to Sydney they found Goody still at the "Grosvenor," seemingly quite happy. At first he had been feeble and despondent, but he knew a large number of people, whose visits kept him from brooding and, on his daughter's return, she found him quite a Society man in his old-fashioned way. Hil asked him to come out to Blue Gums, but he preferred the hotel, so both she and May left him there, perfectly content. Hil found an accumulation of letters and invitations waiting her arrival. Callers were numerous, who made curious enquiries about their long absence, but their curiosity was unsatisfied, and it was generally assumed that Hil had been on a visit to one of her stations.

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"Two gentlemen are below, and wish to see you, miss," said the maid, entering the room when the girls were engaged in bemoaning their lot.

"Did they give their names?"

"No. I asked, but they said it did not matter."

"Shew them up." Then, turning to May, she said, "I don't mind betting they're the boys."

"Good-morning, Miss Goodchild," said both Hal and Reg, advancing to May.

"Good-morning, gentlemen. This is my cousin."

"Delighted to meet you," said Hil, shaking hands cordially.

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"We called at the 'Grosvenor' this morning, and Mr. Goodchild told us we should find you here, so we took the liberty of coming over," said Hal.

"No liberty, I assure you. A pleasure."

"On both sides, I hope," said Reg.

"We have only recently returned from Brisbane, and Mr. Goodchild told us you, too, had been out of town."

"Yes, we went for a trip. I hope you weren't inconvenienced by the floods."

"We were; very much. The mere mention of them makes me look round, expecting to see a tribe of ants, or two or three snakes on the floor."

"Do tell us about your adventures," said May.

"When we left Brisbane we went on to Toowoomba and got on Wyck's tracks and chased him out West as far as Dalby. From there we set off in a buggy for Chinchilla, and we caught up his buggy, but found it had broken down, and that there was no trace of Wyck. We suppose he lost his way and was drowned in the creek, where his body was found."

"How did you manage in the bush? Did you have to camp out?" asked Hil, with an appearance of great interest, and gently touching May's foot.

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"Oh, of course, and it was great fun," and they both laughed.

"Do tell us about it. I am so fond of hearing tales of the bush," said May.

"Well, when we reached the creek, we found an old fellow, named Brown, in charge of the buggy, and from him we learnt that his boss, as he called Wyck, had gone on to Chinchilla on foot, so we started after him, but, losing our way, had to return to the creek. Now, it struck us that Wyck might possibly return to his buggy during the night, so we camped about half-a-mile away, and,

leaving a man in charge of our trap, we dressed up as swagmen and joined the party at the crossing, which had now been increased by the arrival of two new chums and a hawker's van."

"Tell them about the ants, Hal," said Reg.

"Oh, yes. Joe and the hawker had a dispute as to who should have a seat on the log used for the fire, but Joe had possession and determined to stick to it, which he did until a swarm of green-heads climbed up his back, and then he jumped up with a yell and flung off his clothes. Joe frightened the new chums, for they cleared off to their tent."

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"What kind of fellows were these new chums?" asked Hil.

"Oh, nothing out of the common. Very ladylike in appearance and namby-pamby looking. I felt really sorry for them, but they ought never to have left their ma's apron-strings."

"Yes, I fancy this flood will send them back," said Reg, laughing.

"How very interesting: but you have been spreading the story about well," remarked Hil.

"Why, what do you mean? I have never spoken to a soul about it. Have you, Reg?"

"Well, I heard the same tale, yesterday, about old Brown and the ants," said Hil.

"You did?"

"Yes, and I fancy I can recognise you two in the story I heard, since you say you came as tramps."

"I don't understand," said Hal, looking at her in astonishment.

"I'll tell it you as it was told to me, then. It appears Joe Brown recognised in the two tramps the two men who had driven by in a buggy and he passed it round the camp, and while you two were acting as tramps everyone was laughing at you."

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"Miss Mannahill, where did you hear that?" called out Hal, thunderstruck.

"That's not all," continued Hil, imperturbably. "We heard about you in Brisbane, and how you were good enough to discuss May and myself in a public saloon."

Hal looked at Reg in astonishment, and unable to say a word.

"Can you deny saying that, from all accounts, that cousin of May Goodchild's was a bit of a star?" asked Hil.

"And that I was a jolly girl?" struck in May, both of them now laughing heartily at the nonplussed appearance of the two men.

"Excuse me, I—" said Hal, with an uncanny feeling that there was witchcraft somewhere.

"No, we won't. We want an apology."

"For what?" said Reg, seriously.

"For speaking ill of absent friends."

"Did we speak ill?"

"Yes, of those two new chums, who were—"

"Not yourselves."

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"Certainly," said Hil, smiling. "And I am glad we seemed ladylike and I hope you'll do us the justice to say we have got back to our ma's—or the equivalent."

"You two ladies were the new chums!" said Reg, not quite sure if he heard aright.

"Yes. How did we look?"

"Splendid."

"Oh, you traitors, but we'll forgive you," said Hil, ringing for refreshments.

The girls then told their adventures and were equally amused to find they had all been at cross-purposes the whole time. It took the boys some considerable time to get over their astonishment.

"We went for a man, and returned with a horse," said Hil.

"And we went for a man, and returned with a stick," added Hal.

"Which stick? Not the famous one with all the notches cut on it?" asked May.

"The very same. There are several fresh notches added, and one of them may refer to you."

"Oh, let us see it. Where is it?" said Hil, excitedly.

"I have it safe under lock and key," answered Reg.

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"You can scratch out my notch," said May, "for though I had a narrow squeak, my heart is not quite broken, thanks to you two."

"For one thing, I am glad it occurred," answered Hal. "It has given us the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

"New chums, eh?"

"Now, that's not fair. But did that old fellow really recognise us?"

"No, I don't know that he did. Certainly we did not. I only said so because you were rather hard on us," answered Hil.

"What are you gentlemen going to do now?" asked May.

"We are going to have a holiday. I have done my duty, and my dear old friend here has sacrificed all his time for me. We propose staying in Sydney for a short while, and then taking another trip to Tasmania, as the people there were so nice," answered Reg.

"All Tasmanians are nice," put in May.

"Don't fish, May," said Hil, chaffingly.

"Present company always excepted," said May, unwarily.

"Oh, that's worse than ever," retorted Hil, and all joined in the laughter which followed.

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"Now, if you gentlemen are doing nothing to-day, we shall be very glad of your company on our drive," said Hil.

"We shall be delighted," said both together.

"Then that's settled. Now let us go to lunch. Quite impromptu, you know, billy and pannikins," she added, with a light laugh, as she led the way.

And a happy quartette they made, these four young people, sensible to the full of the enjoyments of life. Joke and anecdote were interchanged with good-humoured *camaraderie* and, if Mrs. Grundy was not present, she ought to have been, only in the capacity of spectator, that she might but learn how possible it is for youth of both sexes to meet together in wholesome social enjoyment without the watchful eye of a chaperon. After luncheon, the boys were invited to light their cigars, the girls apologising for not joining in, because they had given up male vices with male habiliments.

"You must come and see Wyck," said Hilda, taking them to the stables. "And here is old Tom. I don't know if you remember him at Dalby. I brought him to look after Wyck, because they seem to understand each other so well."

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"How's Wyck getting on, Tom?" she asked, as the old fellow came forward and saluted.

"Oh, he's doing well, miss. I've had him entered for the Sydney Cup, and I doubt there won't be many to beat him," said Tom, proudly, as he led the way to a loose box in which his favourite was kept.

"Well, Wyck, old boy," said Hil, and the horse, hearing her voice, turned round and put his head over the rail, and sniffed at her as if in search of something.

"Here you are," she said, giving him a piece of sugar, and rubbing his nose.

"We heard about your doings at Dalby; how you took the auctioneer and the farmer down," said Reg, "but we little guessed who the new chums were."

After wandering round the extensive stables, Hil called one of the grooms, and told him to put Fan and Tan in the dog-cart.

"They are a bit skittish, miss," said he, being a new hand.

"All the better," answered she. "Go and put them in."

A handsome dog-cart was wheeled out, and two beautiful dappled grey cobs harnessed to it, who by their prancing and restless antics looked like mischief. The wheeler was the more quiet of the two, but the leader seemed to prefer a more picturesque attitude than that of standing quietly on four legs, and elevating himself on his hind-legs remained pawing the air like an heraldic beast. Twice did the groom pull her into line with the wheeler, but she preferred dancing round and gazing at the driver.

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"I think she has had a fair look at us now," said Hil, quietly taking up the whip. "Straighten them again, please."

The opening of the gate was not a wide one, and the boys confessed they felt a trifle nervous in their seats. But they did not know their driver. With a sharp, "Now then, let go," she gave the leader a couple of smart smacks with the lash, and he dashed forward and they passed through the gate at a hand-gallop, and were soon flying along the beautiful roads round Sydney.

The boys thoroughly enjoyed themselves. What more could heart desire than to be driven behind a pair of handsome horses, beside a pair of handsome girls!

"Will you ladies come to the theatre to-night?" asked Reg. "There is a new star just arrived from London."

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"What do you say, May?"

"Delighted."

"Yes, we'll go with pleasure," said Hil, and arriving at the "Metropole," where the boys had taken up their residence, the cart was pulled up, and they alighted.

"Shall we call for you?" asked Reg.

"No, we'll call for you at 7.30. Good-bye."

Standing on the pavement, the boys gazed first after the cart disappearing round the corner, and then at each other. But words failed them, so they turned on their heel towards the hotel.

"By-the-bye, we had better call on old Goody. He might like to go," said Reg, and Hal being of the same opinion, they turned back to the "Grosvenor."

They found Mr. Goodchild in conversation with a young man, whom he introduced to them as Mr. Philamore.

"We are going to the theatre to-night, Mr. Goodchild, and we came to see if you would join us."

"Well, Philamore and I had agreed—"

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"Oh, both of you join us, won't you?"

Philamore having expressed himself as quite agreeable to the arrangement, it was settled they should all go to the theatre.

CHAPTER XXVI.

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MARJORIE WILLIAMSON.

Punctually to time, the girls arrived at the "Metropole," and, picking up the boys, they drove on to the "Grosvenor" for Goody and his friend. It was a tight squeeze to find seating room for all, but the Criterion Theatre was not far away, and Hil laughingly insisted on taking all of them. Thus, for the third time, the five chief characters of this veracious history were in each other's company, though on this occasion four were known to each other, and the fifth a stranger, but knowing well himself in whose company he was. They were comfortably settled in their box as the curtain rose, and all eyes were turned to the stage in eager anticipation of the appearance of the actress who had been so much talked about. When she did appear, two of the party gave a start; Reg in wonder where he had seen the face before, and Wyck in astonishment, for the familiar face and voice recalled old memories.

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"I have seen that face somewhere before," said Reg to Hil, "but I can't think where. The programme styles her 'Mrs. Montague,' but that does not give me a clue."

"You may have seen her in London," she suggested.

"Wasn't her name Marjorie Williamson?" whispered Mr. Philamore, as he laid aside the opera-glasses through which he had been gazing intensely.

"That's she; the very same. By Jove, I am glad," added Reg, excitedly.

"Hush," said Hal, for Reg had raised his voice, and unpleasant glances were cast in the direction of their box.

During the first act, Reg remained so engrossed in his thoughts that he left the play unheeded. He was only roused from his reverie by the vociferous applause that brought the actress twice before the curtain. Her success was now assured, much to his delight.

The boys, accompanied by Goody and Philamore, left for the saloon during the interval and the girls found themselves alone.

"What do you think of him?" asked Hil.

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"I can't say. I don't like red hair," answered May.

"He can't help that. I thought him rather pleasant."

"How strange that Reg should recognise this lady."

"And Mr. Philamore knows her too. He said her name was Marjorie Williamson."

"Marjorie Williamson! Why, that is the girl he told me about. She was one of Wyck's victims," said May, in surprise.

"They're coming back," said Hil, as the gentlemen entered the box.

"Too bad of us to go and leave you," observed Philamore, with a smile.

"Oh, we don't mind."

"Did you know Miss Williamson in London?" asked Hil of him.

"Slightly. As much as one knows the leading stars," he replied.

"Was she a star there?"

"Yes, she was rather successful, but I believe she got into some trouble and had to retire, contrary to the general rule, for it usually adds to their celebrity."

"What trouble?" asked May, curiously.

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"That's more than I can tell. You see we never notice these things in England, they are every-day occurrences. I don't think I should have recognised her but for her voice," answered Philamore, indifferently.

"Where did you meet your friend, Mr. Goodchild?" asked Reg, when they stood outside the box.

"At the hotel. He only arrived from England a few days ago. He seems a very pleasant young fellow and is well connected at home, knows the Governor, and moves in good society."

"I don't care about him," said Hal. "I have taken an unreasonable dislike to him. I have a certain repellent feeling when he speaks to me."

"It's strange he should know Marjorie Williamson, too," said Reg.

"Oh, I suppose everybody about town, who sees an actress on the stage, thinks himself entitled to claim acquaintance with her."

"Yes, I suppose so. I must call on her. I wonder where she is staying."

"No idea, but we can soon find out," and walking to one of the attendants, came back and said: "Petty's Hotel."

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"Why that's close to the "Grosvenor." We will call to-morrow. I shall be awfully glad to see her again."

"And she'll be glad to see you, old chap, I should think."

At the close of the performance, the boys saw the girls to their carriage and, promising to call on the following day, bade Goody and his friend good-night, and walked to their hotel.

The boys strolled along in silence, and each guessed that the same thing occupied their thoughts. At last, Hal said:

"Look here, Reg, ever since I had that dream in which I saw Wyck and Dick laughing over our failure, I cannot forgive myself for not stopping at Toowoomba, and seeing Bill Adams, and making sure that Wyck is dead, for we have only old Brown's word for it, and he is the kind of fellow that would do anything for money. How do we know his death was not a put-up job?"

"Quite right, Hal, I think we ought to settle that point at once. If Wyck is dead, his clothes will still be at Toowoomba; if he is alive, he will have called for his stick, and we must find him."

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"The express leaves at eight to-morrow morning. You can make an excuse for me to the girls, but let's keep the business to ourselves until it is settled," said Hal.

"You'll wire if you hear anything?"

"Of course. I don't think I shall, but at any rate we'll settle the question, and have done with it."

The next morning Hal left for Toowoomba, and at mid-day Reg called at Petty's Hotel, and sent in his card to Mrs. Montague. He was at once shown in and met with a hearty reception.

"Mr. Morris," said she, "you see I have fulfilled my promise."

"Yes, and I don't know of anything which has delighted me more. I was there last night, and never enjoyed a play more."

"I saw you. You were in a box with two ladies and two gentlemen."

"Yes, they were my friends."

Here a gentleman entered the room, and to Reg's surprise Marjorie ran to him and said:

"Arthur, this is Mr. Morris."

"Morris!" said he. "What! the real Morris? My dear sir, I am delighted to see you."

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"That's my husband," said she, in answer to his look of enquiry, then added in a sad voice, "poor old Jones died a month before my leaving, he sent a short message to you,—it was: 'Tell Mr. Morris that he made me happy.' Poor old chap!"

"I am heartily glad to see that Mrs. Montague took my advice. It would have been a thousand pities had she buried her talent because of a scoundrel."

"Have you come across him yet, Mr. Morris?"

"No, not yet," said Reg, slowly, "for months I have been on his tracks, and the other day he was reported to be drowned, but I can hardly believe it, so my friend has gone off to find out the truth."

"Who was that red-haired gentleman in your box?"

"His name is Philamore, he knows you."

"Philamore? I don't remember the name, but there was something in his face which seemed familiar."

"Fancy, my dear, only fancy," said Mr. Montague. "But you, Mr. Morris, you will join us at lunch. I want to drink your health, for it is to you I owe my meeting with my wife." [Pg 326]

Reg was persuaded to stay, but he did so reluctantly, as he had half promised to lunch at Blue Gums.

"Will you let me introduce my lady friends to you?" he asked.

"I should be most happy to meet any friends of yours," she answered, smiling.

"You'll find them true Australian girls, and I venture to say you will be good friends."

"Well, I shall be at home all this afternoon."

"If I can, then, I'll bring them to you," said Reg, taking his leave, and setting out at once for Blue Gums. His arrival alone caused some enquiries.

"Where's Mr. Winter?" asked Hil.

"He's gone to Toowoomba."

"Toowoomba! What for?"

"Well, to tell the truth, we are not satisfied that Wyck is really dead, and Hal has gone to enquire at the hotel he stopped at and interview Bill Adams; but mind, to anyone else, he has gone to Albury for a couple of days."

"I see," said Hil. [Pg 327]

"Do you know," asked May, "that Mr. Philamore has lately been in Queensland?"

"No. Is that so?"

"Well he started telling us a story about camp-life, and suddenly stopped and, though we both tried to persuade him to continue, he would not."

"And what do you make of that?"

"Nothing, except it seemed curious, considering he has only just come out from England."

"I have just left Mrs. Montague. Will you ladies go and call on her? She expressed a wish to make your acquaintance."

"When?"

"Well, she's at home this afternoon."

"We'd go if we only had an escort."

"Won't I do, Miss Goodchild?"

"If you will honour us," she said, with a mock curtsy.

"And we will both go and put on our brand-new dresses in honour of the occasion," said Hil, following May from the room.

Reg sat down and fell into a brown study. His lost Amy held the first place in his thoughts, but unconsciously of late he had found the form of May Goodchild, not usurping the image of his dead love, but appearing as it were by her side. He did not know whether to take himself to task for want of loyalty, but in the midst of his cogitations he was interrupted by the return of the ladies, costumed in the latest fashion. [Pg 328]

"Understand," said Hil, as they walked out to the carriage, "You are to be our chaperon, and keep us in order."

"Trust me, I'll sing out if I see any lapse," he answered, laughing.

Mrs. Montague and the girls became fast friends from the outset, and when Reg and her husband left for a smoke they became quite confidential. She told them all her experiences and how Reg had come to her rescue.

"You see, here I am with a husband who worships me; a successful career; my sisters at school and well cared-for, and wherever I go I am so well received; and all this I owe to Mr. Morris."

"Yes, he is a fine fellow, and had it not been for him I should not have been here to-day," said May, telling her tale of rescue by the boys.

The girls enjoyed their visit, and had extracted from Mrs. Montague a promise to make Blue Gums her home for the remainder of her stay. As the carriage was taking them down Pitt Street, Reg started in surprise as his eye caught sight of a man crossing the street. [Pg 329]

"Joe Brown!" he cried. "That's him for a certainty, in spite of his store clothes. If you'll excuse me I'll follow him. I'll keep you informed," he added, as the carriage was stopped, and he raised his hat.

Hastily hurrying in the direction taken by Joe Brown, Reg soon caught sight of him again. He shadowed him to Market Street, where he entered one of those cheap restaurants, at which one can get a bed or a three-course meal for sixpence. Reg sauntered about for fully an hour before he re-appeared. At last his patience was rewarded. Brown appeared, and walked in the direction of George Street, and halted at the corner of a cross-street, and waited as if expecting someone. Presently a hansom pulled up and Joe stepped in and sat down by the side of another man, and the cab drove rapidly away.

"The plot thickens," said Reg to himself. "Now, what the devil has he to do with Joe?" and he called a cab and had himself driven to Blue Gums.

"Well, did you see him?" asked Hil, eagerly. [Pg 330]

"Yes, and who do you think picked him up in a cab?"

"Mr. Philamore?"

"Yes, but how did you guess that?" said Reg, in surprise.

"I'll tell you what it is. I fancy that red-headed gentleman either knows something, or is not exactly what he professes to be."

"We'll wait until we hear from Hal, before doing anything further," said Reg.

"Yes, it would be just as well. But you will stay for dinner, as Mr. Goodchild and some Tasmanian friends are coming to-night."

Reg did not refuse, needless to say. On his return to his hotel he found two telegrams and a letter waiting for him. Opening one of the telegrams, he read:

"Toowoomba. Wyck called here day before flood. Left for Sydney.—Hal."

The other read:

"Albany, W.A. Self and wife arrive Adelaide Monday. Wire address.—Whyte."

The letter contained a cheque for £150, with the photo of Mr. and Mrs. Montague enclosed, on the back of which was written:—"May God bless and prosper Reginald Morris is the earnest prayer of the originals!" [Pg 331]

CHAPTER XXVII.

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FOILED.

Reg passed a restless night, turned himself out of bed early, and went for a stroll in the Domain before breakfast. He was ill at ease and full of self-reproach, for it seemed to him he had neglected his oath. He had given himself up to the pleasure of the hour, while Wyck was still at large. He blamed himself for believing rumours and not satisfying himself of their truth, and altogether worked himself into a miserable frame of mind.

After a hasty breakfast, he hurried round to the "Grosvenor," and asked for Goody, and shewed him the telegram.

"That's funny, very funny," said Goody.

"Is that friend of yours here still?" asked Reg.

"No, he has gone to stay at Government House for a few days. He shewed me a most pressing invitation." [Pg 333]

"When was this, Mr. Goodchild?"

"Last night. He told me he knew a lot of the Governor's friends, and that the Governor had asked him almost as a favour to go, as he complained of being bored."

"Did he tell you this?"

"Yes, he seemed to sympathise with his friend."

"Poor devils, how badly we treat them," said Reg, with mock commiseration.

"Now I don't agree with you there, Mr. Morris. I think we treat the Governors right royally;" said Goody, mistaking his tone.

"You try to do so in your straightforward, honest way, and such are the thanks you get for it. But good-bye for the present, I have some work to do."

Reg hurried away to Blue Gums where he produced the telegram, which the girls read with surprise. All agreed that nothing could be done until Hal returned.

"You'll keep your appointment with Mrs. Montague," said Reg, rising to go: "but you must excuse me. I want to look round."

"After Philamore?" asked Hil.

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"He's staying at Government House."

"What!"

"So your father told me this morning."

"Then he can't be Wyck," said Hil, emphatically.

Meeting Hal on the arrival of his train, they drove together to their hotel, to take up the thread of their abandoned plans. Hal told his story:

"On my arrival, I went to the 'Royal' and saw Bill, who, of course, said he knew nothing; but when I threatened to arrest him on a warrant he changed his tone. He told me Wyck had called for his things on the day before the flood, and then started for Sydney. Bill said he had complained about the loss of a black stick, of which he knew nothing. I wired to you, and caught the next train back."

"I expect Mr. and Mrs. Whyte. They arrived at Adelaide on Monday," said Reg, handing him their telegram.

"What's become of Philamore?"

"Staying at Government House."

"We musn't lose sight of that chap."

"Oh, you remember old Joe Brown, who swore to Wyck's identity?"

"Yes; what about him?"

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"I saw him here yesterday," said Reg. "I followed him, and he got into a cab, with whom do you think?"

"Not Philamore?"

"Yes."

"Then that settles it. Well, now we will get the girls to call a meeting at Blue Gums to-morrow. They must invite Mr. and Mrs. Montague, Goody and ourselves; then we can compare notes, for we all must go to the garden-party at Government House to-morrow afternoon."

Goody's tale to Reg was quite true. Fred Philamore had made the acquaintance of the Governor, and had mentioned so many London friends that were known to both, that His Excellency, finding him so interesting, had invited him to Government House. This invitation he was glad to accept, as he was still uneasy about his pursuers. The boys, however, little guessed that all this while they were themselves being watched: yet this was so, as the pseudo Fred Philamore had two retainers on their track, who reported all their movements. Consequently he knew all about Hal's journey to Toowoomba, and guessed its object. He was engaged in forming a plan by means of which he could be revenged on Morris, but as he did not consider the time was ripe to put it into practice, he accepted the chance offered him by the Governor to enjoy himself at the expense of the Colonial Government.

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The next morning the party of seven interested in the doings of Villiers Wyckcliffe met at Blue Gums to discuss matters.

"Of course," said Hal, "we are only surmising that Philamore is our man. We have no direct proof of his identity yet."

"When I last saw him he had dark hair and moustache," said May.

"Well a moustache is easily shaved off, and hair can be as easily dyed," said Reg.

"I suppose nobody noticed his hands, for he has a white scar on the fore-finger of his right hand, plainly visible," said Mrs. Montague.

"Why, I noticed that only yesterday on Philamore's hand," said Goody.

"Then it is he," said Reg, excited. "Now how are we to get at him?"

"Leave that to me, old chap," answered Hal. "You've got your die ready; you shall be executioner,

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I will bring him to the block."

"You are not really going to brand him?" put in Mrs. Montague.

"I am, indeed."

"Well, I can't say he does not deserve it," she added, stopped from further remark by Reg's determined face.

"Well, it is understood that we all meet this afternoon at Government House," said Hal. "We will now adjourn the meeting."

Hil and May had already refused the invitations to the party, but a private note despatched to the Secretary had the desired effect, as that gentleman held a very high opinion of Hil and her fortune.

Government House is a palatial residence, and situated in the midst of lovely gardens. It was the height of the season, and a large number of people were assembled in the grounds, including a good proportion of mammas, each with a bevy of daughters. At the appointed time Hil's carriage drove into the grounds, followed by a cab, and the occupants of both were set down to be presented to His Excellency, who stood with a forced, dignified smile on his face, and bowed to each visitor with the accurate regularity of a machine. Close observers only would notice that the smile was supercilious and the bow perfunctory. Both the girls and boys, as a matter of form, passed before him and then wandered together round the grounds. They did not wander far before they came across the bishop's son, who was paying elaborate attention to the daughter of a squatter who could count his sheep by millions. With ill-concealed satisfaction, her fond mother watched her daughter's flirtation with one of England's nobility, as she supposed him to be. Further on, they met their man, evidently in the full swing of enjoyment. He was talking to a young English lady with whom he was seated under a spreading eucalyptus, and satirising colonial manners. The lady herself was on the look-out for a colonial millionaire and often sighed to herself over the disagreeable necessity that the millions could not be obtained without the millionaire.

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Seats had been placed on both sides of the tree, and Philamore and his companion were quite unaware that the seat at their back was occupied, until the former was startled by hearing a familiar voice say:

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"It's Wyck for a certainty. We shall have to waylay him."

"It's a matter of time, Mr. Morris. Do not distress yourself so much. We'll catch him before long."

Peering round, he saw May and Reg were the speakers, and a longing to get out of the way seized him. He took the earliest opportunity of excusing himself and calling a cab drove rapidly into the town, to the same restaurant into which Reg had seen Joe disappear. He sent a boy in to ask for Mr. Brown.

"Come and get up," he called out as Brown appeared. "You must get ready at once, Brown, and do it to-night, for I am off by the express. They have found me out. But, mind, no murder."

"Oh, no, just bruise and lame 'em a bit, eh!"

"Exactly, and don't let them catch sight of your face if you can help it."

"I understand, boss."

"Now you can get out. Here's a tenner to go on with and I'll send you another when I hear the job is done."

"All right, boss," said Brown, as he got down.

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"Address George Thompson, P.O., Melbourne," shouted Philamore to him.

"Ay, ay. Good-night."

Philamore drove to the Imperial Hotel, and wrote a note to His Excellency, saying he had been called away to Brisbane on important business and promising to call on his return. The remainder of the time left to him he devoted to preparations, and when the Melbourne train left Sydney it carried an elderly man with grey hair.

Both the boys and the girls left the garden-party early, and on the return of the former to their hotel, they found that a young woman had been enquiring for Mr. Morris and had promised to call again. While they were speculating as to whom this new visitor could be the lady herself appeared. She had a sad tale to tell. She had been employed as barmaid at a hotel, and had met Wyck and fallen in love with him, and after arranging to be married, he had thrown her over.

"But why do you come to us?" asked Reg.

"I heard you were after him for a similar thing," she said, bursting into tears.

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"And where did you hear that?" said Hal.

"Well, my friend the housemaid at the 'Metropole' heard you talking about Wyck, and she told me."

"What do you want us to do."

"I don't know, sir, but I thought you would like to know that he has made an appointment with another girl in the 'Domain' at eight to-night."

"Where's he to meet her?"

"I'll show you, sir."

"Look here, my girl," said the astute Hal, "you are not telling me the truth."

"What do you mean, sir?" she asked, indignantly.

"Do you mind pulling the bell, Reg?"

"What for, Hal?"

"To send the waiter for a policeman. He will investigate this lady's statement."

"Oh, don't do that, sir."

"Will you tell us who sent you here then?" said Hal.

"You'll not touch me if I do."

"Not if you tell the truth."

"Well, there were going to be several men behind the bushes, where I was to take you, and they were going to thrash you." [Pg 342]

"Who sent you here?"

"Mr. Brown gave me ten shillings to come."

"If you take my advice, you won't have anything more to do with Mr. Brown. Now you can go," and Hal dismissed her.

"A very clumsy plot indeed, Mr. Wyckliffe, very clumsy! You must be losing your wit," said Hal, smiling.

The next morning, Reg amused himself by reading the sarcastic account in the *Bulletin*, of the doings at Government House, which were served up in the spicy style of that journal, and to his astonishment the account wound up with the astounding statement that Mr. Philamore had left for Brisbane.

As Hal read the paragraph aloud, he looked at Reg whose face seemed to contract with rage, he caught Hal's glance, and then both turned away in silence to engage in their own thoughts.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

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PREPARATIONS.

When Wyck, or Fred Philamore, left Sydney, he did so without leaving a trace behind him, for Joe Brown had returned to Queensland, after sending a detailed account of how the boys had been caught, and had received a tremendous thrashing. Wyck was overjoyed, and had sent him his other tenner. Now his intention was to get to England without delay, but as no boat was starting for a week, and feeling secure in his disguise, he gave himself up to enjoyment in Melbourne, and, becoming bolder every day, allowed the boat to start without him. The boys had visited Adelaide and Melbourne, and scoured the county, but could find no trace of the fugitive, and as Mr. and Mrs. Whyte had now arrived, they had gone to Tasmania with them and the girls for a short stay at Goodchilds'. They had only been there two days when Hal received the following telegram:

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"Melbourne, Come over. Quick.—Terence O'Flynn."

They at once started for Melbourne, where Terence met them and gave them an account of his proceedings.

"You see, gents, ever since I last saw you I have been keeping a sharp look-out on both Dick and the 'Gaiety,' but I never see any one at all like our man. On Tuesday I was on my cab as usual and Dick was in the same rank, when I see an elderly gent, clean-shaved, and with rather grey hair, wearing a bell-topper—a regular howling toff he looked—stroll along the rank, 'Cab, sir,' says I, but he shook his head and walked on. Seemed as if he was in thought, for when he came to the end of the street he came back again, and beckoning to Dick, got in his cab, and drove off. I didn't take much notice of that, but I did notice that Dick didn't come back until nearly twelve, and when he did he seemed pleased with himself. Next day morning I was passing the 'Gaiety,' when I'm blowed if I didn't see Dick's cab a-waiting outside, so I drives down a lane a bit and watches, and sure that elderly gent comes out again with one of the young ladies, and drives away. When Dick comes back to the stand that night, I says to him—'Got another soft line,

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Dick—"Yes," he says, "but he's going away soon!" Well, I tried all I knew, but Dick he was fly, and as this chap seemed to carry on just like Wyck, I thought it would do no harm to send for you."

"He's got grey hair you say, Terence?" asked Hal.

"Yes, but he don't look old, and I know he's a toff, too."

"It's worth risking, Reg. Let's make all preparations in case it is, for we do not intend to let him slip again."

"What shall we do first?"

"We want a furnished house, Terence."

"Sure you can get hundreds of 'em, sir."

"Do you know of one close handy?"

"I saw one in Nicholson Street only yesterday, for I drove a gent to look at it, but he said the rent was too much."

"How much was it, Terence?"

"Two pounds ten a week."

"Let's go and have a look at it."

Calling a cab they drove up Collins Street to Nicholson Street, and half-an-hour later they had the receipt for two weeks' rent of an eight-roomed house. [Pg 346]

"The next thing for you to do, Terence, is to swell up a bit," said Hal.

"What do you mean—put my Sunday togs on?"

"Yes, that's the idea. How long will it take you?"

"About an hour, sir."

"Then go and do it, and meet me at 'Menzie's,' in an hour's time. Here's a sovereign to go on with."

The boys then drove to "Menzie's," engaged a room and locked themselves in.

"The only way we can satisfy ourselves as to his identity is by means of that stick."

"The stick! How are you going to do it? I cannot part with it on any account," said Reg, grasping it firmly, as if in fear that it would vanish altogether; he had had it made so that it could be put together in one, or taken apart.

"My idea is to send Terence to the 'Gaiety' at a time when this man is there, and carry the stick openly in his hand."

"What then?"

"Why, if he really is Wyck, he is almost certain to shew some interest in the stick." [Pg 347]

"Yes?"

"Well, that will put Terence on his guard, and he can tell him some yarn about it, and make an appointment with him at our house."

"What then?"

"Then you can make use of your die, my boy."

"It's a glorious idea, but I don't like parting with the stick. Having it by me is a great source of satisfaction to me."

"We can trust Terence. He's no fool, and knows well enough what success will mean to him."

"How about the doctor?"

"I wired young Aveling to come over with Goody and the girls. The boat's due at mid-day tomorrow. Come on down now, Terence ought to be here."

"Then I am to bring the stick with me?"

"Yes, certainly, old chap. It's our only chance."

They found Terence below, rigged out in his Sunday best, and looking very smart. The stick was handed to him, with full instructions how to act, and what to say, should the gentleman recognise the stick. [Pg 348]

"You can depend on me, gentlemen," said Terence.

"Be off now, Terence, and don't drink anything strong. Stick to light stuff, and report to us directly you have seen him."

"Right you are, your honour, and be jabbers, if he's the man, we'll see him at 345, Nicholson Street," said Terence as he left.

About nine o'clock Terence called at their hotel, in a very excited state, and quite out of breath.

"It's Wyck, it's Wyck," he said, sinking down on a chair and wiping his forehead. They gave him time to recover his breath, and then he told them his story.

"When I left your honour," he said, "I went to the 'Gaiety,' but he was not there, so I waited on the other side of the road, as I didn't want Dick to see me toggged up. Just about seven, I see Dick's cab drive up, and out jumps the old gentleman. When Dick had driven off again, I followed him into the saloon. There he was, larking with Miss Harris, but I took no notice of him at all. 'A glass of lager,' says I, throwing down a sovereign carelessly, like as if I was a toff, and as I counted the change I put the stick on the counter. The old gent he gives a start directly he sees it, and he looks quite hard at me, but I took no notice and called for a smoke. Well, I lights up, says good-night, and was just off, when he calls out—'Have another drink with me?'"

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"I don't mind,' says I.

"That's a curious sort of stick,' says he, pointing to it.

"Yes,' says I.

"Had it long,' says he.

"Some months now,' says I.

"What's them notches on it for?' says he.

"I don't know. It don't belong to me.'

"Whose is it then?' asks he, getting interested.

"Oh,' says I, 'there's quite a history belonging to that stick.'

"What sort of a history?'"

"Well,' says I, 'it's like this. My sister, she was staying at Toowoomba up Queensland way; she's the sister of the landlady at the 'Royal.' Well, one day a new chum named Wyckcliffe came there to stop. She told me he seemed a decent sort, but he left early for out West the next morning, and he never came back, poor fellow! for he was drowned—so the papers say. Any rate, he left some old clothes at the 'Royal,' and this stick was found amongst them, and she keeps it, for she said he was such a nice fellow.'

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"But it's yours now,' says he.

"No such luck,' says I. 'She don't know I have it out, else there'd be a row.'

"I'll tell you what I'll do,' he says, 'I knew the chap as owned this stick, and I'll give you ten bob for it.'

"You won't,' says I, 'nor ten pound neither.'

"Why?' says he, surprised.

"I'm living in her house,' says I, 'and if she knew I was taking liberties with her goods I'd get the run.'

"Would she sell it?' he asks.

"There'd be no harm in asking her,' I says, 'if it's worth anything to you.'

"It is for old acquaintance sake. Where does she live?'"

"At 345 Nicholson Street,' says I.

"What time is best to see her?' says he.

"About four in the afternoon.'

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"Tell your sister I'll call at four to-morrow,' says he.

"We had another drink and he wished me good afternoon, and I ran all the way down here," said Terence, evidently immensely pleased with himself.

"You have done well, Terence," said Hal, and Reg shook him warmly by the hand.

"Look here, Terence, we shall want a lady to take the part of your sister to-morrow and receive him. Do you know of a respectable girl who would do it?"

"Well, that all depends. What would she have to do?"

"Nothing more than to receive him."

"Well, I think I know of a lady that will suit. She *is* my sister. She is a nurse, but is not doing anything now."

"A nurse. That's the very person we want," said Hal, quite pleased at the way things were going.

"She'll come, I suppose, Terence?" asked Reg.

"Yes, sir. She'll do anything I tell her," answered Terence, proudly.

"Then you can tell your sister to call at the house at ten to-morrow, and we'll meet you there to arrange matters," said Hal. [Pg 352]

"Right you are, your honours. I reckon he won't get away this time," said Terence, leaving them together.

The following morning the boys took possession of their house and planned out details. Terence duly brought his sister, who, they were surprised to find, was an extremely good-looking Irish girl, quite ready to do all she was told, without asking any questions.

Hal drilled her instructions into her thoroughly, and then they both set out for the wharf, and met the *Pateena*, which arrived with all their friends on board, including Dr. Aveling, a friend of Goodchild's.

Hil was briefly informed of all that had been done, and the boys hurried back to Nicholson Street, taking the doctor with them.

"Now, doctor," said Reg, "just look at this die and see if it is fit for the job."

"Yes, it will do very well," he replied, examining the edges.

"We want you to have all your tools ready, for though Reg will do the deed, you will see that the wounds are properly dressed, won't you?" [Pg 353]

"Certainly, I have brought all that is necessary, and, provided you are sure of your man, I am ready to help you."

"Rest assured we won't brand the wrong man," said Hal, who was as cool as a cucumber.

"There's a cab pulling up at the door," said Reg, excitedly. He had scarcely spoken when there was a loud knock at the door.

Miss O'Flynn opened the door, and the visitor entered.

CHAPTER XXIX.

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EAR-MARKED.

The room into which the gentleman was shewn was in the centre of the house, and was furnished as a sitting-room. Miss O'Flynn followed him in and closed the door, which was immediately locked on the outside. A second door which led into another apartment, was screened by a heavy curtain. The door it hid was kept ajar, so that the people interested, who were waiting in the room, could hear all that passed. The first thing that caught the visitor's eye was the notched stick lying on the table, which he eagerly picked up.

"Ah, here we are, miss. Yes, this is the very stick," he said, as he examined it carefully.

"The poor fellow who owned it was drowned, I believe," said Miss O'Flynn.

"I want this stick as a memento of him," answered the gentleman, sweetly. [Pg 355]

"But I can't part with it on any account."

"I'll give you five pounds for it, though it is not worth a penny."

"No, sir, I cannot sell it. My brother knew that."

"Where is your brother?"

"He's in the town."

"And are you all alone in this large house?" asked he, with an insinuating smile.

"Yes, why?"

"Oh, nothing. But really, miss, you must let me have this stick. You must. You must, I say you must," and he came close to her and stared her straight in the face.

"Ah, you will then. I can have it," said he, picking up his hat and the stick. "Now, good-bye."

"Miss O'Flynn, will you leave the room?" said a voice behind him that made him start round as he was making his way to the door.

He paused thunderstruck, as his eyes rested on Reg's pale face with its look of fierce determination.

"Villiers Wyckliffe we meet at last."

The silence in the room was profound, broken only by the fall of Wyck's hat on the floor, as his trembling fingers lost their power of grasp. [Pg 356]

"Morris!" he gasped.

"Yes, I am Reg Morris."

At this announcement Wyck's first idea was flight, and he made for the door.

"Don't trouble yourself, the door is locked. There is no escape for you now," said Reg, sternly.

Wyck watched his adversary for a moment. Then he came forward, smiling, and said, "My dear Morris, I was most sorry to hear of your trouble. Believe me, I beg your pardon, sincerely, for any wrong I did you."

"Stand aside, you scoundrel. You killed the girl I had loved for years. You made it your sport to break our hearts. Your chosen device is a broken heart. See I have provided you with an excellent reproduction of it, and, in order that you may carry it with you wherever you go, that it may always be in evidence, I am going to brand your charming device on both your ears."

The relentless, menacing tone chilled him and sapped his self-control. At heart Wyck was a coward, but he was a calculating villain as well. His lips quivered and his face paled. His voice shook as he whined: [Pg 357]

"Mercy, Morris. Mercy! I'll forfeit anything, I'll do anything you like, to make amends. I never meant—"

"But I do mean it, you grovelling coward. And if you take my advice you'll submit, for it has to be done."

Again the cold, cruel tone made him shiver, but the bully in Wyck's nature reasserted itself as he shouted:

"You won't. You won't, for I'll shoot you, you hound," and he levelled a revolver he had taken from his pocket at Reg's head.

Reg laughed a hard, unnatural laugh, as he sprang forward and, knocking his arm up, planted a blow well between his eyes. The bullet lodged harmlessly in the ceiling and Wyck lay in a heap on the floor.

"Come, doctor," cried Reg, as between them they hauled the struggling man to a sofa. Reg smothered his cries, and a few minutes later he was under chloroform. Reg's stern determination acted like a spell on his assistants and swiftly all the accessories for the operation were brought. A small block was placed under each ear; Reg firmly held the die upon the piece of flesh, and with a single blow from a mallet calmly branded the device on each ear. Then he handed his victim over to the doctor to dress the wounds and, giving a deep sigh, sank into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. A wave of relief that his task was accomplished, that his oath was fulfilled, passed over him. Pity for his victim he had none, only satisfaction that an act of stern, pitiless justice had been done. When the doctor had finished his bandaging Reg straightened himself. [Pg 358]

"We'd better keep him a week here to give the wounds a chance to heal," said Hal.

"Yes, it would be as well to do so," said the doctor. "When the bleeding stops I will dress them so that they heal quickly."

"I wonder what he'll do now," said Reg.

"Probably give us in charge," laughed Hal.

"Let him do so, I'm agreeable. At any rate we will stop in Melbourne to give him a chance."

Terence and his sister were left in charge with full instructions, and the boys left for their hotel, where they found all their friends awaiting them. [Pg 359]

"Father, I've kept my word," said Reg, taking Whyte's hand.

"Amen," said the old man.

"Kiss me," said Mrs. Whyte, coming to him with tears in her eyes.

"And shake hands with us," said Hil and May.

Goody also came forward and gave him a hearty hand-clasp.

"I thank you all," said Reg, much affected. "But here is the man to whom the success is due. He offered his services to me, a complete stranger, and all these months he has been my constant companion. Hal, old boy, give me your hand."

"I only helped a friend in need," answered Hal.

"As any Australian would do," said the doctor.

The girls and Goody took to the Whytes at once. Goody and old Whyte had many opinions and pursuits in common, while the girls openly called Mrs. Whyte, mother. Amy's death had left its mark on both the old people, and the Mia-Mia had become intolerable to them, so that when an opportunity occurred of selling it they accepted it eagerly. Whyte had had enough of England. It held only one small spot sacred and dear to him, which was Amy's grave.

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That evening Reg was seized with a fit of melancholy. Now that his revenge was accomplished the inevitable reaction had come. In spite of his conviction that he had done his duty, still his conscience pricked him for wilfully maiming a fellow-creature. He had separated himself from the others and was brooding sadly in the twilight when he was roused by the touch of a small hand being laid on his.

"Don't fret, Mr. Morris," said May, in her gentle, sympathetic way. "Think how you have saved others now from the fate you saved me from."

"You make too much of it, Miss Goodchild."

"No, I can never do that," she answered, simply.

"Ah, here you are. We've been looking for you everywhere," called out Mrs. Whyte, coming upon them.

"I've been trying to console Mr. Morris, mother," said May.

"And she has succeeded, for now I am quite over it," said Reg, lightly.

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"Mr. Winter suggested going to the theatre to see that friend of yours."

"That's a splendid idea. We'll go."

They were fortunate enough to get a box, and gave themselves up to an evening's enjoyment. Between the acts Hal and Reg sent their names round to Mrs. Montague, and were immediately received.

"Shake hands, Mrs. Montague," said Reg.

"He's branded," said Hal.

"Who, Wyck?" asked the lady, surprised, and both nodded an assent.

"Well, he has deserved his fate," she said, with a little sigh. "And now you will let him go." The completion of the revenge awed her.

"Will you and Mr. Montague join us at our hotel this evening?" asked Hal.

"Where are you staying?"

"At 'Menzie's.'"

"Why, I am there, too. Certainly we will, with pleasure. But there is my call. Good-bye till then."

Later on, the doctor returned and gave a favourable report of his patient. He said Terence had had a good deal of trouble to keep him quiet. But though he was sullen and restless no serious consequences had arisen, and he could be removed in two days' time.

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They had a gay supper-party that night, and two days later a cab was sent to 345, Nicholson Street, and Wyck, with his head bandaged, was released to go whithersoever he would.

"Where to?" asked the cabby.

"To Dr. Moloney's," said he, having heard of that gentleman's name.

"I want you to examine my ears," he said, when he found himself in the doctor's consulting room.

"What's the matter?" replied the doctor, removing the bandages. "Phew"—he whistled, when he saw the damage.

"What is it, doctor?"

"You're branded for life. Who did it?" and the doctor passed him a hand-mirror to see for himself.

The sight that met Wyck's eyes nearly made him faint with rage and terror.

"Who did it?" asked the doctor, again.

Then Wyck told him the story, at least his own version of it, and in such a manner that the doctor's indignation was at once aroused.

"Come down to the Police Station and I will go with you. It's horrible that such a thing should be allowed. You must punish these ruffians."

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The doctor drove him to the nearest Police Station and shewed the branding to the Inspector, who was thunderstruck at the sight and would scarcely believe the details told him by Wyck.

"Will you issue warrants?" asked the doctor.

"No, we can't do that. You must charge them with inflicting grievous bodily harm and we must

issue an information."

"Where are these men now?"

"I have no idea. They kept me prisoner for three days and I daresay are far away by this time," answered Wyck.

The Inspector took down full particulars, to be forwarded to the detective department with instructions to wire details all over the Colonies without delay.

The Melbourne Press is as enterprising as that of other cities, and scarcely an hour had gone by since Wyck laid the information, when the news-boys were shouting, "Terrible assault on a gentleman. Ear-marked on both ears." The boys bought both the *Herald* and the *Standard*, and read the following paragraph:

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ASSAULT ON A GENTLEMAN.

At a quarter to five this evening a gentleman named Villiers Wyckliffe, accompanied by Dr. Moloney, called at the police-station and reported himself as being the victim of a terrible assault by which he will be marked for life. It appears from particulars to hand, which are very meagre, that two men named Morris and Winter have followed him for some months in order to be revenged for some fancied wrong. They decoyed him into a house and committed the assault complained of. We learn that information has been sworn, and the matter is in the hands of the detectives.

"Shall we call for the warrants, Hal?" asked Reg, playfully.

"No; let's give the detectives a chance."

At dinner they discussed their probable arrest, but no detectives appeared, so quite unconcerned they went off to a theatre with their friends.

The following morning both the *Age* and the *Argus* had each long columns referring to the assault. Both had interviewed Wyck, and that gentleman had glorified himself and posed as the martyr of a horrible conspiracy. The affair became the sensation of the day. Telegrams were sent the length and breadth of the Colonies; ships' passenger-lists were examined, and no trace of the fugitives from justice—so the papers called them—could be discovered. On the next afternoon, the boys called on the Inspector, sent up their cards and coolly asked for the warrants. The Inspector's face was a study when he was told where they had been staying. They were then formally served with the informations.

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Each newspaper vied with the other in giving their readers as many particulars, real or imagined, as possible and the boys were besieged with reporters. The public were informed that the charge was not denied, and that the accused considered their action fully justified. Details were given of the curious type of ear-mark, which was stated to be Mr. Wyckliffe's device. The Sydney correspondent telegraphed the surprise felt in the highest circles, and the indignation expressed at the dastardly act, as Mr. Wyckliffe was well-known there. The Brisbane correspondent sent all that could be gleaned from their Dalby and Toowoomba agents, and the romance and the excitement grew in equal proportions. Later editions reported that the eminent Q.C., Mr. Curves, had been retained for the prosecution, and that Dr. Haddon had undertaken the defence.

Next day the case was called in a crowded court, but the defendants asked for, and obtained, a remand of a week to allow witnesses to be brought.

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CHAPTER XXX.

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THE TRIAL.

At length, the day of the celebrated trial of Wyckliffe *v.* Morris and Winter dawned. Never since the days of the trial of Ned Kelly had popular excitement been so keen. The newspapers were full of the case. It was the absorbing topic throughout the colonies, and the conjectures as to the result were numerous.

The Melbourne Law Courts are housed in a huge building, which cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, and is acknowledged to be the largest in the Colonies. But it was not in this palatial building that the great case was tried, but as is usually the way in a dilapidated, stuffy, little police-court, with dingy walls, bad ventilation, and greasy seats.

Long before the commencement of the trial, large crowds had gathered round the doors, not one tenth of whom could have found seats in the miserable building, that would scarcely hold two hundred people. The boys had secured passes for their friends to the gallery.

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The bench was overcrowded with gentlemen who could tag J.P. on to their names. This is usual when an exciting case, particularly a breach of promise case, is on. At ordinary times great difficulty is experienced in getting anyone to attend.

When the Court was duly opened the Inspector read out the charge against Reginald Morris and Allen Winter, for inflicting grievous bodily harm and endangering the life of Villiers Wyckcliffe.

"How do you plead—Guilty or Not Guilty?" asked the Clerk of the Court.

"Not Guilty," said Reg.

"Not Guilty," said Hal.

"I appear to prosecute, your worship," said Mr. Curves, rising.

"And I for the defendants," said Dr. Haddon.

Wyck sat by his counsel's side. His head was wrapped in bandages and the expression of his face was forlorn and miserable. The boys were permitted to sit at their counsel's side and both appeared quite contented and serene.

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The celebrated counsel, Mr. Curves, noisily arranged his papers, rose and opened the case in the blustering manner for which he was famous.

"The case I have to present to your worship I think I may characterise as unprecedented in the annals of Australian history. It is monstrous that such a savage act of reprisal should have been conceived in the midst of the enlightened civilisation of our day. It is typical of a period of savagery and barbarism, and I venture to assert that even were we living under such barbaric conditions, when human life was held cheaply, an act so atrocious as this would not be allowed to go unpunished. That the prisoners—"

"I object to my clients being called prisoners," interposed Dr. Haddon.

"I bow to my learned friend. I will say defendants—for that they will be prisoners soon will be clearly demonstrated, so the objection hardly matters. That the defendants are hardened to crime and wickedness their callous manner makes apparent to all of us. To view with in-difference the grave charge of disfiguring a man in such a manner that his life is ruined stamps them at once as murderers in intent, if not in deed. I shall have little difficulty in shewing your worship that the crime was premeditated, and that the defendants were literally thirsting to avenge themselves in this bloodthirsty manner. I shall shew the Court that the defendant Morris set himself to avenge a wrong—or rather what his warped imagination considered a wrong—and, coward that he was, thinking that man to man would be an unequal match he sought an accomplice in the man by his side. Both of them hounded my client down, tracked him over the whole country—and what for, think you? For his blood—and yet both have the presumption to sit there with smiling faces and to ask you to believe they have done an heroic deed."

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Mr. Curves was practised in the art of rousing his audience to indignation, and he paused to let the full effect of his outburst sink into the hearts of his hearers.

"These are the outlines, your worship. I will now go into details. Villiers Wyckcliffe, my client, is the only son of the late Seymour Wyckcliffe, the eminent banker, whose name is known throughout the civilised world. On the death of his father, Mr. Wyckcliffe, being disinclined for a business life, converted the bank into a company and retired. Now, given a young man of prepossessing appearance, of good birth and standing, with ample means, does it not stand to reason that, in a city like London, a young man of this description would have more temptations thrown in his way than a more ordinary individual? Furthermore, he was always a great favourite with the gentler sex, and perhaps that fact alone was sufficient to rouse the ire of jealous individuals, a fair specimen of whom we have before us in the defendant Morris. Now, my client was introduced to a young lady at a ball, at the lady's own request, and they sat out one dance together. The lady proving to be very interested in him, and shewing a tendency to monopolise his attention, time passed, so that instead of one dance being missed, two were. The lady in question had merely remarked that as she was engaged to her betrothed for the next dance, it did not matter missing it. Also, in the course of the conversation, she mentioned, in a manner that could not be misconstrued, that she would be walking on the following day in the Park. Naturally, my client announced his intention of being there too. They met, and for several days continued to meet, just previous to the day the plaintiff had decided to start on his trip to Australia. On his arrival here telegrams informed him that he was being pursued. My client was surprised, but subsequently obtained the information that the girl had fallen in love with him and broken off with her betrothed, the defendant Morris. Now, I ask the Court if it is surprising that a girl should do that? One has only to compare the two men—even though you now see my client at a disadvantage—to perceive how natural, how much a matter of common sense and how inevitable it was that she should do so. Now, this commonplace matter was the cause of the assault."

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We need not follow the learned counsel as he detailed the history of the meeting with Winter, the pursuit from one colony to another, the theft of the notched stick, and the ultimate capture of Wyck. With brutal directness and sarcasm he laid bare a diabolical plot until the audience was roused almost to a pitch of frenzy: but when he closed as follows the frenzy became almost uncontrollable.

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"When these ruffians seized and drugged my client and gave play to their barbarous instincts by maiming him for life, one is tempted to ask why they did not further indulge their brutal propensities by roasting the flesh they cut away. I am sorry to say that both these men are Australians, and I ask again, can such things be tolerated in the country of sunshine and gladness, of freedom and justice? In another country we know Judge Lynch would preside at their

trial. And we here shall shew these two that such an atrocity will not be permitted here solely because a girl has shewn one man that she can like him better than another, with whom she has become entangled. I will now call Mr. Wyckliffe."

As Mr. Curves sat down he was gratified to find his blustering eloquence had had the result desired. Applause broke out in all corners of the Court; in vain the criers shouted for order, but their voices were drowned. "Let's lynch 'em," shouted some ardent spirits at the back. The row only subsided when the magistrate gave orders for the Court to be cleared. The boys looked quietly at each other, and held a whispered consultation with their counsel, but they remained as calm and collected as before, and the girls followed their example of quiet confidence.

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Wyck entered the box with an air of bravado, and gave full particulars in support of his counsel's opening, in answer to the questions put to him. When Mr. Curves had finished, Dr. Haddon rose in a quiet way, glanced slowly round the Court, and, turning to Wyck, asked:

"You know, of course, you are on your oath?"

"Certainly."

"You were a member of the Detlij Club before you left London?"

Wyck started in surprise, but answered, "I was."

"One of the objects of the Club was to enable jilted men to avenge themselves, I believe?"

"I believe so."

"They give a gold badge every year to the member who can boast of having destroyed the happiness of the most ladies?"

"Yes."

"You were awarded that badge last year?"

"I was."

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"This is your stick, I believe?"

"It was, before it was stolen."

"Did you cut those notches in it?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"I don't know."

"Will you swear that you did not produce this stick at the Detlij Club and assert that each notch represented a broken heart?"

"I did not."

"Then what did you get the badge for?"

"I don't know." This in a sulky tone.

"Had you a friend of the name of Thomas Thomas?"

"Yes."

"You are aware he confessed everything to Morris?"

"No!" excitedly.

"Well then, I can tell you he did."

"It's a lie."

"Your crest was a broken heart, I believe?"

"It was."

"Why did you choose that?"

"To please myself."

"You know, of course, that you are branded with your own device?"

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"Yes."

"Now, with reference to this stick; do you still swear that you never produced it at the Detlij Club?"

"I do."

"Then what would you say if I brought forward a member of the Club to prove it?"

"That he's a liar."

"I have nothing more to ask, your worship," said Dr. Haddon, resuming his seat.

Dick Burton and several minor witnesses were called to complete the case for the prosecution, and the Court adjourned for luncheon.

CHAPTER XXXI.

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THE VERDICT.

The Court was, if possible, more crowded than ever when the case was resumed. The atmosphere was oppressive in the extreme, and the attention of everyone was strained to the utmost when Dr. Haddon rose to open the defence.

"May it please your worship. This case has been described by my learned friend as unprecedented in the annals of Australian history. I have no doubt that such is the case, but I sincerely hope from this day onward it may become a common occurrence."

The effect of this opening was electrical and caused a sensation in the Court. The Justices whispered portentously among themselves, in doubt whether the counsel should not be pulled up short.

"I repeat my words," continued the advocate. "I hope it will become a common occurrence, and furthermore I venture to say that there is not an Australian present in this building who will not agree with me when he has heard the evidence. Now the plaintiff, Villiers Wyckliffe, has informed us through his counsel that he lived the life of an English gentleman. The only comment I make on that is to say that his class will need all the help Heaven can give them, for I shall prove their representative to be a villain of the deepest dye. He has acknowledged his connection with the Detlij Club, an infamous institution which is the expression of the depravity, the callousness, the cynicism, the degradation of English Society. He acknowledged also that he was the owner of this stick, and, in spite of his denial, I shall have little difficulty in proving to the satisfaction of the Court that the notches were placed there by his own hand, and that each notch represented was airily described as a broken heart. When I mention to your worship that the notches are fifty in number it will give some indication of the plaintiffs character."

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Dr. Haddon had struck the right key-note, and everyone in Court hung upon his words. The silence was profound, and each listener's eager attention grew in intensity as he proceeded to detail the peculiar power of fascination—snake-like, he called it—possessed by the plaintiff. Without any assistance from turgid rhetoric, or indignant denunciation, he depicted it in a manner so simple, yet so direct, that his audience shivered in response. Then, with consummate art, he played upon their sensibilities by picturing the simple homeliness of Amy Johnson's happy family circle, on to the fervour of Reg's devotion, the complete happiness of the young couple up to their disunion under the diabolical arts of Wyckliffe. Gently, but still with a power that swayed them in their own despite, he wrung their sympathies from them with a pathetic recital of Amy's death, showed the blank in the happy home, and roused them to a pitch of enthusiasm over his client's oath of vengeance.

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"I have witnesses from England," he continued, "who will speak to his dastardly gallantries there. I have girls from all parts of Australia"—here a constable whispered in his ear. "This constable tells me, your worship, that he has some difficulty in keeping the witnesses I have just alluded to under control. They have expressed a unanimous wish to have an interview with the plaintiff."

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The suggestion of Wyckliffe being handed over to the tender mercies of his Australian victims seemed to tickle the audience and a faint ripple of laughter went round the crowded Court. Wyck, who had been growing more and more fidgetty, here held an excited conversation with his counsel, who rose and said:

"Your worship, my client complains of feeling unwell. May we adjourn?"

"I object to an adjournment," said Dr. Haddon, promptly.

"Then my client instructs me to withdraw the case, as he does not wish to carry the matter further."

"What's that?" said the Chairman, in surprise.

"Well, your worship, if you will allow me to explain," said Mr. Qurves, in his impressive way, "I should like to say that I have never given up a case with greater pleasure than I do this one, for I am an Australian born and I consider the defendants acted like men, and I wish publicly to apologise for anything I have said to their discredit. I consider them an honour to our country."

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"Hear, hear. Hurrah!" burst from all sides.

"Silence!" cried the crier, but he cried in vain.

When silence was in some measure restored, the Chairman remarked:

"If Mr. Wyckliffe wishes to withdraw from the prosecution there is nothing left for the Bench but to dismiss the case. The defendants have undoubtedly broken the law, which we are here to administer, but though we are magistrates, our sympathy is for the Australians, and I cannot help saying that I am glad that our duty demands from us nothing that will prevent them from quitting the Court."

Ringling cheers here broke out from all quarters, which no one wished to check. Even members of the Bench were seen to join in the applause. The Inspector, fearing Wyck might be roughly handled, got him away quietly and sent him off in a cab to his hotel.

Enthusiasm ran high, and the boys had considerable difficulty in leaving the Court. At last they got safely into a cab, but even then the crowd refused to leave them unmolested, and the horse was removed and they were dragged in triumph to their hotel. [Pg 382]

That evening, the young Australians gave a big banquet at the Town Hall, at which they were the honoured guests. Toasts and complimentary speeches followed one another in rapid succession. Australians love their country, but they love the honour of their women above all.

Everywhere the boys were feted and made much of, and it was a relief to them when they were able to accompany the girls and Mr. and Mrs. Whyte to Tasmania for a lengthy stay at Goodchild's. Here they rested till Reg had recovered his melancholy, till the memory of Wyck and his infamy had become like an evil dream, and life seemed again to offer him a share in its joys, and the future held out the prospect of many happy days to come.

CHAPTER XXXII.

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CONCLUSION.

The following is a cutting from the *Bulletin*:

SEQUELS TO THE GREAT CASE OF WYCKLIFFE v. MORRIS AND WINTER.

PHASE I.—Yesterday was a red letter day in Melbourne, for it witnessed the double wedding of the heroes of the great case of Wyckliffe v. Morris and Winter to two of the wealthiest and most charming of Australian heiresses. Having successfully, and to the admiration of their countrymen, vindicated the honour of Australia on the person of its English traducer, Mr. Allen Winter and Mr. Reginald Morris have now proceeded to demonstrate to Englishmen in general, (and we may add to our own countrymen also), how possible it is for an Australian heiress to ally herself with an Australian husband. From to-day, Miss Hilda Mannahill, a daughter of whom Australia is proud, reappears as Mrs. Allen Winter; and Miss May Goodchild, the daughter of Mr. Goodchild, of Tasmania, reappears as Mrs. Reginald Morris. A fashionable crowd packed Scott's Church, where the ceremony was performed; and a larger and less fashionable, but more enthusiastic, crowd lined the streets and greeted both brides and bridegrooms with the heartiest cheers. With one voice Australia wishes them health and happiness.

PHASE II.—Have you ever seen a whipped hound trailing along with its tail between its legs? How furtively it gazes out of the corner of one eye. With what anxious trepidation it endeavours to hide itself behind the flimsiest obstacles! What an air of dilapidation and misery it bears! How piteously it whines if you deign to notice it, as if it said, "It wasn't me, but the ugly bull-dog round the corner!" Passengers by the s.s. *Paramatta*, which left Adelaide yesterday, were reminded of the aptness of this simile to one of their number, who was leaving for England. He was a young man, with a pale, emaciated face, a hang-dog expression, and having both ears closely bandaged. His name is Villiers Wyckliffe, and he will be able to tell England what he thinks of Australia, and on his person he will bear, till his dying day, the mark of Australia's Revenge. [Pg 384]

LATEST EDITION.

SYDNEY CUP.

Mrs. Allen Winter's "Wyck" won by two lengths.

FINIS.

APPENDIX.

AUTHORS' NOTE.

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The authors would like it to be distinctly understood that the following is an opinion formed by a young Australian, a keen observer who has traversed the greater portion of the Colonies, mixed freely with all classes, and attended meetings, at times presided over by eminent politicians, at others by working men. The opinion given is an unprejudiced one for which he alone is responsible. He is not connected with any society whatsoever, nor has he any interest in one; and the authors trust that their readers will treat it accordingly.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNORS.

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PAST—PRESENT—FUTURE.

LIST 1894.

<i>Colony.</i>	<i>Salary.</i>
VICTORIA	£10,000
NEW SOUTH WALES	7,000
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	5,000
QUEENSLAND	5,000
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	4,000
NEW ZEALAND	5,000
TASMANIA	3,500
	<hr/> 39,500

DEFINITION.

An Australian Governor is a gentleman, usually a nobleman, who, without having any special qualifications, is sent out by the Crown to represent the interests of Great Britain and to safeguard the bond that links the Colony to its Mother Country. His position is virtually an anomaly and he himself, a mere figure-head.

FROM A GENERAL POINT OF VIEW.

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Governors may be divided into two classes, as follows:—

- 1.—Those who possess an income, and accept the position with the intention of living a life of pleasure.
- 2.—Those who are hard pressed, and accept with the idea of recruiting and saving money.

Herein is embodied the chief elements which will determine whether a Governor is to become popular or unpopular, for no matter how excellent his qualifications may be if he is poor his chances of becoming popular are reduced to a minimum.

The indispensable conditions for an Australian Governor in Australian eyes are as follows:—

He must be a titled nobleman of really ancient and distinguished family, for the Australian Society folks "dearly love a lord."

He must possess a large private income and be prepared to spend it in addition to his salary.

He must be an ardent sportsman and *bon viveur*, and yet be on terms of sympathy with the Anti-Gambling Society and the Tee-total Party.

He must entertain right royally.

He must have no strong political opinions or, if he has, he must keep them to himself.

He should be able to make a humorous, graceful and good-natured speech, neither biassed nor erudite, on any subject that may come prominently forward.

He must lay aside all aristocratic "airs," and be prepared to shake every caller's hand at levees, etc.

Lastly, but by no means least in importance, he must possess a wife of an amiable disposition,

who will mix on cordial terms with the ladies, condescend to "talk chiffons" and even scandal when required; and one, who in addition to being a perfect hostess, must hold herself ever ready to be at the beck and call of the general public to lay foundation stones, open bazaars and perform the hundred-and-one similar social functions. [v]

These qualifications are not severe, and many men going out for a life of pleasure would find little difficulty in fulfilling them. The stumbling-block to most aspirants would be in the two first clauses, for one need only glance over the peerage to find to his astonishment how few really representatives of ancient families are possessed of good incomes. The large incomes are enjoyed by the self-made men who have been raised to the peerage of late years, but though Australians would object to a poor man, they would not have a wealthy, self-made man, however celebrated he might be, at any price; for the Colonies are great respecters of, and believers in, blue blood, as they possess an abundance of the commoner quality already.

Lord Carrington stands supreme in the annals of Australian history as the most popular Governor who has ever visited her shores. Since he holds a position so unique it may be as well to examine the means to which he owed his success. They lie in a nut-shell. He realised his position as a figure-head. He knew he would be called upon to lavish hospitality on a grand scale, and to confine himself to the exercise of social qualities only. He made his plans accordingly.

His predecessor, an old and well-tried diplomatist, had failed through interference, and he profited by the experience. A week after his arrival he could count his admirers by the score, and a few months later the Colony from end to end sang his praises. And what a glorious time the Society folk had! what delightful garden-parties, entertainments, and picnics! No gathering was complete without the genial Lord and his Lady, and they, recognising the situation, were always ready and willing to put in an attendance at every function, at all of which they invariably received a loyal and hearty welcome. In the council-room his Lordship was equally ready to act up to the ideal. When his Ministers attended to discuss politics he yawned, languidly—so gracefully, indeed, that the "Carrington yawn" became the rage in Sydney—he would put the papers aside in his genial way, bid them do anything they pleased, and order refreshments of the most enticing nature, and politics would be forgotten. Undoubtedly among their many estimable qualities the greatest lay in the interest both took in the welfare of the poor; and when the day of their departure came, there was as genuine a display of grief on the part of the poverty-stricken, who had been the recipient of their bounty, as from those in higher places who had revelled in their hospitality. [vi]

Sir Henry Loch, as Governor of Victoria, rivalled Lord Carrington very closely in popularity. He might be taken as an exception to the rule, for, although not a lord, he showed himself to be such an excellent diplomatist, and capable of giving such sensible advice, that his opinion was always sought by his Ministers on matters of importance. Even these qualities in a man would not always ensure his success, for, were he too eager to give his advice, he might be classed as an interferer; but, as previously mentioned, Sir Henry was an excellent diplomatist. At the same time he had the good fortune to have in his wife one of the most amiable and genial hostesses that ever presided over a Government House in the Colonies.

How readily a Governor may become unpopular may be illustrated in the case of one within the last ten years, who received a most cordial welcome and flattering reception, the whole Colony turning out to do him honour. His lady, however, the following day turned the tide against him, by summoning a meeting of all the local business people and delivering a very pathetic lecture on domestic economy. The following day Society received the appalling news that no balls, receptions, or parties were to be expected, as they came out with the intention of economising, having to keep up a second establishment in England. This occurred strangely enough in by far the most hospitable and pleasure-loving of the Australasian Colonies. Needless to say, it did not take many months before they were given to understand what was expected from a Governor. They fell in gracefully with the hint given them, and towards the end of their term became fairly popular.

Upon the Governors of to-day little more than a few passing remarks need be made, as no one of them can rank as a really popular Governor. [vii]

Lord Kintore cannot by any means be considered a success. Certainly he was not rich when he accepted the position, but he was fortunate in being put in the way of "a good thing," by some of those gentlemen, eager for social distinction, with whom the Colonies swarm. The good thing came off, and he became richer to the extent of some thirty thousand—but his advisers are still waiting for titles. His popularity was not increased by that expensive trip of his across Australia, for although he may have figured as a hero in England, by no means did he do so in Australia, for he travelled *en prince*, with his medical adviser and every other personal and material luxury provided at the expense of the Colony. Lady Kintore could never feel at home in the Colonies and openly showed her preference for English life and ways, preferring rather to entertain English Royalty and nobility than the "common Australians." Consequently, Government House in Adelaide has been voted a distinct failure since she became its hostess. The Premier of South Australia has announced that the Governor's salary will in future be reduced by two thousand pounds; his reasons are obvious. The other Colonies will follow suit for a certainty, so the halcyon days of an Australian Governor may fairly be said to be over.

In Lord Hopetoun we have a young and inexperienced man. He is popular among a certain class, but, taking him all round, he can neither be regarded as a success nor a failure; but he has a few exceptionally good traits of character, by which he will be remembered long after his time has

expired.

Sir Robert Duff, the recently-appointed Governor of New South Wales, has on more than one occasion offended the Colonials and, judging by the way he is spoken of in the Press, his term of office is not likely to be a happy one, nor will it tend to strengthen the existing bond.

The Press of Australia may generally be regarded as very enthusiastic in its support of the Governors, and, considering the weight and influence it carries and exercises, it is well that this is so. The only exception to the rule is the *Sydney Bulletin*, a paper with a large circulation, which it owes to its outspoken opinions and clever caricatures of all the leading men and incidents of the day. It carries considerable influence with it, more especially in the democratic circles, throughout all the Colonies. Most of the Governors that have held office in Australia will, no doubt, have unpleasant recollections of its satire.

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Every Colony has her leading dailies, and they, taken as a whole, may be termed loyal supporters of Great Britain and her Sovereign.

The reasons that may be assigned are many.

In the first place, they have to meet the wishes of their subscribers and, undoubtedly, the majority of the more important have strictly loyal opinions, and both have become used to the groove in which they have been running for so many years, probably dating back to the days when the right of free speech was not so permissible as it now is.

Then again, the Press seemed to think it their duty to accept with acclamation any representative sent out by the Crown, no matter whether he was suitable for the position or not, but this has to a great extent become altered, thanks to Queensland, the most outspoken and independent of all the Colonies, when her able Premier put down his foot and said that he should be consulted before an appointment was ratified. Even then some of the older journals reprovved Queensland for her audacity, but fortunately they were in the minority and had to give way.

Of course, no Governor however dull he might be, would be so injudicious as to offend the Press, for he would not increase the popularity of his stay, nor would he tend to strengthen the connecting link; consequently the chief officers of the Press enjoy many privileges not known to the outside world; but that's diplomacy.

There are times, however, when the Governors may, either from want of knowledge or from other reasons, overstep the limits of their duty. The Press will then in leading articles gently point out the error of their ways, and offer sensible advice on the subject; if the offender be wise he will withdraw, unconditionally, and then all will be well; but should he persevere in his antagonism he will receive a severe slating. This of course is only referring to extra-ordinary cases, as the Governors as a rule are allowed a wide scope in which to humour their whims.

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From the foregoing it will be seen that, taken from a general point of view, the duties of the Governors are merely to preside, entertain right royally and to be good fellows; for this the Colonies are prepared to pay handsome salaries and bow down to her Majesty's representatives, professing their apparent sincerest loyalty to the Crown.

FROM A YOUNG AUSTRALIAN POINT OF VIEW.

Within the last few years there has been a strong feeling of democracy growing in Australia. It can be traced to two great sources. Firstly, to the fact that the young Australians have grown tired of the continual display of so-called loyalty, and secondly, to the great struggles that have taken place between capital and labour; and although neither party recognises each other's policy these are so similar in the main points that they will be taken collectively, including that of a third and weaker party, who, although also of the same mind, do not recognise either of the former.

Scores of societies and parties are to be found scattered over the length and breadth of the Colonies. They are to be found in the handsome chambers of the City Clubs, presided over by some of the leading men of the day, and they are to be found in the white-washed parlour of the bush public-house, with a rough labouring, yet perhaps a deep-thinking, man at their head, coupled with occasional assistance perhaps of a delegate from some Union or the Labour representative in Parliament for that district. At the present time they are disunited for reasons of their own, and in many cases they would feel insulted at the very idea of their names being coupled together: consequently, each works on what it considers its own lines, which it naturally believes to be the correct ones; but one day Great Britain will make another blunder—which judging from past events cannot be considered altogether an impossibility—and the Young Australians, feeling themselves strong enough in numbers, will rise and assert their opinion or in other words will take objection; the result will be that publicity will be given to their opinions and arguments, and then for the first time the other societies and parties will recognise how closely their policies agree, and they will naturally extend their sympathy towards them; this will give the Young Australians confidence and they will take a more determined stand, with the result that the outside bodies will proffer their assistance and will act as tributaries feeding a running stream; with others joining in from other quarters this small insignificant stream will gradually swell, and the result will be a vast river of party feeling with so strong a current and such

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immense volume that to try and divert its course would be useless. Considering that the present labour parties, who are democrats almost to a man, hold the balance of power in all the principal Parliaments some idea might be formed of the power that Young Australians would hold when they had asserted themselves.

Now, supposing such a body had been formed, what would their policy be?

The first on the list would be the appointment of their leaders by ballot, this over, the more important step would be taken on true democratic lines to secure their permanency; consequently the first item of importance would be the guarding against social distinctions in the shape of knighthoods emanating from Great Britain. This might seem of trivial importance to such a body, as it might be argued that men of their opinions would not be the ones to have the refusal of such distinctions, and yet it would be so, for one has only to look at every-day life in Australia and to watch what is going on, to be convinced of the importance of the precautions.

Knighthoods and social distinctions may well be looked on as a curse in Australia, and it's only the Crown's advisers that really know what a trump card they hold in having an abundant supply always on hand ready to be distributed at the slightest notice. Should it enter the minds of any reader that this casts a reflection on the holders of such distinctions let it be instantly dismissed, for there are gentlemen of the first water holding titles, to whom every right thinking person will admit their claim to the highest distinction the Crown could bestow on them, for they have helped to build up the Empire and make it what it now is, and are men whose consciences would allow them to assert that in accepting the same they only did their duty; but it's not of this class that anything need be said, it is those who are daily practising hypocrisy and appearing as philanthropists by bestowing munificent gifts on institutions, or are agreeable to sell their opinions with the hope of securing the coveted honours. Take away the titles granted to politicians, and very few will remain, and as politics has long since been acknowledged the cheapest way to become knighted, the competition has become very keen, with the result that influential men with strong Republican opinions, are offered and accept a title, thereby selling themselves. There are men who once were acknowledged to be as firm as a rock in their sentiments, wavering as the coveted curse is dangled in front of their nose. Intrigues and conspiracies are carried on between themselves, and the whole political career of many an honest man has been blasted by his ambition to have a handle to his name.

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There is another class who try to work the oracle through the Governors, but that has not proved a success.

Then come the philanthropists, one of whom barely escaped taking his title into penal servitude lately, and another of whom, on securing the title, at once came to England and settled down as an English nobleman, giving strict orders for his estates to be managed in the most economical way, in order that he might be able to live as a gentleman in England; he has been successful and is now related to titled families of the class with which England abounds, for ever on the alert to make the acquaintance of millionaires' daughters. That this class of people should be titled is what disgusts the Young Australians, especially when they have so many good citizens, men who have introduced capital, started industries and manufactories and have assisted to build up the commercial trade with the world; these are passed over and not noticed, for the simple reason that their names do not appear in print twice a day, but they are true men and are thought none the less of. Much as the many worthy recipients are admired, there is yet a class that are held to be far superior, and they are those who, on being pressed to accept the honours, refused, preferring to keep their opinions unfettered; they are the men Young Australians admire, and are prepared to follow.

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"Cut the painter" might be suggested by some weak and injudicious member of about the calibre of that novelist who made use of the same expression in his report of his reception in the Colonies. This, however, would be negatived immediately, as it would be entirely in opposition to what their policy would be.

The next question, undoubtedly, would be the appointment of Governors, and a motion proposing the abolition of English Governors would be brought forward and received with such enthusiasm that it would quickly be recognised as a point of vital importance and interest.

On looking at the definition of a Governor it is seen that his position is an anomaly and he himself a figure-head, his duty being to strengthen the link that connects the Colony to Great Britain, This definition as before mentioned, may be allowable from a general point of view, but never from the Young Australians' point of view, for they recognise that these gentlemen of pleasure cost the Colonies £39,500 a year in salaries, and another £20,000 may be added for incidental expenses, interest, etc., making, roughly speaking £60,000 a year, or nearly sufficient to pay the interest on a three per cent. loan of two millions. It would be argued in the first place that the sixty thousand was simply thrown away, and in the second that the time had arrived when men of ability took the places of the figure-heads.

The English Governor is sent out to strengthen the existing bond, or in other words to preach loyalty. "God save the Queen" is his text, his motto and his password. If he attends a public function, "God save the Queen" is conspicuous on the walls; if he replies to a toast he will make frequent reference to the estimable qualities of Her Majesty. If he walks or drives down the street, the street bands and barrel-organs play "God save the Queen"; if he attends or promises to attend a theatrical performance, nothing is done until his arrival, even if it be an hour late, then everybody in the house is expected to rise, and take off their hats, when the orchestra greets him

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with "God save the Queen." If he attends a dinner, "God save the Queen" is inscribed on the menu between each of the courses, and is supposed to be partaken of; if he visits a school the children will have been practising for months, at home, in the street, in school and everywhere, "God save the Queen"; if he attends a football match or any athletic sports, he is the centre of attraction, all in the grand stands rise while the band plays "God save the Queen." These are a few instances that have become law in Australia, and the song or tune has just about the same effect on the Young Australians as a worn-out, threadbare music-hall song would have on a first-night audience; and yet there are plenty of people to be found who will acknowledge that it's the prettiest tune they ever heard, and with a "God bless the dear old lady," they are arguing the next instant with themselves that it must come, it's only a matter of waiting, another thousand or two judiciously expended will do it. To keep the tune of "God save the Queen" fresh in the Australian's ears costs sixty thousand a year.

One of the greatest surprises an Australian has on his arrival in England is the comparative lack, of loyal display. There, the Queen's birthday is taken no more notice of than if it were a commoner's, the Prince of Wales's less, even the papers make very slight mention of the fact. Britons dearly love their ruler and are always ready to obey when called on, but, they do not make any attempt to impress it upon every one that visits their shores, and by so doing command respect. As for Earls and Lords they are spoken of as my milkman, Lord So-and-So, or my fruiterer or butcher, the Earl of So-and-So, or my dressmaker the Countess of So-and-So, as they are rapidly becoming mixed up in trade.

To return to the loyal subjects of Australia, what does loyalty mean? Ask for a truthful statement and nine out of ten will reply, "self-interest." This is why Young Australians object, for, taken as a whole they do not trouble about Society and its ways; they are open, candid and, above all, they despise hypocrisy. So, instead of the Governor strengthening the existing bond, he is weakening it, looking at it from a general point of view, and this fact is regretted by the Young Australians, for, although they will always be ready and willing to show their highest respect and admiration for both Her Majesty and her dominions, and wish, if anything, to strengthen the bond, yet they will not recognise figure-heads when they have men of ability among themselves, willing and capable to govern the Colony at a third of the expense. Young Australians are loyal, although they may have their own peculiar way of showing their loyalty.

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Supposing the English Governors were to be withdrawn, it might be asked what would the connecting link be which would still bind the Colonies to Great Britain. That might be answered in a very practical way. If Great Britain wishes to be represented in the Colonies, let her send out men of commercial and business ability as Ambassadors, paying them sufficient to be able to entertain right royally; that would have the desired effect. But why should it be necessary for Great Britain to be represented at all, for there is not the slightest fear of Australia attempting to cut the leading strings, but, on the other hand, it would be so beneficial to the Colonies and all concerned, that the act would be so appreciated as to make the bond stronger than ever. Such arrangements as the Australian Squadron now in force might be improved upon and continued, and many more that would undoubtedly suggest themselves to the interests of both parties.

There can be no doubt that at its first intimation the candidature for a Local Governorship would bring forth many aspirants for the honour, but, fortunately for Australia, every Colony has men who stand head and shoulders above their fellows, that when a minute examination of the necessary qualifications was held there would be no difficulty in selecting the proper man for the position.

In order to point out the contrast between the Local and English Governors, let us consider the action of each at an imaginary meeting called to discuss the most important phase in Australian history, viz: Federation.

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The present system will be dealt with first.

As the Governors of to-day are recognised only as figure-heads, they would not be invited to attend, consequently the whole onus of the undertaking would fall on the Premiers and their Parliamentary colleagues.

Every Parliament may be divided into three distinct classes, the Government, the Opposition, and the Labour Party, consequently the leaders of all three parties would be required to assist in the movement. They might fairly be said to represent the Colony, but would it be likely that the Opposition, who have perhaps lately been thrown out of power, would assist their opponents to complete what is to be the most important step in Australian history? No, most decidedly not, for they would recognise that the party in power would take the sole credit for having brought it about. Shewing how eager the Premiers of the Colonies are to personally bring about that most important step, it may be mentioned that the last three Premiers of New South Wales have each made overtures to the other Colonies, and yet were they to meet in convention their opinions would be divided, with the result that Federation would be just as far off as ever it was, and under the existing regime it will never be brought to a head.

Now, supposing that a Local Governor was at the head of the Colony how different things would be, for he would have no political or party feelings, he would be the friend of all, and were a convention to be called, he, a man of ability and integrity, with his whole interests in the Colony, would meet men of the same calibre from the other Colonies; he would be accompanied by his able ministers and leaders of the different parties; all party strife would be put aside, for on his shoulders would fall the credit of such an undertaking, and the parties, glad to choose a medium

by which their opponents would not succeed over them, would gladly consent to the intervening party, consequently this policy would be unanimous, and the long-talked of Federation accomplished.

English Governors are a direct stumbling-block to Federation, and before any convention is held, steps should be taken for the removal of the obstacles. [xvi]

Had Australia been self-governed, or even had the Governors been shrewd business men, there is a great possibility that that great financial crisis, which nearly crippled Australia and by which millions were lost, might have been avoided. This may seem a rash statement, and yet when the facts are considered there undoubtedly does seem to have been a possible probability.

It is well known that the crisis did not come suddenly, for never had there been so much warning and time given in which to prepare for an impending catastrophe. For months and months dark and heavy clouds were hanging over financial circles, threatening to burst at any moment. Depositors were in a fever of excitement, they held their deposit receipts in their hands ready to withdraw at the first alarm, their excitement stood on the balance, ready to burst forth or to be smoothed down into confidence by a judicious action of some responsible parties had it been forthcoming, but, alas, the Commercial Bank of Australia was allowed to suspend payment and the panic burst forth in every direction and no amount of work could cool the excited crowds.

The Commercial Bank, with its numerous branches, had been doing an extensive business, and was a prominent member of the Associated Banks, which was formed with the idea of assisting each other. When the Directors of the Bank saw how matters stood they approached the association in a half-hearted way and received a half-hearted answer, and the result was disaster.

Now, supposing that one of the Governors had been a keen, shrewd man of business, and a man who could look far ahead of him, and supposing that he could have forgotten that he was a mere figure-head, he would have stepped forward and said, "The Commercial Bank shall not close its doors." With such an affirmation, had he approached the Government of the Colony and, through them hastily summoned the leaders of the other Colonies, there is no doubt but that an arrangement would have been arrived at, by which the crisis could have at least been suspended for a sufficient time to either allow the bank to unload some of its more pressing liabilities or to realise on its assets, and thereby, sufficient time would have been gained for some arrangements to be entered into with the British depositors and investors, who no doubt would only have been too agreeable to assist. [xvii]

Worse crises than the Australian have been avoided, to wit, Baring Brothers, but certainly this is only an individual opinion.

In conclusion, the Young Australian, trusting that he has not overstepped the boundary in the expressions of his opinions, and that no personalities will be taken, heartily wishes the Young Australians every success. It will be from Colonies such as Queensland and South Australia that steps will be first expected to be taken, for Queensland has already shown her cards and that clever South Australian Premier is going a step farther, and when South Australia has her Lieutenant-Governor in power she will show the other Colonies the immense advantages to be derived therefrom, and they will very soon follow in her footsteps, for men of his calibre are not to be had so readily in Great Britain.

END OF APPENDIX.

Transcriber's Note

Page 009 'badge was [to to](#) held.' changed to 'badge was to be held.'

Page 317 'back to [the the](#) "Grosvenor.' changed to 'back to the "Grosvenor."'

Page 346 'made so [thatit](#)' changed to 'made so that it'

Page 349 'Toowoomba up [Queeensland](#)' changed to 'Toowoomba up Queensland'

All instances of 's. s.' standardised to the more frequently occurring 's.s.'

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