Chapter Three from *Such Is Life* (1903)

by Joseph Furphy (1843-1912)

Fri. Nov. 9–Charley's Paddock–Binney–Catastrophe

What fatality impelled me to fix on the 9th, above all other days in the month? Why did n't I glance over the record of each 9th, before committing myself by a promise to review and annotate the entries of that date? For, few and evil as the days of the years of my pilgrimage have undeniably been, the 9th of November, '83, is one of those which I feel least satisfaction in recalling. Moreover, I incur a certain risk in thus unbosoming myself, as will become apparent to the perfidious reader who hungrily shadows me through this compromising story. But it may be graven with a pen of iron, that, at my age, no man shirks a promise, or tells a fib, for the first time; and so, "Sad, but Strong"–-the family motto of the Colonnas, that offshoot of our tribe which settled in Italy in the year One–I answer to my bail.

One reservation I must make, however. For reasons which will too soon become manifest, it is expedient to conceal the exact locality of the unhappy experience now about to be disclosed; but I think I shall be on the safe side in setting forth that it was somewhere between Echuca and Albury.

Any person who happens to have preserved the files of the — Express may find, on the second page of the issue of Nov. 12th, the following local intelligence:–

LUNATIC AT LARGE!

> On the night of Friday last the inhabitants of — were thrown into a state of excitement which may better be imagened than described by the appearance of a lunatic in puris naturalibus whose mania was evidently homicidal. During the earlier portion of the night the unfortunate man was seen from time to time by quite a number of people in places many miles apart. Some of the pleasure-seekers returning from the picnic held by the Sunday School Teachers' Re-union (noticed elsewhere in our columns) saw him scuttling along the three-chain road at a breaknəck pace, others saw him dodging behind trees or endeavouring to conceal himself in scrub. At about 9 o'clock in the evening one of the picnic party, an athlete of some repute, made a plucky and determined attempt to capture the madman, and succeeded in overpowering him. This accomplished secundem artem, an impulse of humanity prompted Mr. K— (for as some of our readers have already guessed, the gentleman referred to was Mr. K—, of the firm of D— and S—, Drapers,—) to divest himself of part of his own clothing for the benefit of his prisoner. The latter, when Mr. K— attempted to force the clothing upon him, rent the air with horrible shrieks heard by many others of the party, and by exertion of the unnatural strength which insanity confers, broke from his captor and escaped. Mr. K— humorously comments on the difficulty of holding a nude antagonist. If we were inclined to be facetious on the subject we might suggest that mens sana in corpore sano is not an infallible rule. Late in the evening the maniac horresco referrens made a furious attack on the residence of Mr. G— who was unfortunately absent at the time. Mrs. G— with the splendid courage which distinguishes the farmer's wife, kept him at bay till some wild impulse drove him to seek "fresh fields and pastures new." The black trackers (who were brought on the scene on Saturday afternoon) have found his tracks in Mr. A—'s flower garden close to the parlour window, and also around Mr. H—'s homestead. The trackers aver that he is accompanied by a large kaugaroo dog. It is a matter of congratulatiou that he has so far failed in effecting an entrance to any habitation. The police are scouring the neighbourhood and though the thunderatorm of Saturday night has unfortunately placed the trackers at fault, we trust soon to chronicle a clever capture, "a consummation devoutly to be wished." Various surmises are afloat regarding the identity of the lunatic but to our mind the suggestion of Inspector Collins, of the N.S.W. Civil Service appears most tenable: On Saturday afternoon when the excitement was at its height this gentleman called at our office, and in course of conversation on the all-absorbing topic prouounced his opinion that the lunatic is no other than the late escapee from Beechworth Asylum! Anent his mysterious disapearance at some time late on Friday night Mr. Collins snpposes that he must have drowned himself in the river, and advances many ingenious and apparently conclusive arguments in support of both his hypotheses.

Notwithstanding the ingenuity and conclusiveness of those arguments, the chain of fatalities which has headed this story with the entry of Nov. 9th brings the reluctant secret to light: I was that homicidal maniac.

The second page of the newspaper just quoted will be also found to contain, in another column, the following local item:–

> We regret to learn that on the morning of Saturday last Mr. Q— lost a valuable stack of hay by fire. The conflagation was detected almost immediately on its breaking out but no steps could be taken to check the progress of the "devouring element." It might be reasonably expected that Mr. Q—'s well-deserved popularity would be a sufficient safeguard against such barbarous incendiarism, but of a truth there are people now at large who ought to be in "durance vile." At the moment of our going to press we are happy to add that the police have a clue, and will soon no doubt unearth the cowardly perpetrator of this un-British outrage, and drag him forth to condign punishment.

However, the perpetrator in question, being even more cunning than cowardly, took special order that the police should not unearth him; and here he sits in his temporary sanctum, inviting them to come on with what is left of their clue–though at the same time keeping, like Sir Andrew, o' the windy side o' the law, by putting initials and dashes in place of full names, and by leaving the exact locality unspecified. Drag me forth to condign punishment! My word! Drag a barrister.

Now for my narrative. Charley V—, a boundary rider on B— Station, N.S.W., is one of my very oldest acquaintances. Away back in the procuratorship of Latrobe, two angels, in wreaths of asphodel, had almost simultaneously deposited Charley and myself on the same station; respectively, in the hut of a stock-keeper, and in the hut of a petty overseer. Together, as the seasons passed, we had looked forward to the shearing, the foot-rotting, and the lambing; and together we had watched the lagoon for the bunyip. We had aimed our little reed-spears at the same mark, we had whirled our little boomerangs over the same big tree, and we had been welted an equal number of times for crossing the river on the same slippery log.

Whatever may be the development of my own inner nature, Charley, at least, walks faithfully in the moral twilight which his early training vouchsafed to him. His fidelity to B— Station is like that which ought to distinguish somebody's wife–I forget whose, but no matter. The mere ownership of the property is a matter of perfect indifference to Charley. When the place changes hands, he is valued and sold as part of the working plant, without his concern, and almost without his knowledge; owners may come, and owners may go, but he virtually goes on for ever. His little hut, three or four miles north from the Murray, is the very headquarters of hospitality. He has some hundreds of pounds lent out (without interest or security) though his pay is only fifteen shillings a week–with ten, ten, two, and a quarter–and he is anything but a miser. Many people would like a leaf out of his book. It is my privilege to be able to furnish this, though in a sort of ambiguous way, having received the information in confidence. Here it is:

In a bend, on the north bank of the Murray, a few miles from Charley's hut, is a tract, about a hundred acres in extent, of fine grass land, completely isolated by billabongs, reed-beds, dense scrub, and steep ridges of loose sand. At the time I write of, it was impossible to ride to this island of verdure, and no white man could track a horse through the labyrinth that led to it. Once placed in that spot, no horse would ever try to get away. This is all the information I feel justified in giving.

During the afternoon of the 9th, I was sitting on a log, in the shade of a tree, on the north bank of the river, about a mile from that secluded Eden, and four or five from Charley's hut. I had camped at dusk on the previous evening; and the equipment of my two horses, with other impedimenta, was lying about. A small damper was maturing under the handful of fire, and a quart pot of tea was slowly collecting a scum of dirt which made it nothing the worse to a man of my nurture. Pup was reposing on my possum rug, and Cleopatra and Bunyip were in Eden, per favour of the kindly scoundrel who held that property by right of discovery, and who, in spite of some reluctance on my part, had made me free of it. Along with my two horses were ten or twelve others, all strangers, and in various stages of ripening for rewards.

Owing to the broken character of the country, the N.S.W. river-road lay three or four miles north of Charley's very private property; but a short cut, impassable during the winter, and impracticable at any time to wheeled vehicles, saved about three miles in ten, and passed within a mile of the property. It was beside this pad that I was camped.

The refined leisure of the day had been devoted chiefly to the study of my current swapping-book–Edwards on Redemption–and now, half-stifled by the laborious blasphemy of the work, I was seeking deliverance from the sin of reading it by watching the multitudes of white cockatoos through my binocular, and piously speculating as to their intended use.

Presently, sweeping the ground-line with the glass, I noticed, crossing an open place, about a mile away, the figure of a swagman approaching from the west–that is, coming up the river. I kept the glass in his direction, and whenever he disappeared I was on the watch, and caught him again as he came in sight, tramping wearily along in the roasting sun. That swagman had a history, highly important, at all events, to himself. He had been born; he lived; he would

probably die–and if any human being wants a higher record than that, he must work for it. This man's personal value, judged by the standard which I, for one, dare not disown, was certainly as high as that of the average monarch or multi-millionaire. But was I as much interested as I would have been had one of these personages been approaching my camp in state? And if not, why not?

I immediately filled and lit a mighty German meerschaum, an ally of established efficiency in ethical emergencies such as this. Then laying the pipe, so to speak, on the scent of the swagman, I attempted a clairvoyant rear-glance along his past history, and essayed a forecast of his future destiny, in order to get at the valuation presumably placed upon him by his Maker. But the pipe, being now master of the position, gently seduced my mind to a wider consideration, merely using the swagman as a convenient spring-board for its flight into regions of the Larger Morality. This is its hobby–caught, probably, from some society of German Illuminati, where it became a kind of storage-battery, or accumulator, of such truths as ministers of the Gospel cannot afford to preach.

Ah! (moralised the pipe) the man who spends his life in actual hardship seldom causes a trumpet to be blown before him. He is generally, by heredity or by the dispensation of Providence, an ornament to the lower walks of life; therefore his plea, genuine if ungrammatical, is heard only at second-hand, in a fragmentary and garbled form. Little wonder, then, that such a plea is received with felicitous self-gratulation, or passed with pharisaical disregard, by the silly old world that has still so many lessons to learn– so many lessons which none but that unresisting butt of slender-witted jokers can fitly teach, and which he, the experienced one, is usually precluded from teaching by his inability to spell any word of two syllables. Yet he has thoughts that glow, and words that burn, albeit with such sulphurous fumes that, when uttered in a public place, they frequently render him liable to fourteen days without the option.

And even though he be not a poor rogue hereditary; even though he may once have tasted the comfort ambiguously scorned of devils; even though his descent into Avernus be, like that of Ulysses or Dante, temporary and incidental, you need n't expect him, on reaching the upper air, to be the prophet, spokesman, and champion of the Order whose bitter johnny-cake he has eaten. You must n't be surprised to find him reticent, not to say mendacious, respecting details which he may regard as humiliating. A sort of Irish pride will probably lead him to represent that he had abundant, though unavailable, resources during the period of his perdition. For one or the other of these reasons–orthographical inability, or Irish pride–the half is never told; therefore, as a rule, the reading public is acquainted only with sketchy and fallacious pictures of that continuous, indurating hardship which finally sends reluctant Hope after her co-tenants of the box.

And further, of this, my son, be admonished (continued the pipe): The more bitter the hardship, the more unmixed and cordial is the ignominy lavished by the elect upon the sufferer–always provided the latter is one of the non-elect, and more particularly if he is a swagman. Yet this futureless person is the man who pioneers all industries; who discovers and unearths the precious ores; whose heavy footprints mark the waterless mulga, the wind-swept plains, and the scorching sand; who leaves intaglio impressions of his mortal coil on the wet ground, at every camp from the Murray to the Gulf; and whose only satisfaction in the cold which curls him up like cinnamon bark–making him nearly break his back in the effort to hold his shoulders together–is the certainty that in six months he will scrape away the hot surface sand, in order to sleep comfortably on the more temperate stratum beneath; he is the man who, with some incoherent protest and becoming invective, metaphorically makes a Raleigh-cloak of himself, to afford free and pleasant passage for the noblest work of God, namely, the Business Man.

The successful pioneer is the man who never spared others; the forgotten pioneer is the man who never spared himself, but, being a fool, built houses for wise men to live in, and omitted to gather moss. The former is the early bird; the latter is the early worm. Like Rosalind's typical traveller, this worm has rich eyes and poor hands–the former often ophthalmic, the latter always brown and wrinkled, and generally dirty. Life is too short to admit of repeated blunders in the numeration of beans, and this being his one weak point, the dram of ale does its work. And so, neither as pharisee nor publican, but rather as the pharisee's shocking example, and the publican's working bee, he toils and swears his hour upon the stage, and then modestly departs to where the thrifty cease from troubling, and the thriftless be at rest. Little recks he then for lack of storied urn or animated bust, little that for him no minstrel raptures swell; for his animated busts are things of the past, and there never was anything of the swell about him.

Heaven help him! that nameless flotsam of humanity! (mused the pipe). Few and feeble are his friends on earth; and the One who, like him, was wearied with his journey, and, like him, had not where to lay his head, is gone, according to His own parable, into a far country. The swagman we have always with us–And comfortable ecclesiasticism marks a full stop there, blasphemously evading the completion of a sentence charged with the grave truth, that the Light of

the world, the God-in-Man, the only God we can ever know, is by His own authority represented for all time by the poorest of the poor. Yet whosoever fails to recognise in the marred visage of any social derelict the image of Him who was despised and rejected of men–whosoever resents not the spectacle of that image weighted down by fraternal neglect and oppression till a human heart pulses with no higher aspiration than that which prompts a persecuted animal to preserve its life for further persecution–such a person, I say, can have no place among the Architect's workmen, being already employed on the ageless Babel-contract.

This special study of hardship (resumed the pipe, after a pause) leads naturally to the generic study of poverty; for, as the greater includes the less, poverty includes hardship, along with disfranchisement, social outlawry, proud man's contumely, and so forth; entirely without reference to the moral worth of the person most concerned. In a word, poverty is, in the eyes of the orthodox Christian, a hell in the hand, better worth avoiding than two hells in the book, which latter may be only figurative after all.

But the great institution of poverty (ruminated the pipe) is too often referred to in this large, loose way. There are two kinds–or rather, the condition exhibits two opposite extremes of moral quality. There is a voluntary poverty, which is certainly the least base situation you can occupy whilst you crawl between heaven and earth, and which is not so rare as your sordid disposition might lead you to imagine. There is also a compulsory poverty, shading down from discontented to contented. And, paradoxical as it may appear, the contented sub-variety is the opposing pole to voluntary poverty. The discontented sub-variety is the perpetual troubler of the world, by reason of its aiming only at changing the incidence of hardship, and succeeding fairly well in its object. Touching the contented sub-variety–well, possibly the Hindoo language might do justice to its vileness; the English falls entirely short. Compulsory-contented poverty is utterly, irredeemably despicable, and, by necessity, ignorantly blasphemous–not because its style of glorifying God is to place His conceded image exactly at the plough-horse level, but because it teaches its babies, from the cradle upward, that a capricious Mumbo-Jumbo has made pollard-bread for them, and something with a French name for its white-headed boy; moleskins, tied below the knee, for them, and a belltopper for the favourite of the family; the three R's for them, and the classics, ancient and modern, for the vessel chosen to honour; illicit snakejuice for them, and golden top for the other fellow. The adherents of this cult vote Conservative, work scab, and are rightly termed the "deserving poor," inasmuch as they richly deserve every degree of poverty, every ounce of indignity, and every inch of condescension they stagger under. But their children don't deserve these things. And just mark the slimy little word-shuffle which, in order to keep the "deserving poor" up to their work, pronounces upon them the blessings obviously adherent only to that unquestionable guarantee of unselfish purpose, namely, voluntary poverty. A subtle confusion of issues; but the person who homilises on the blessings of compulsory poverty should be left talking to the undefileable atmosphere.

Yet do I cling (continued the pipe) to Plato's beautiful thought, that no soul misses truth willingly. In bare justice to brave, misguided Humanity; in daily touch with beings in so many respects little lower than the imagined angels; in dispassionate survey of history's lurid record of distorted loyalty staining our old, sad earth with life-blood of opposing loyalty, while each side fights for an idea; in view of the zeal which fires the martyr-spirit to endure all that equal zeal can inflict; in contemplation of the ever-raging enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the Ormuzd and the Ahriman in man; in view even of that dismal experiment indifferently termed "making the best of both worlds," and "serving God and Mammon "–in view of all these things, I cannot think it is anything worse than a locally-seated and curable ignorance which makes men eager to subvert a human equality, self-evident as human variety, and impregnable as any mathematical axiom. And this special brand of ignorance is even more rampant amongst those educated asses who can read Kikero in the original than amongst uneducated asses who know not the law, and are cursed.

Remember (pursued the pipe, with a touch of severity) that Science apprehends no decimal of a second adequate to note, on the limitless circle of Time, the briefness of a centenarian's life; and yet the giddiest pitch of human effrontery dares not carry beyond the incident of death any vestige of a social code now accepted as good enough to initiate a development which, according to your own showing, goes on through changing cycles till some transcendent purpose is fulfilled. The "love of equality"–that meanest and falsest of equivocations–sickens and dies, and the inflated lie of a social privilege based on extraneous conditions collapses, under the strict arrest of the fell sergeant, Death. If we seek absolute truth– which can never be out of place–surely we shall find it beyond the gates which falsehood cannot pass. And here we find it conceded by all; for as material things fade away, human vision clears, and truth becomes a unit.

Osiris' balances weighed impartially the souls of Coptic lord and slave, before the pyramids rose on Egypt's plains; austere Minos meted even justice to citizen and helot, while the sculptured ideals of Attica slept in Pentelican quarries; Brahmin and Sudra,

according to deeds done in the body– strictly according to deeds done in some body–awake beyond the grave to share aeons of sorrowful transmigration, and final repose; Nirvana awaits the Buddhist high and low alike; Islamism sternly sends all mankind across the sharp-edged Bridge, which the righteous only cross in safety, while wicked caliph and wicked slave together reel into the abyss below. The apotheosis of pagan heroes rested on personal merit alone. No eschatology but that of High Calvinism anticipates, in the unseen world, anything resembling the injustice of a civilisation which, of set purpose, excludes from the only redemption flesh and blood can inherit, that sad rear-guard whose besetting sin is poverty. Yet John Knox's wildest travesty of eternal justice never rivalled in flagrancy the moving principle of a civilisation which exists merely to build on extrinsic bases an impracticable barrier between class and class: on one side, the redemption of life, education, refinement, leisure, comfort; on the other side, want, toil, anxiety, and an open path to the Gehenna of ignorance, baseness, and brutality. Holy Willie's God, at least, heaps no beatitude on successful greed; and your Christian civilisation does so. Dare you deny it?

Chastened by contemplation of levelling mortality, awed into truth by the spectacle of a whole world made kin by that icy touch of nature, the belated soul seeks refuge in a final justice which excludes from natural heirship to the external home not one of earth's weary myriads. Your conception of heavenly justice is found in the concession of equal spiritual birthright, based on the broad charter of common humanity, and forfeitable only by individual worthlessness or deliberate refusal. Why is your idea of earthly justice so widely different–since the principle of justice must be absolute and immutable? Yet while the Church teaches you to pray, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven," she tacitly countenances widening disparity in condition, and openly sanctions that fearful abuse which dooms the poor man's unborn children to the mundane perdition of poverty's thousand penalties. Is God's will so done in heaven? While the Church teaches you to pray, "Thy Kingdom come," she strikes with mercenary venom at the first principle of that kingdom, namely, elementary equality in citizen privilege. Better silence than falsehood; better no religion at all–if such lack be possible–than one which concedes equal rights beyond the grave, and denies them here.

I wish you to face the truth frankly (continued the pipe), for, heaven knows, it faces you frankly enough. Ecclesiastical Christianity vies with the effete Judaism of olden time as a failure of the first magnitude. Passing over what was purely local and contemporaneous, there is not one count in the long impeachment of that doomed Eastern city but may be repeated, with sickening exactitude, and added emphasis, over any pseudo-Christian community now festering on earth. Chorasin and Bethsaida have no lack of antitypes amongst you. Again has man overruled his Creator's design. The mustard seed has become a great tree, but the unclean fowls lodge in its branches. The symbol of deepest ignominy has become the proudest insignia of Court–moths and professional assassins, but it is no longer the cross of Christ. Eighteen-and-a-half centuries of purblind groping for the Kingdom of God finds an idealised Messiah shrined in the modern Pantheon, and yourselves "a chosen generation," leprous with the sin of usury; "a royal priesthood," paralysed with the cant of hireling clergy; "a holy nation," rotten with the luxury of wealth, or embittered by the sting of poverty; "a peculiar people," deformed to Lucifer's own pleasure by the curse of caste; while, in this pandemonium of Individualism, the weak, the diffident, the scrupulous, and the afflicted, are thrust aside or trampled down.

And whilst the world's most urgent need is a mission of sternest counsel and warning, from the oppressed to the oppressor, I witness the unspeakable insolence of a Gospel of Thrift, preached by order of the rich man to Lazarus at his gate–a deliberate laying on the shoulders of Lazarus a burden grievous to be borne, a burden which Dives (or Davis, or Smith, or Johnson; anything–anything–but Christ's brutal "rich man") hungry for the promised penalty, will not touch with one of his fingers. The Church quibbles well, and palters well, and, in her own pusillanimous way, means well, by her silky loyalty to the law and the profits, and by her steady hostility to some unresisting personification known as the Common Enemy. But because of that pernicious loyalty, she has reason to complain that the working man is too rational to imbibe her teachings on the blessedness of slavery and starvation. Meanwhile, as no magnanimous sinner can live down to the pseudo-Christian standard, unprogressive Agnosticism takes the place of demoralised belief, and the Kingdom of God fades into a myth.

Yet there is nothing Utopian (pleaded the pipe) in the charter of that kingdom–in the sunshiny Sermon on the Mount. It is no fanciful conception of an intangible order of things, but a practical, workable code of daily life, adapted to any stage of civilisation, and delivered to men and women who, even according to the showing of hopeless pessimists, or strenuous advocates for Individualistic force and cunning, were in all respects like ourselves– delivered, moreover, by One who knew exactly the potentialities and aspirations of man. And, in the unerring harmony of the Original Idea, the outcome of that inimitable teaching is merely the consummation of prophetic

forecast in earlier ages. First, the slenderest crescent, seen by eyes that diligently searched the sky; then, a broader crescent; a hemisphere; at last, a perfect sphere, discovered by the Nazarene Artisan, and by him made plain to all who wish to see. But from the dawn of the ages that orb was there, waiting for recognition, waiting with the awful, tireless, all-conquering patience for which no better name has been found than the Will of God.

History marks a point of time when first the Humanity of God touched the divine aspiration in man, fulfilling, under the skies of Palestine, the dim, yet infallible instinct of every race from eastern Mongol to western Aztec. "The Soul, naturally Christian," responds to this touch, even though blindly and erratically, and so from generation to generation the multitudes stand waiting to welcome the Gospel of Humanity with palms and hosannas, as of old; while from generation to generation phylactered exclusiveness takes counsel against the revolution which is to make all things new. And shall this opposition–the opposition by slander, conspiracy, bribery, and force–prevail till the fatal line is once more passed, and you await the Titus sword to drown your land in blood, and the Hadrian-plough to furrow your Temple-site?

I think not (added the pipe, after a pause). I think not. For a revolt undreamt of by your forefathers is in progress now–a revolt of enlightenment against ignorance; of justice and reason against the domination of the manifestly unworthy. The world's brightest intellects are answering one by one to the roll-call of the New Order, and falling into line on the side championed by every prophet, from Moses to the "agitator" that died o' Wednesday. Inconceivably long and cruel has the bondage been, hideous beyond measure the degradation of the disinherited; but I think the cycle of soul-slaying loyalty to error draws near its close; for the whole armoury of the Father of Lies can furnish no shield to turn aside the point of the tireless and terrible PEN–that Ithuriel-spear which, in these latter days, scornfully touches the mail-clad demon of Privilege, and discloses a swelling frog.

Contemporaneous literature (continued the pipe thoughtfully) is our surest register of advance or retrogression; and, with few exceptions indeed, the prevailing and conspicuous element in all publications of more than a century ago is a tacit acceptance of irresponsible lordship and abject inferiority as Divine ordinances. Brutal indifference, utter contempt, or more insulting condescension, toward the rank and file, was an article of the fine old English gentleman's religion– "a point of our faith," as the pious Sir Thomas Browne seriously puts it– the complementary part being a loathsome servility toward nobility and royalty. In that era, the most amiable of English poets felt constrained to weave into his exquisite Elegy an undulating thread of modest apology for bringing under notice the short and simple annals of the Vaisya caste. Later, Cowper thought poverty, humility, industry, and piety a beautiful combination for the wearer of the smock frock. Even Crabbe blindly accepted the sanctified lie of social inequality. And this assumption was religiously acquiesced in by the lower animal himself–who doubtless glorified God for the distinctly unsearchable wisdom and loving-kindness manifested in those workhouse regulations which separated his own toil-worn age from the equal feebleness of the wife whose human rights he should have died fighting for when he was young. And, as might be expected, this strictly gentlemanly principle looms larger in your forefathers' prose than in their poetry. At last, Burns and Paine flashed their own strong, healthy personalities on the community, marking an epoch; and from that day to this, the Apology of Humanity acquires ever-increasing momentum, and ever-widening scope. Now, if social-economic conditions fail to keep abreast with the impetuous, uncontrollable advance of popular intelligence, the time must come when, with one tiger-spring, the latter shall assail the former; and the scene of this unpleasantness (concluded the infatuated pipe) is called in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon.

The swagman approached, plodding steadily along, with his billy in one hand and his water-bag in the other; on his shoulder, horse-shoe fashion, his forty years' gathering; and in his patient face his forty years' history, clearly legible to me by reason of a gift which I happily possess. I was roused from my reverie by some one saying:

"How fares our cousin Hamlet? Come and have a drink of tea, and beggar the expense."

"Good day," responded Hamlet, still pursuing his journey.

"Come on! come on! why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"

"Eh?" And he stopped, and faced about.

"Come and have a feed!" I shouted.

"I'll do that ready enough," said he, laying his fardel down in the shade, and seating himself on it with a satisfied sigh.

I rooted my damper out of its matrix, flogged the ashes off it with a saddle-cloth, and placed it before my guest, together with a large wedge of leathery cheese, a sheath-knife, and the quart pot and pannikin.

"Eat, and good dich thy good heart, Apemantus," said I cordially. Then, resuming my seat, I took leisure to observe him. He was an everyday sight, but one which never loses its interest to me–the bent and haggard wreck of what should have been a fine soldierly man; the honest face sunken and furrowed; the neglected hair and matted beard thickly strewn

with grey. His eyes revealed another victim to the scourge of ophthalmia. This malady, by the way, must not be confounded with sandy blight. The latter is acute; the former, chronic.

"Coming from Moama?" I conjectured, at length.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I ain't had anything since yesterday afternoon. Course, you of'en go short when you're travellin'; but I'm a man that don't like to be makin' a song about it."

"Would n't you stand a better show for work on the other side of the river?"

"Eh?"

"Is n't the Vic. side the best for work?" I shouted.

"Yes; takin' it generally. But there's a new saw-mill startin' on this side, seven or eight mile up from here; an' I know the two fellers that owns it– two brothers, the name o' H—. Fact, I got my eyes cooked workin' at a thresher for them. I'm not frightened but what I'll git work at the mill. Fine, off-handed, reasonable fellers."

"Would n't it suit you better to look out for some steady work on a farm?"

"Very carm. Sort o' carm heat. I think there's a thunderstorm hangin' about. We'll have rain before this moon goes out for a certainty. She come in on her back–I dunno whether you noticed?"

"I did n't notice. Don't you find this kind of weather making your eyes worse?"

"My word, you're right. Not much chance of a man makin' a rise the way things is now. Dunno what the country's comin' to. I don't blame people for not givin' work when they got no work to give, but they might be civil" he paused, and went on with his repast in silence for a minute. It required no great prescience to read his thought. Man must be subject to sale by auction, or be a wearer of Imperial uniform, before the susceptibility to insult perishes in his soul. "I been carryin' a swag close on twenty year," he resumed; "but I never got sich a divil of a blaggardin' as I got this mornin'. Course, I'm wrong to swear about it, but that's a thing I ain't in the habit o' doin'. It was at a place eight or ten mile down the river, on the Vic. side. I wasn't cadging, nyther. I jist merely ast for work–not havin' heard about the H—s till after– an' I thought the bloke was goin' to jump down my throat. I didn't ketch the most o' what he said, but I foun' him givin' me rats for campin' about as fur off of his place as from here to the other side o' the river; an' a lagoon betwixt; an' not a particle o' grass for the fire to run on. Fact, I'm a man that's careful about fire. Mind you, I did set fire to a bit of a dead log on the reserve, but a man has to get a whiff o' smoke these nights, on account o' the muskeeters; an' there was no more danger nor there is with this fire o' yours. Called me everything but a gentleman."

"Possess your soul in patience. You have no remedy and no appeal till we gather at the river."

"O, I was in luck there. Jist after I heard about this saw-mill–bein' then on the Vic. side–I foun' a couple o' swells goin' to a picnic in a boat; an' I told them I wanted to git across, an' they carted me over, an' no compliment. Difference in people."

"I know the H—s," I shouted. "When did you hear about them starting this saw-mill?"

"O! this forenoon. I must ast you to speak loud. I got the misfortune to be a bit hard o' hearin'. Most people notices it on me, but I was thinkin' p'r'aps you did n't remark it. It come through a cold I got in the head, about six year ago, spud-diggin' among the Bungaree savages."

"I'm sorry for you."

"Well, it was this way. After the feller hunted me off of his place this mornin', who should I meet but a young chap an' his girl, goin' to this picnic, with a white horse in the buggy. Now, that's one o' these civil, good-hearted sort o' chaps you'll sometimes git among the farmers. Name o' Archie M—. I dunno whether you might n't know him; he's superintender o' the E— Sunday School. Fact, I'd bin roun' with the H—'s thresher at his ole man's place four years runnin'; so when he seen me this mornin', it was, 'Hello, Andy!–lookin' for work?' An' the next word was, 'Well, I'm sorry we ain't got no work for you'– or words to that effect–'but,' says he, 'there's the H—s startin' a saw-mill fifteen or twenty mile up the river, on the other side. They won't see you beat,' says he, 'but if you don't git on with them,' says he, 'come straight back to our place, an' we'll see about something,' says he. So I'm makin' my way to the saw-mill."

"Well, I hope you'll get on there, mate."

"You're right. It's half the battle. Wust of it is, you can't stick to a mate when you got him. I was workin' mates with a raw new-chum feller las' winter, ringin' on the Yanko. Grand feller he was–name o' Tom–but, as it happened, we was workin' sub-contract for a feller name o' Joe Collins, an' we was on for savin', so we on'y drawed tucker-money; an' beggar me if this Joe Collins did n't git paid up on the sly, an' travelled. So we fell in. Can't be too careful when you're workin' for a workin' man. But I would n't like to be in Mr. Joe Collins's boots when Tom ketches him. Scotch chap, Tom is. Well, after bin had like this, we went out on the Lachlan, clean fly-blowed; an' Tom got a job boundary ridin', through another feller goin' to Mount Brown diggin's; an' there was no work for me, so we had to shake hands. I'd part my last sprat to that feller."

"I believe you would. But I'm thinking of Joe Collins. To a student of nominology, this is a most unhappy combination. Joseph denotes sneaking

hypocrisy, whilst Collins is a guarantee of probity. Fancy the Broad Arrow and the Cross of the Legion of Honour woven into a monogram!"

"Rakin' style o' dog you got there. I dunno when I seen the like of him. Well, I think I'll be pushin' on. I on'y got a sort o' rough idear where this mill is; an' there ain't many people this side o' the river to inquire off of; an' my eyes is none o' the best. I'll be biddin' you good day."

"Are you a smoker?" I asked, replenishing my own sagacious meerschaum. "Because you might try a plug of this tobacco."

Now that man's deafness was genuine, and I spoke in my ordinary tone, yet the magic word vibrated accurately and unmistakably on the paralysed tympanum. Let your so-called scientists account for that.

"If you can spare it," replied the swagman, with animation. "Smokin's about the on'y pleasure a man's got in this world; an' I jist used up the dust out o' my pockets this mornin'; so this'll go high. My word! Well, good day. I might be able to do the same for you some time."

"Thou speakest wiser than thou art 'ware of," I soliloquised as I watched his retreating figure, whilst lighting my pipe. "As the other philosopher, Tycho Brahe, found inspiration in the gibberish of his idiot companion, so do I find food for reflection in thy casual courtesy, my friend. Possibly I have reached the highest point of all my greatness, and from that full meridian of my glory, I haste now to my setting. From a Deputy-Assistant-Sub-Inspector–with the mortuary reversion of the Assistant-Sub-Inspectorship itself–to a swagman, bluey on shoulder and billy in hand, is as easy as falling off a playful moke. Such is life."

The longer I smoked, the more charmed I was with the rounded symmetry and steady lustre of that pearl of truth which the swagman had brought forth out of his treasury. For philosophy is no warrant against destitution, as biography amply vouches. Neither is tireless industry, nor mechanical skill, nor artistic culture–if unaccompanied by that business aptitude which tends to the survival of the shrewdest; and not even then, if a person's mana is off. Neither is the saintliest piety any safeguard. If the author of the Thirty-seventh Psalm lived at the present time, he would see the righteous well represented among the unemployed, and his seed in the Industrial Schools. For correction of the Psalmist's misleading experience, one need go no further down the very restricted stream of Sacred History than the date of the typical Lazarus. Continually impending calamities menace with utter destitution any given man, though he may bury his foolish head in the sand, and think himself safe. There lives no one on earth to day who holds even the flimsiest gossamer of security against a pauper's death, and a pauper's grave. If he be as rich as Croesus, let him remember Solon's warning, with its fulfilment–and the change since 550 B.C. has by no means been in the direction of fixity of tenure. Where are one-half of the fortunes of twenty years ago?–and where will the other half be in twenty years more? Though I am, like Sir John, old only in judgment and understanding, I have again and again seen the wealthy emir of yesterday sitting on the ash-heap to-day, scraping himself with a bit of crockery, but happily too broken to find an inhuman sneer for the vagrants whom, in former days, he would have disdained to set with the dogs of his flock. I could write you a column of these emirs' names. And if there is one impudent interpolation in the Bible, it is to be found in the last chapter of that ancient Book of Job. The original writer conceived a tragedy, anticipating the grandeur of the Oedipus at Colonos, or Lear–and here eight supplementary verses have anti-climaxed this masterpiece to the level of a boys' novel. "Also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before," &c., &c. Tut-tut! Job's human nature had sustained a laceration that nothing but death could heal.

Is there any rich man who cannot imagine a combination of circumstances that would have given him lodgings under the bridge?–that may still do so, say, within twelve months? Setting my knighthood and my soldiership aside, I can imagine a combination that would have quartered me in that airy colonnade–nay, that may do so before this day week; and my view of the matter is, that if I become not the bridge as well as another, a plague of my bringing up! We are all walking along the shelving edge of a precipice; any one of us may go at any moment, or be dragged down by another.

And this is as it ought to be. Justice is done, and the sky does not fall. For, from a higher point of view, the Sabians and Chaldeans of the present day don't dislocate society; they only alter the incidence of existing dislocation; and all this works steadily towards a restoration–if not of some old Saturnian or Jahvistic Paradise-idyll, at least of a Divine intention and human ideal. Vicissitude of fortune is the very hand of "the Eternal, not ourselves, that maketh for righteousness," the manifestation of the Power behind moral evolution; and we may safely trust the harmony of Universal legislation for this antidote to a grievous disease; we may rest confident that whilst this best of all possible worlds remains under the worst of all possible managements, the solemn threat of thirty-three centuries ago shall not lack fulfilment–the poor shall never cease out of the land. And no man knows when his own turn may come. But all this is strictly conditional.

Collective humanity holds the key to that kingdom of God on earth, which clear-sighted prophets of all ages have pictured in colours that never fade. The kingdom of God is within us; our all-embracing duty is to give it form and effect, a local habitation and a name. In the meantime, our reluctance to submit to the terms of citizenship has no more effect on the iron law of citizen reciprocity than our disapproval has on the process of the seasons; for see how, in the great human family, the innocent suffer for the guilty; and not only are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children, but my sins are visited upon your children, and your sins upon some one else's children; so that, if we decline a brotherhood of mutual blessing and honour, we alternatively accept one of mutual injury and ignominy. Eternal justice is in no hurry for recognition, but flesh and blood will assuredly tire before that principle tires. It is precisely in relation to the palingenesis of Humanity that, to the unseen Will, one day is said to be as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. A Divine Idea points the way, clearly apparent to any vision not warped by interest or prejudice, nor darkened by ignorance; but the work is man's alone, and its period rests with man.

My reason for indulging in this reverie was merely to banish the thought of my late guest. (Of course, my object in recording it here is simply to kill time; for, to speak like a true man, I linger shivering on the brink of the disclosures to which I am pledged. I feel something like the doomed Nero, when he stood holding the dagger near his throat, trying meanwhile to screw his courage to the sticking-place by the recitation of heroic poetry. Trust me to go on with the narrative as soon as I choose.)

I did n't want to think of Andy personally. Intuition whispered to me that the swagman, who would have parted his last sprat to a former mate, hadn't that humble coin in his pocket; whilst purse-pride hinted that I had four sovereigns and some loose silver in mine–not to speak of £8 6s. 8d. waiting for me in Hay. If I had allowed my mind to dwell on these two intrusive intimations, they would have seemed to fit each other like tenon and mortice; though when the opportunity of making the joint had existed, a sort of moral laziness, together with our artificial, yet not unpraiseworthy, repugnance to offering a money gift, had brought me out rather a Levite than a Samaritan. In mere self-defence, I would have been constrained to keep up a series of general and impersonal reflections till the swagman lost his individuality–say, five or six hours–but I was rescued from this tyranny by the faint rattle of a buggy on the other side of the river. Idly turning my glass on the two occupants of the vehicle, I recognised one of them as a familiar and valued friend–a farmer, residing five or six miles down the river, on the Victorian side. I rose and walked to the brink as the buggy came opposite.

"Hello! Mr. B—," I shouted.

"Hello! Collins. I thought you were way back. When did you come down? Why did n't you give us a call?"

"Could n't get across the river without sacrifice of dignity and comfort."

"Yes, you can; easy enough. You can start off now. I'm going across here with Mr. G—, to see some sheep, but I'll be back toward sundown. I'll tell you how you'll manage: Follow straight down the road till you come to the old horse-paddock, nearly opposite our place; then turn to your left, down along the fence—"

"No use, Mr. B—. I want to get away to-morrow; and you know when we get together—"

"Yes; I know all about that. But you must come, Collins. There's a dozen things I want your opinion about."

"Indeed I appreciate your sensible valuation of me as a referee, Mr. B—, but I must still decline. I wish I had gone this morning; it's too late now."

"Well, I'll feel disappointed. So will Dick. By-the-by, Dick L— has turned up again. He's at our place now. He's off next week–to Fiji, I suspect."

"Where has he been this last time?"

"You would n't guess. He's been in the Holy Land. Poked about there for over six months."

"At Jerusalem?"

"Yes; he's been a good deal in Jerusalem. He lived in Jericho for a month; but he spent most of his time at different places up and down the Jordan."

"Did he meet many Scotchmen wandering along that river?"

"I suppose he would meet a good many anywhere–but why there particularly?"

"Well, Byron tells us that on Jordan's banks the arab Campbells stray."

"I don't take."

"Neither do I, Mr. B—."

"But I'm perfectly serious, Tom; I am, indeed. I thought you would like to have a yarn with Dick. His descriptions of the Holy Land are worth listening to."

"Say 'Honour bright'."

"Honour bright, then. I say, Collins–did you ever have reason to doubt my word?"

"No; but I always get demoralised out back. Where were you saying I could get across the river?"

"I thought that would fetch the beggar," I heard B— remark to his companion. And he was right. It would fetch the beggar across any river on this continent.

Dick L—, Mrs. B—'s brother, was a mine of rare information and queer experiences. Educated for the law, his innate honesty had shrunk from the practice of

his profession, and he had taken to rambling as people take to drink, turning up at irregular intervals to claim whatever might be available of the £l2 10s. per quarter bequeathed to him by his father. His strong point was finding his way into outlandish places, and getting insulted and sat on by the public, and run in by the police. Apart from this speciality, he was one of the most useless beings I ever knew (which is saying a lot). Some men, by their very aspect, seem to invite confidence; others, insult; others, imposition; but Dick seemed only to invite arrest. When well-groomed, he used to be arrested in mistake for some bank defaulter; when ragged, he was sure to be copped for shoplifting, pocket-picking, lack of lawful visible, or for having in his possession property reasonably supposed to have been stolen. Therefore, honest as he was, he had been, like Paul, in prisons frequent. But, thanks to his forensic training, these interviews with the majesty of the law seemed homely and grateful to him. He could converse with a Bench in such terms of respectful camaraderie, yet with such suggestiveness of an Old Guard in reserve, that his innocence became a supererogatory merit. Besides which, he had been, in a general way, a servant of servants in every quarter of the globe, and had been run out of every billet for utter incompetency; often having to content himself with a poor half-pennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack. So he enjoyed (or otherwise) opportunities of seeing things that the literary tourist never sees; and, being a good talker, and, withal, a singularly truthful man, he was excellent and profitable company after having been on the extended wallaby.

"Where were you saying I could get across the river, Mr. B—?"

"You know the old horse-paddock fence? Well, follow that down to the river, and just at the end of it you'll find a bark canoe tied to the bank. Bark by name, and bark by nature. And you'll see a fencing wire lying in the river, with the end fastened to a tree. When you haul the wire up out of the water, you'll find the other end tied to a tree on this bank. Very complete rig. And, I say, Collins; mind you slacken the wire down from this end after you get across, on account of steamers, and snags, and so forth, The canoe's dead certain to be on your side of the river. It belongs to a couple of splitters, living in the horse-paddock hut; and they only use it to come across for rations, or the like of that. Well, we'll be off, Mr. G—. I'll see you again this evening, then, Collins."

The buggy rattled away through the red-gums. I packed my things in a convenient hollow tree, and started off down the river, followed by the slate-coloured animal that constantly loved me although I was poor. About half-way to the horse-paddock, I was overtaken and passed by Arthur H—, one of the two brothers reported to be starting the sawmill; and I afterward remembered that, though we saluted each other, and exchanged impotent criticisms on the weather, I had by this time obtained such ascendency over the meddlesome and querulous part of my nature that I had never once thought of asking him if he had met Andy.

It must have been near six in the afternoon when I made my way down the steep bank to where the aptly-named bark was tied up. I soon pulled the slack of the wire out of the bed of the river, and made all fast. Then it occurred to me that I might have a smoke whilst pulling across. My next thought was that I could economise time by deferring this duty till I should resume my journey, with both hands at liberty. Forthwith, I squatted in the canoe, and got under way, leaving Pup to follow at his own convenience.

In a former chapter I had occasion to notice a great fact, namely, that the course of each person's life is directed by his ever-recurring option, or election. Now let me glance at two of my own alternatives, each of which has immediate bearing on the incident I am about to relate:

Three weeks ago (from the present writing) I had open choice of all the dates in twenty-two diaries. I actually dallied with that choice, and inadvertently switched my loco. on to the line I am now faithfully, though reluctantly, following. The doom-laden point of time was that which marked the penning of my determination; for a perfectly-balanced engine is more likely to go wandering off a straight line than I am to fail in fulfilment of a promise.

Another indifferent-looking alternative was accepted when my guardian angel suggested a smoke while crossing the river, and I declined, on the plea of haste. A picaninny alternative, that, you say? I tell you, it proved an old-man alternative before it ran itself out. The filling and lighting of my pipe would have occupied three or four minutes, and I should have seen an impending danger in time to guard against it. But I shunted on to the wrong line, and nothing remained but to follow it out to a finish. You shall judge for yourself whether even your own discretion and address could have carried the allotted trip to a less unhappy issue.

Hand over hand along the wire, I had wobbled the bark to the middle of the stream, when I noticed, not fifty yards away, a dead tree of twelve or fifteen tons displacement, en route for South Australia. Being about nineteen-twentieths submerged, and having no branches on the upper side, it would have passed under the wire but for a stump of a root, as thick as your body, standing about five feet above the surface of the water, on its forward end. In remarking that the tree was ong root, I merely mean to imply such importance in that portion of its substance that it might rather be viewed as a root with a tree attached than as

a tree with a root attached. This is the aspect it still retains in my mind.

There was not half enough time to pull the bark ashore and sink the wire, so I did the next best thing I could. As the log approached, I carefully rose to my feet, and held the wire high enough to clear the root. Nearer it came; it would pass the bark nicely within three or four feet; a few seconds more, and the root would glide underneath the wire—

Pup had remained yelping and dancing on the bank for a few minutes after my embarkation–the kangaroo dog having a charcoal burner's antipathy to the bath–but at last becoming desperate, he had plunged in, and was rapidly approaching whilst I judiciously gauged the height of the root, and meanwhile balanced the unsteady bark under my feet. When the root was within six inches of the wire, Pup's chin and forepaws were on the gunwale; in three seconds more, I was clinging with one hand to the root, the other still mechanically holding the tightening wire; Pup was making for the log; and the splitters' bark had gone to Davy Jones's locker. In another half-minute, the wire parted, and Pup and I were deck passengers, ong root for the land of the Crow-eaters.

I was no more disconcerted than I am at the present moment. I would go on to B—'s as if nothing had happened; and put up with the inconvenience of swimming the river in the morning. In the meantime, though I was well splashed, all the things in my pockets were dry. I particularly congratulated myself on the good fortune of having been so close to the root at the Royal Georgeing of my bark. My bark–well, strictly speaking, it was the splitters' bark; but accidents will happen; and I was certain that not a soul had seen me turn off the main road toward the river.

My clothes were of the lightest. I took them off, and tied them in my handkerchief. I pounded a depression in the package to fit the top of my head, and bound it there with my elastic belt, holding the latter in my teeth. You must often have noticed that the chief difficulty of swimming with your clothes on your head arises from the fore-and-aft surging of the package with each stroke. But nothing could have been more complete than my arrangements as I slid gently into the water, and paddled for the Cabbage Garden shore.

When I had gone a few yards, my faithful companion, now left alone on the log, raised his voice in lamentation, after the manner of his subspecies.

"Come on, Pup!" I shouted, without looking round; and the next moment I felt as if a big kangaroo dog had catapulted himself through twenty feet of space, and lit on my package.

After returning to the surface and coughing about a pint of water out of my nose and ears, I looked uneasily round for my cargo. It was nowhere to be seen. I swam back to the log, and stood on it to get a better view. Good! there was the white, rounded top, an inch above the water, ten yards away. As I swam toward it, a whirlpool took it under. I dived after it, struck it smartly with the crown of my head; and eventually returned to the log, whence I watched for its re-appearance above the slowly-swirling water. It never re-appeared.

Following the sinuosities of the river, this must have been a mile and a half below the splitters' crossing-place; and time had been passing, for there was the setting sun, blazing through a gap in the timber, and its mirrored reflection stretching half a mile of dazzling radiance along a straight reach of the river.

Now, though the Murray is the most crooked river on earth, its general tendency is directly from east to west. Would n't you, therefore–if you were on a floating log, remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow; standing, like the Apollo Sauroctones, with your hand on the adjacent stump, and, to enhance your resemblance to that fine antique, clad in simplicity of mien and nothing else–if you were sadly realising the loss of your best clothes, with all the things in the pockets, including a fairly trustworthy watch–if, in addition to this, the patient face of the spratless swagman was rising before you till you involuntarily muttered "O Julius Caesar! thou art mighty yet!" and the nasty part of your moral nature was reminding you that you might have had anything up to four-pounds-odd worth of heavenly debentures; whereas, having failed to put your mammon of unrighteousness into celestial scrip, to await you at the end of your pilgrimage, you were now doubly debarred from retaining it in your pilgrim's scrip, by reason of having neither scrip nor mammon–under such circumstances, I say, would n't you be very likely to take the sunset on your left, and swim for the north bank, without doing an equation in algebra to find out which way the river ought to run? That is what I did. It never occurred to my mind that Victoria could be on the north side of New South Wales.

After shouting myself hoarse, and whistling on my fingers till my lips were paralysed, I brought Pup into view on the south, and supposedly Victorian, bank, opposite where I had landed. By the time I had induced him to take the water and rejoin me, the short twilight was gone, and night had set in, dark, starless, hot, and full of electricity.

And the mosquitos. Well, those who have been much in the open air, in Godiva costume, during opaque, perspiring, November nights, about Lake Cooper, or the Lower Goulburn, or the Murray frontage, require no reminder; and to those who have not had such experience, no illustration could convey any adequate notion. Hyperbolically, however: In the

localities I have mentioned, the severity of the periodical plague goads the instinct of animals almost to the standard of reason. Not only will horses gather round a fire to avail themselves of the smoke, but it is quite a usual thing to see some experienced old stager sitting on his haunches and dexterously filliping his front shoes over a little heap of dry leaves and bark.

To return. The recollection of much worse predicaments in the past, and the reasonable anticipation of still worse in the future, restored that equilibrium of temper which is the aim of my life; and I felt cheerful enough as I welcomed my dripping companion, and, taking a leafy twig in each hand to switch myself withal, started northward for the river road, which I purposed following eastward to where the pad branched off, and then running the latter to my camp. Once clear of the river timber, and with the road for a base, the darkness, I thought, would make little difference to me.

After half an hour's gliding through heavy forest, and cleaving my way through spongy reed-beds, and circling round black lagoons, alive with the "plump, plump" of bullfrogs, and the interminable "r-r-r-r-r" of yabbies, I found the river on my right, with a well-beaten cattle-track along the bank. Here was something definite to go upon. By keeping straight on, I must soon strike the old horse-paddock fence, where the splitters used to keep their bark; and in an hour and a-half more, I would be at my camp.

But the discerning reader will perceive, from hints already given, that, by following the cattle track, with the river on my right, I was unconsciously travelling westward on the Victorian side, instead of eastward on the New South Wales side. If the sky had cleared for a single instant, a glance at the familiar constellations would have set me right.

After half a mile, the cattle-track intersected a beaten road, with the black masses of river timber still on the right, and a wire fence on the left–as I found by running into it. Everything seemed unfamiliar and puzzling; but I followed the road, looking out for landmarks, and zealously switching myself as I went along.

Soon I heard in front the trampling of horses, and men's voices in jolly conversation. I aimed for the sounds, and, after running against a loose horse, feeding leisurely on the grass, I distinguished through the hot, stagnant darkness the approaching forms of three men riding abreast.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said I politely, switching myself as I spoke. "Could you give me some idea of the geography"— I got no farther, for a colt that one of the fellows was riding suddenly shied at me and followed up the action by bucking his best. Upon this, the loose horse presented himself, cavorting round in senseless emulation, while the other two horses swerved and tried to bolt. All this took place in half a minute.

The rider of the colt was taken by surprise, but he was plucky. Though losing not only his stirrups but his saddle with the first buck, he spent the next couple of minutes riding all over that colt, sometimes on his ears, and sometimes on his tail. But this sort of thing could n't last–it never does last–so, after hanging on for about twenty seconds by one heel the fellow dismounted like a barrow-load of sludge. During this time, I saw nothing of the two other men, but I could hear them trying to force their excited horses toward the spot where I was skipping round, ready to catch the colt on the moment of his discharging cargo.

On making the attempt, I missed the bridle in the dark; and away shot the colt in one direction, and the loose horse in another.

"I bet a note Jack's off," said a voice from the distance.

"Gosh, you'd win it if it was twenty," responded another voice from the ground close by.

"There goes his moke!" said the first voice. "Come and jam the beggar against the fence, or he'll be off to glory." And away clattered the two horsemen after the wrong horse; Jack following on foot.

Noticing their mistake, I cantered hopefully after the colt, thinking to obtain a favourable introduction to Jack by restoring the animal; but in a few minutes I lost the sounds, and abandoned the pursuit. Then, after supplying myself with fresh switches, I resumed my fatal westward course.

More voices, a short distance away, and straight in front. Judging them to come from some vehicle travelling at a slow walk along the edge of the timber, I posted myself behind a tree, and waited as patiently as the mosquitos permitted.

"Now you need n't scandalise one another," said a pleasant masculine voice. "You're like the pot and the kettle. You're both as full of sin and hypocrisy as you can stick. Six of one, and half-a-dozen of the other. I would n't have believed it if I had n't seen it with my own eyes. You've disgraced yourselves for ever. Who the dickens do you think would be fool enough to marry either of you after the way you've behaved yourselves to-day?"

"Well, I'm sure we're not asking you to marry us," piped a feminine voice.

"Keep yourselves in that mind, for goodness' sake. I'm disgusted with you. Why, only last Sunday, I heard your two mothers flattering themselves about the C— girls knowing too much; and I'll swear you've both forgot more than the C— girls ever knew. You're as common as dish-water."

"O, you're mighty modest, your own self," retorted a second feminine voice.

”It’s my place to be a bit rowdy,” replied the superior sex. “It’s part of a man’s education. And I don’t try to look as if butter would n’t melt in my mouth. You’re just the reverse; you’re hypocrites. ‘Woe unto you hypocrites!’ the Bible says. But it’s troubling me a good deal to think what your mothers’ll feel, now that you’ve come out in your true colours.”

”But you wouldn’t be mean enough to tell?” interrupted one of the sweet voices.

”I always thought you were too honourable to do such a thing, Harry,” remarked the other.

”Well, now you find your mistake. But this is not a question of honour; it’s a question of duty.”

”O, you’re mighty fine with your duty! You’re a mean wretch. There!”

”I’ll be a meaner wretch before another hour’s over. Go on, Jerry; let’s get it past and done with.”

”But, Harry–I say, Harry–don’t tell. I’ll never forgive you if you do.”

”Duty, Mabel, duty.”

”What good will it do you to tell?” pleaded the other voice.

”Duty, Annie, duty. On you go, Jerry, and let’s get home. This is painful to a cove of my temperament.”

During this conversation, I had become conscious of standing on a populous ant-bed; and, not wishing to lose the chance of an interview with Harry, I had retreated in front of the buggy till a second tree offered its friendly cover. Jerry’s head was now within two yards of my ambush, and, peeping round, I could make out the vague outline of the figures in the buggy.

”Well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said Harry, stopping the horse: “If each of you gives me a kiss, of her own good will, I’ll promise not to tell. Are you on? Say the word, for I’ll only give you one minute to decide.”

”What do you think, Mabel?” murmured one of the voices.

”Well, I’ve got no— But what do you think?”

”I think it’s about the only thing we can do. We would never be let come out again.”

There was perfect silence for a minute. My tree was n’t a large one, and the near front wheel of the buggy was almost against it. Not daring to move hand or foot, I could only wish myself a rhinoceros.

”Come on,” said one of the voices, at last.

”Come on how?” asked Harry innocently. “Look here: the agreement is that each of you is to give me a kiss, of her own good will. I’m not going to move.”

”O, you horrid wretch! Do you think we’re going to demean ourselves? You’re mighty mistaken if you do.”

”Go on, Jerry.” And the buggy started.

”We’re not frightened of you now,” remarked one of the voices complacently, whilst I threw myself on the ground, and rolled like a liberated horse. “If you dare to say one single word, we’ll just expose your shameful proposal. You mean wretch! you make people think it’s safe to send their girls with you, to be insulted like this. O, we’ll expose you!”

”Expose away. And don’t forget to mention that you both agreed to the shameful proposal. I’ll tell your mothers that I made that proposal just to try you, and you consented on condition of me keeping quiet. You’re both up a tree. ‘Weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin.’ Go on, Jerry, and let’s have it over.”

”What do you think, Annie?” asked one of the voices, whilst I made for my third tree.

”He’s the meanest wretch that ever breathed,” replied the other vehemently. “And I always thought men was so honourable!”

”Live and learn,” rejoined the escort pithily.

”O, Harry!” panted one voice, “I seen a white thing darting across there!”

”Quite likely,” replied Harry. “When a girl’s gone cronk, like you, she must expect to see white things darting about. But I’ll give you one more chance.”

”I think we better,” suggested one of the voices.

”There’s nothing else for it,” assented the other.

By this time, the buggy had disappeared in the darkness. I heard it stop; then followed, with slight intervals, two unsyllabled sounds.

”Over again,” said Harry calmly. “You both cheated.”

The sounds were repeated.

”Over again. You’ll have to alter your hand a bit–both of you–or we’ll be here all night. Slower, this time.”

Once more the sounds were repeated; then the buggy started, and Harry’s voice died away in the distance to an indistinct murmur, as he reviled the girls for this new exhibition of their shamelessness.

Whilst undecided whether to follow the buggy any further, I saw a light on the other side of the road. Making my way toward it, I crossed a log-and-chock fence, bounding a roughly ploughed fallow paddock, and then a two-rail fence; wondering all the while that I had never noticed the place when passing it in daylight. At last, a quarter of a mile from the road, a white house loomed before me, with the light in a front window. I opened the gate of the flower garden, and was soon crouched under the window, taking stock of the interior.

A middle-aged woman was sitting by the table, darning socks; and at the opposite side of the lamp sat a full-grown girl, in holiday attire, with her elbows on the table and her fingers in her hair, reading some illustrated journal; while a little boy, squatted behind the girl’s chair, was attaching a possum’s tail to her improver.

Like Enoch Arden (in my own little tin-pot way) I turned silently and sadly from the window, for I was n't wanted in that company. I thought of going round to the back premises in search of a men's hut; but before regaining the gate, I trod on a porcupine cactus, and forgot everything else for the time. Then, as I lay on the ground outside the gate, caressing the sole of my foot, and comforting myself with the thought that a brave man battling with the storms of fate is a sight worthy the admiration of the gods, a white dog came tearing round from the back yard, and rushed at me like a coming event casting its shadow before.

"Soolim, Pup!" I hissed. That was enough. Pup's colour rendered him invisible in the dark, and his stag-hound strain made him formidable when he was on the job. The office of a chucker-out has its duties, as well as its rights; and in half a minute that farm dog found that one of these duties demanded a many-sided efficiency with which Nature had omitted to endow him. He found that, though the stereotyped tactics of worrying, and freezing, and chawing, were good enough as opposed to similar procedure, they became mere bookish theories when confronted with the snapping system. Eviction becomes tedious when the intruder's teeth are always meeting in the hind quarters of the ejecting party; and the latter can neither get his antagonist in front of him, nor haul off to investigate damage.

Of course, I fanned the flame of discord as well as I could, hoping that some one of my own denomination would come out to see what was the matter. But no: the parlour door opened, Mam came out to the gate, and, in the broad bar of light extending from the door, I saw her pick up a clod, and aim it at the war-clouds, rolling dun. I was crouching some yards away to one side, but the clod crumbled against my ear. Then the storm of one-sided battle went raging round the back premises, as the farm dog returned to tell Egypt the story. Mam retreated from the gate in haste, and for a minute or two there was a confused clatter of voices in the house, and some opening and shutting of doors. Then all was silent again. Presently Pup returned, and accompanied me back to the road, carrying something which I ascertained to be a large fowl, plucked and dressed in readiness for cooking.

Musing on the difficulties of this Wonderland into which, according to immemorial usage, I had been born without a rag of clothes, I waited for Pup whilst he ate his fowl, and then again pressed forward, alert and vigilant, as beseemed a man scudding under bare poles through an apparently populous country, which by right ought to have been a sheeprun, with about one selection every five miles.

I had managed to put another mile between myself and my camp, when two horsemen met and passed me at a canter, singing one of Sankey's Melodies. I made a modest appeal, but they didn't hear me, and so passed on, unconscious of their lost opportunity.

Then I saw, a long way ahead, the lamps of an approaching vehicle, and at the same time, I heard, close in front, the trampling of horses, and voices raised in careless glee. I headed straight for the horses. As I neared them, the laughing and chatting ceased, and I was about to open negotiations when a woman's awe-stricken voice asked,

"Wha–what's that white thing there in front?"

Before the last syllable had left her lips, that white thing was receding into the darkness, like a comet into space. The party stopped for a minute, and then went on, conversing in a lower tone.

More pilgrims of the night. This time, the slow footfalls of horses, and a low, inarticulate murmur of voices, out in front and a little to the left, gave me fresh hope. Warned by past failures, I thought best to forego the erect posture to which our species owes so much of its majesty. I therefore dropped on all-fours and went like a tarantula till I distinguished two horses walking slowly abreast, jammed together; the riders presenting an indistinct outline of two individuals rolled into one; and it was from this amalgamation that the low, pigeon-like murmurs proceeded. An instinct of delicacy prompted me to pause, and let the Siamese twins pass in peace; but, unfortunately, I happened to be straight in the way, and just as I started to creep aside, one of the horses extended his neck, and, with a low, protracted snore, touched me on the back with the coarse velvet of his nose. Then followed two quick snorts of alarm; the horses shied simultaneously outward, while down on the ground between them came two souls with but a single thud, two hearts that squelched as one. In spite of the compunction and sympathy I felt, modesty compelled me to glide unobstrusively away, leaving the souls to disentangle themselves and catch their horses the best way they could.

By this time, the buggy lamps had approached within fifty yards. Knowing how dense the outside darkness would appear to anyone in the vehicle, I made a circuit, and got round to the rear. It was a single-seated buggy, with a white horse, travelling at a walk; and, in the darkness behind the lamps, two figures were discernible. I followed a little, to hear them introduce themselves. They did so as follows:–

"Now, Archie; I'll scream."

"My own sweetest"—

"Letmego! O,youwon'tletmego!"

Why, the district was fairly bristling with this class of people! I had never seen anything like it, except in the Flagstaff Gardens, when I was in Melbourne.

"My precious darling! My sweetest"—

"I'iltellmotherIwill! O!"

"My sweetest, my beautiful"—

”O! Idon’tloveyoudear! Idon’tloveyounow! Andyouwon’tletmego!”

”There, then, sweetest. Kiss me now.”

”Yes, Archie, my precious love.”

There was more of it, but it fell unheeded on my ears. I paused, and thought vehemently. The white horse in the buggy, and Archie M—, Superintendent of the E— Sunday School, with his girl! No wonder I had met so many people, and all going in the same direction. They were the sediment of the pic-nic party, returning from their orgy. Here was the lost chord. The whole truth flashed upon me. Now, the solid earth wheeled right-about face; east became west, and west, east. I recognised the Victorian river road, because I saw things as they were, not as I had imagined them–though, to be sure, I still saw them as through a glass, darkly.

My worldly-wise friend, let us draw a lesson from this. If you have never been bushed, your immunity is by no means an evidence of your cleverness, but rather a proof that your experience of the wilderness is small. If you have been bushed, you will remember how, as you struck a place you knew, error was suddenly superseded by a flash of truth; this without volition of judgment on your part, and entirely by force of a presentation of fact which your own personal error–however sincere and stubborn–had never affected, and which you were no longer in a position to repudiate. It has always been my strong impression that this is very much like the revelation which follows death–that is, if conscious individuality be preserved; a thing by no means certain, and, to my mind, not manifestly desirable.

But if, after closing our eyes in death, we open them on an appreciable hereafter–whether one imperceptible fraction of a second, or a million centuries, may intervene–it is as certain as anything can be, that, to most of us, the true east will prove to be our former south-west, and the true west, our former north-east. How many so-called virtues will vanish then; and how many objectionable fads will shine as with the glory of God? This much is certain: that all private wealth, beyond simplest maintenance, will seem as the spoils of the street gutter; that fashion will be as the gilded fly which infests carrion; that “sport” will seem folly that would disgrace an idiot; that military force, embattled on behalf of Royalty, or Aristocracy, or Capital, will seem like— Well, what will it seem like? Already, looking, or rather, squinting, back along our rugged and random track, we perceive that the bloodiest battle ever fought by our badly-bushed forefathers on British soil–and that only one of a series of twelve, in which fathers, sons, brothers, kinsmen, and fellow-slaves exterminated each other–was fought to decide whether a drivelling imbecile or a shameless lecher should bring our said forefathers under the operation of I Samuel, viii. (Read the chapter for yourself, my friend, if you know where you can borrow a Bible; then turn back these pages, and take a second glance at the paragraphs you skimmed over in that unteachable spirit which is the primary element of ignorance–namely, those reflections on the unfettered alternative, followed by rigorous destiny.)

Much more prosaic were my cogitations as I followed the buggy, keeping both switches at work. According to the best calculation I could make, I had ten or twelve miles of country to re-cross, besides the river; and, having no base on the Victorian side, it was a thousand to one against striking my camp on such a night. Of course, I might have groped my way to B—’s place; but if you knew Mrs. B—’s fatuous appreciation of dilemmas like mine, you would understand that such a thing was not to be thought of. I preferred dealing with strangers alone, and preserving a strict incognito. However, a pair of –- I must have, if nothing else–and that immediately. The buggy was fifteen or twenty yards ahead.

”Archie M—!” said I, in a firm, penetrating tone.

The buggy stopped. I repeated my salute.

”All right,” replied Archie. “What’s the matter?”

”Come here; I want you.”

The quadrant of light swept round as the young fellow turned his buggy.

”Leave your buggy, and come alone!” I shouted, careering in a circular orbit, with the light at my very heels.

”Well, I must say you’re hard to please, whoever you are,” remarked Archie, stopping the horse. “Hold the reins, sweetest.”

”Who is it?” asked the damsel, with apprehension in her tone.

”Don’t know, sweetest. Sounds like the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” And the light flashed on him as he felt downward for the step.

”Don’t go!” she exclaimed.

”Never mind her, Archie!” I called out. “She’s a fool. Come on!”

”What on earth’s the matter with you?” asked Archie, addressing the darkness in my direction.

”I’m clothed in tribulation. Can’t explain further. Come on! O, come on!”

”Don’t go, I tell you, Archie!” And in the bright light of the off lamp, I saw her clutch the after part of his coat as he stood on the foot-board.

”I must go, sweetest”—

”Good lad!” I exclaimed.

”I’ll be back in a minute. Let go, sweetest.”

”Don’t leave me, Archie. I’m frightened. Just a few minutes ago, I saw a white thing gliding past.”

”Spectral illusion, most likely. There was a hut-keeper murdered here by the blacks, thirty years ago,

and they say he walks occasionally. But he can't hurt you, even if he tried. Now let go, sweetest, and I'll say you're a good girl."

"Archie, you're cruel; and I love you. Don't leave me. Fn-n-n, ehn-n-n, ehn-n-n!" Sweetest was in tears.

"This is ridiculous!" I exclaimed. "Come on, Archie; I won't keep you a minute. The mountain can't go to Mahomet; and to state the alternative would be an insult to your erudition. Come on!"

"O, Archie, let's get away out of this fearful place," sobbed the wretched obstruction. "Do what I ask you this once, and I'll be like a slave the rest of my life."

"Well, mind you don't forget when the fright's over," replied Archie, resuming his seat. "That poor beggar has something on his mind, whoever he is; but he'll have to pay the penalty of his dignity."

"Too true," said I to myself, as Archie started off at a trot; "for the dignity is like that of Pompey's statue, 'th' austerest form of naked majesty'–a dignity I would gladly exchange for what Goldsmith thoughtlessly calls 'the glaring impotence of dress'."

I followed the buggy at a Chinaman's trot, thinking the thing over, and switching myself desperately, for the night was getting hotter and darker, and mosquitos livelier. You will bear in mind that I was now retracing my way.

Keeping on the track which skirted the river timber–the cool, impalpable dust being grateful to my bare feet–I heard some people on horseback pass along the parallel track which ran by the fence. Demoralised by the conditions of my unhappy state, I again paused to eavesdrop. Good! One fellow was relating an anecdote suited to gentlemen only. Thanking Providence for the tendency of the yarn, I darted diagonally across the clearing to intercept these brethren, and was rapidly nearing the party, when Pup, thinking I was after something, crossed my course in the dark. I tripped over him, and landed some yards ahead, in one of the five patches of nettles in the county of Moira. By the time I had cleared myself and recovered my equanimity, the horsemen had improved their pace, and were out of reach.

A few minutes afterward, I became aware of the footfalls of a single horse, coming along behind me at a slow trot. I paused to make one more solicitation. When the horseman was within twenty yards of where I stood, he pulled up and dismounted. Then he struck a match, and began looking on the ground for something he had dropped. The horse shied at the light, and refused to lead; whereupon, after giving the animal a few kicks, he threw the reins over a post of the fence close by, and continued his search, lighting fresh matches. Assuming an air of unconcern, so as to avoid taking him by surprise, I drew nearer, and noted him as a large, fair young man, fashionably dressed.

"Good evening, sir," said I urbanely.

With that peculiar form of rudeness which provokes me most, he flashed a match on me, instead of replying to my salutation.

"Are you satisfied?" I asked sardonically, switching myself the while, and still capering from the effect of the nettles.

He darted towards his horse, but before he reached the bridle my hand was on his shoulder.

"What do you want?" he gasped.

"I want your —," I replied sternly. "I'm getting full up of the admiration of the gods; I want the admiration of my fellow-men. In other words, I'm replete with the leading trait of Adamic innocence; I want the sartorial concomitants of Adamic guilt. Come! off with them!" and with that I snapped the laces of his balmorals; for he had sunk to the ground, and was lying on his back. "And seeing that I may as well be hanged for a whole suit as for a pair of —, I'll just take the complete outer ply while my hand's in; leaving you whatever may be underneath. Let me impress upon you that I don't attempt to defend this action on strictly moral grounds," I continued, peeling off his coat and waistcoat with the celerity of a skilful butcher skinning a sheep for a bet. "I think we may regard the transaction as a pertinent illustration of Pandulph's aphorism–to wit, that 'He who stands upon a slippery place, makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up.' When the hurly-burly's done, I must get you to favour me with your address, so that"— Here my antagonist suddenly gave tongue.

During an eventful life, I have frequently had occasion to observe that when woman finds herself in a tight place, her first impulse is to set the wild echoes flying; whereas, man resists or submits in silence, except, perhaps, for a few bad words ground out between his teeth. Therefore, when the legal owner of the — which I was in the act of unfastening, suddenly splintered the firmament with a double-barrelled screech, the thought flashed on my mind that he was one of those De Lacy Evanses we often read of in novels; and in two seconds I was fifty yards away, trying to choose between the opposing anomalies of the case. A little reflection showed the balance of probability strongly against a disguise which I have never met with in actual life; but by this time I heard the clatter of horses' feet approaching rapidly from both sides. The prospective violation of my incognito by a hap-hazard audience made my position more and more admirable from a mythological point of view, so I straightway vaulted over the fence, and lay down among some cockspurs.

Within the next few minutes, several people on horseback came up to the scene of the late attempted outrage. I can't give the exact number, of course, as I could only judge by sound, but there might have been

half a dozen. A good deal of animated conversation followed–some of it, I thought, in a feminine voice–then the whole party went trampling along the fence, close to my ambush, and away out of hearing.

The mosquitos were worse than ever. I pulled two handfuls of crop to replace the switches I had thrown away on attempting to cajole the Chevalier d'Eon out of his —. My mind was made up. I would solicit this impracticable generation no longer. I would follow the river road for eight or ten miles, and then wait in some secluded spot for the first peep of daylight. I began to blame myself for not having gone straight on when Archie unconsciously gave me my longitude. To get home in the dark was, of course, entirely out of the question; all that I could do was to aim approximately in the right direction.

I was pacing along at the double, when a lighted window, a couple of hundred yards from the road, attracted my attention. Like Frankenstein's unhappy Monster, I had a hankering, just then, for human vicinity; though, like It, I met with nothing but horrified repulse. You will notice that Mrs. Shelley, with true womanly delicacy, avoids saying, in so many words, that the student omitted to equip his abnormal creation with a pair of —. But Frankenstein's oversight in this matter will, I think, sufficiently account for that furtive besiegement of human homes, that pathetic fascination for the neighbourhood of man, which so long refused to accept rebuff. With —, man is whole as the marble, founded as the rock, as broad and general as the casing air. Without —, unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. The — standard is the Labarum of modern civilisation. By this sign shall we conquer. Since that night by the Murray, methinks each pair of — I see hanging in front of a draper's shop seems to bear aright, IN HOC SIGNO VINCES! scrolled in haughty blazonry across its widest part. And since that time, I note and condemn the unworthy satire which makes the somnambulistic Knight of La Mancha slash the wine skins in nothing but an under garment, "reaching," says one of our translations, "only down to the small of his back behind, and shorter still in front; exposing a pair of legs, very long, and very thin, and very hairy, and very dirty." Strange! to think that man, noble in reason, infinite in faculty, and so forth, should depend so entirely for his dignity upon a pair of —. But such is life.

Approaching the house, I judged by the style of window curtains that the light was in a bedroom. I made my way to the front door, and knocked.

"Who's there?" inquired a discouraging soprano.

"A most poor man, made tame by Fortune's blows," I replied humbly. "Is the boss at home?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed, in a hysterical tone.

"Would you be kind enough to tell him I want him?"

"Clear off, or it'll be worse for you!" she screamed.

"It can't be much worse, ma'am. Will you please tell the boss I want him?"

"I'll let the dog loose!–that's what I'll do! I got him here in the room with me; and he's savage!"

"No more so than yourself, ma'am. Will you please tell the boss I want him?"

"Clear off this minute! There's plenty of your sort knockin' about!"

"Heaven pity them, then," I murmured sorrowfully; and I went round to the back yard, in hope of finding something on the clothes-line, but it was only labour lost.

I was on my way back to the road when I saw another lighted window. The reason I had seen so few lights was simple enough. As a rule, farmers' families spend their evenings in the back dining room; and the front of the house remains dark until they are retiring for the night, when you may see the front bedroom window lighted for a few minutes.

Turning toward the new beacon, I waded through a quarter of a mile of tall wheat, which occasionally eclipsed the light. When I emerged from the wheat, the light was gone. However, I found the house, and went prowling round the back yard till I roused two watch-dogs. These faithful animals fraternised with Pup, while I prospected the premises thoroughly, but without finding even an empty corn-sack, or a dry barrel with both ends out.

In making my way back to the road, I noticed, far away in the river timber, the red light of a camp-fire. This was the best sight I had seen since sunset. Some swagman's camp, beyond doubt. I could safely count on the occupier's hospitality for the night, and his help in the morning. If he had any spare —, I would borrow them; if not, I would, first thing in the morning, send him cadging round the neighbourhood for cast-off clothes, while I sought ease-with-dignity in his blanket. This was not too much to count on; for I have yet to find the churlish or unfeeling swagman; whereas, my late experience of the respectable classes had not been satisfactory. At all events, the fire would give me respite from the mosquitos.

Encouraged by this brightening prospect, I crossed the road and entered on the heavy timber and broken ground of the river frontage. But all preceding difficulties, in comparison with those which now confronted me, were as the Greek Tartarus to the Hebrew Tophet. So intense was the darkness in the bush that I simply saw nothing except, at irregular intervals, the spark of red fire, often away to right or left, when I had lost my dead reckoning through groping round the slimy, rotten margins of deep

lagoons, or creeping like a native bear over fallen timber, or tacking round clumps of prickly scrub, or tumbling into billabongs. I could show you the place in daylight, and you would say it was one of the worst spots on the river.

Still, in pursuance of my custom, I endeavoured to find tongues in the mosquitos (no difficult matter); books in the patches of cutting-grass; sermons in the Scotch thistles; and good in everything. Light and Darkness!–aptest of metaphors! And see how the symbolism permeates our language, from the loftiest poetry to the most trifling colloquialism. "There is no darkness but ignorance," says the pleasantest of stage fools; "in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog." And what many-languaged millions of passably brave men have sympathised with Ajax in his prayer–not for courage or strength; he had those already– not for victory; that was outside the province of his interference–but for light to see what he was doing.

No obligatory track so rugged but man, if he be any good at all, may travel it with reasonable safety, in a glimmer of light. And no available track so easy but man, however capable, will blunder therein, if he walks in darkness; nay, the more resolute and conscientious he is, the more certainly will he stub his big toe on a root, and impale his open, unseeing eye on a dead twig, and tread on nothing, to the kinking of his neck-bone and the sudden alarm of his mind.

And Light, which ought to spread with precisely the rapidity of thought, is tardy enough, owing solely to lack of receptivity in its only known medium, namely, the human subject. But–and here is the old-man fact of the ages– Light is inherently dynamic, not static; active, not passive: aggressive, not defensive. Therefore, as twice one is two, the momentum of Light, having overborne the Conservatism of the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and other unpronounceable ages, has, in this 19th century, produced a distinct paling of the stars, with an opaline tint in the east. And, as a penny for the first nail, twopence for the second, fourpence for the third, and so on, amounts to something like a million sterling for the set of horse-shoes, so the faint suggestion of dawn observable in our day cannot do otherwise than multiply itself into sunshine yet. Meantime, happy insect is he whose luminosity dispels a modicum of the general darkness, besides shedding light on his own path as he buzzes along in philosophic meditation, fancy free—

Here I trod on something about as thick as your wrist–something round and smooth, which jerked and wriggled as my weight came upon it. I rose fully three feet into the air without conscious effort, and thenceforth pursued my difficult way with a subjective discontent which, I fear, did little honour to my philosophy; thinking, to confess the truth, what an advantage it would be if man, figuratively a mopoke, could become one in reality when all the advantage lay in that direction; also, feeling prepared to wager my official dignity against a pair of — that Longfellow would never have apostrophised the welcome, the thrice-prayed-for, the most fair, the best-beloved Night, if he had known what it was to work his passage through pitch-black purgatory, in a state of paradise–nudity, with the incongruity of the association pressing on his mind. Ignorance again; but such is life.

It was about three-quarters of a mile from the edge of the timber to the fire; and I should think it took me an hour to perform the journey. It was a deserted fire, after all, and nearly burnt out; but I soon raised a good smoke, and had relief from the mosquitos. The passage from the road had given me enough of exploring for the time; so I parted the fire into three lots, and, piling bark and rubbish on each, lay down between them, to enjoy a good rest, and think the thing over thoroughly.

It may surprise the inexperienced reader to know that I had often before found myself in a similar state of nature, and in far more prominent situations. I had repeatedly found myself doing the block, or stalking down the aisle of a crowded church, mid nodings on, and had wakened up to find the unsubstantial pageant faded, and my own conspicuousness exchanged for a happier obscurity. So, throughout the trying incidents of the evening I have recalled, the hope of waking up had never been entirely absent from my mind; and now, as I lay drowsing, with Pup beside me, and not a mosquito within three yards, it occurred to me that if I did n't get out of the difficulty by waking up, I would get out of it some other way. Philosophy whispered that all earth-born cares were not only wrong, but unprofitable. Though I had inadvertently switched my little engine on to the wrong line when I postponed my intended smoke, and had so lost the clothes which evidently went so far toward making the man, it would be true wisdom to accept the consequent kismet, and wait till the clouds rolled by. The end of the section could n't be far ahead. Sufficient unto the day— And I dropped asleep.

Here the record properly ends. I have faithfully recounted the events of the 9th of November, at what cost to my own sensibilities none but myself can ever know. But the one foible of my life is amiability; and, from the first, I had no intention of breaking off abruptly when my promise was fulfilled, leaving the reader to conclude that I woke up at my camp, and found the whole thing a dream. The dream expedient is the mere romancist's transparent shift–and he is fortunate in always having one at command, though transparency should, of course, be avoided. The dream-expedient vies in puerility with the hero's

rescue of the heroine from deadly peril–a thing that has actually happened about twice since the happily-named, and no less happily extinct, Helladotherium disported itself on the future site of Eden. I am no romancist. I repudiate shifts, and stand or fall by the naked truth.

Therefore, though legal risk here takes the place of outraged sensibility, I shall proceed with the record of the next day, till my loco. reaches the end of the current section. By this large-hearted order of another herring, the foolish reader will be instructed, the integrity of narrative preserved, and the linked sacrifice long drawn-out. And if, in the writing of annotations yet to come, the exigencies of annalism should demand a repetition of this rather important favour, I may be trusted to grant it without fishing for compliments, or in any way reminding the recipient of his moral indebtedness. I can't say anything fairer than that.

It was good daylight when I woke, a little chilled and smarting, but otherwise nothing the worse. Let me endeavour to describe the scene which I stealthily, but carefully, surveyed during the next few minutes. The Victorian river road, running east and west, lay about three-quarters of a mile to the south. North and west, I could see nothing but heavy timber and undergrowth. The eastern prospect was more interesting. Within twenty yards of my lair, a long, deep lagoon lay north and south, the intervening ground being covered with whipstick scrub. Beyond the lagoon, a large promontory of red soil, partly cultivated and partly ringed, projected northward from the road into the State Forest. Beyond this, still eastward, the river timber again came out to the road.

A roomy homestead, with smoke issuing from one of the chimneys, stood almost opposite my point of observation, and about a hundred yards distant, whilst a garden occupied the space between the house and the lagoon. At the north side of the garden, the lagoon was divided by a dry isthmus. The nearer boundary fence of the farm, half-buried in whipstick scrub, ran north and south along the edge of the lagoon, the lower line of garden-fence forming part of it; and a gate opposite the isthmus afforded egress to the river frontage.

Again, opposite my fire, but considerably to the right, a deep, waterworn drain came down from the table land into the lagoon; and between this drain and the house stood a little, old, sooty-looking straw-stack, worn away with the Duke-of-Argyle friction of cattle to the similitude of a monstrous, black-topped mushroom. The stack was situated close to the drain, something over a hundred yards from the house, and about the same distance from my camp. The paddock intersected by the drain was bare fallow–that is, land ploughed in readiness for the next year's sowing. There were several other old straw-stacks on different parts of the farm, but they have nothing to do with this record.

Away beyond the farm, two or three miles up the main road, and just to the right of the river timber, I recognised the F—'s Arms Hotel. B—'s place lay beyond, and to the right, but shut out of view by a paddock of green timber. The sight of the pub.–a white speck in the distance– suggested to my mind an expedient, which, however, I had to dismiss.

We read that Napoleon Bonaparte, on the eve of signing his first abdication, walked restlessly about, with his hands behind his back, muttering, "If I only had a hundred thousand men!" Similarly, as I contemplated that pub., I muttered, "If I only had a handful of corks!" Ay, if! My prototype wanted the men to abet him in maintaining his Imperial dignity, whilst I wanted the corks to assist me in carrying-out an enterprise attempted by a good many people, from Smerdis to Perkin Warbeck, namely, the personation of Royalty. Something similar, you see, even apart from the fact that neither of us found any truth in Touchstone's statement, that "there is much virtue in an 'if'."

Nice customs curtsey to great kings. Jacky XLVIII, under whose mild sway I have spent many peaceful years, wears clothes exactly when it suits his comfort. When his royal pleasure is to emulate the lilies of the field, he simply goes that way; thus literally excelling Solomon in all his glory. The Evolution of Intelligence has stripped him of every other prerogative; but there its stripping-power ends, and his own begins. European monarchs will do well to paste a memorandum of this inside their diadems, for, let them paint an inch thick, to this favour they must come at last. Howevers that is their business. My own Royal master can still do no wrong in arraying himself in any one of his three changes of attire–the put-on, the take-off, or the go-naked–and if I could only counterfeit his colour for a few hours, I would stalk majestically to my camp, caparisoned in the last-named regalia, and protected by the divinity that doth hedge a king. But I had no corks.

The homestead was cheerful with voices which reached my ambush clearly, though unintelligibly, through the still morning air. At last I saw a woman advance toward the edge of the fallow, and stand for a minute facing the direction of the old straw-stack; then she looked over her shoulder toward the house, and called out,

"Can any of you see Jim comin' with that horse? Father'll be ready in a minute, and then there'll be ructions."

A little boy climbed the garden fence, and stood on the corner post.

"Not comin' yet, Mam."

Mam went back to the house, and the boy followed her. Here was my opportunity. The topography of the place was so perfectly suited to the simplest plan of campaign that it may suggest to the suspicious reader a romancist's shift, diaphanous as the "woven wind" of Dacca. Let me repeat, then, that such a flimsy thing is entirely out of my line, and would have been so even at that time.

Availing myself of the abundant cover of whipstick scrub, I made my way down to the lagoon, swam silently across, darted along the drain in a stooping position, till I could "moon" the house with the old stack, and finally took my post in a convenient recess on the side of the stack farthest from the house. Sure enough, there was a cattle-track across the fallow and a culvert on the drain close to my refuge. Jim would soon be coming down that track toward the house. And, as my unhappy condition might appear more compatible with the nature of an alien than of a Britisher, I would accost him with a slight foreign accent, state my difficulty, and ask him, pour l'amour de Dieu, to bring me a pair of his—. My name would be Frongswaw Bongjoor.

I sat down with my back against the stack to recover breath, for already Jim was in sight, approaching at an easy gallop, and in two minutes was within fifty yards. Then hope for a season bade the world farewell, and a cold shiver ran down my spine. Horror-stricken, but without moving from my niche, I desperately tore down handfuls of Irish feathers from the overhanging eave, to form a sort of screen; for "Jim" was a magnificent young woman, riding barebacked, á la clothes-peg; the fine contour of her figure displayed with an amazonian audacity which seemed to make her nearly as horrid as myself. My brow was wet with honest sweat whilst, from the poor concealment already described, I watched her swing the horse aside from the culvert, and send him at the drain: and, with that danger-begotten fascination by trifles which, in situations like mine, you must often have experienced, I noticed her pliant waist spring in easy undulation to the horse's flying leap. And so, with that thick cable of platted hair flapping and surging down her back, she vanished from the scene. She was a phantom of delight, when first she gleamed upon my sight; but the revulsion of feeling was one of the quickest and fullest I ever experienced.

It was some minutes before I became my own philosophic self again. Then I crept to the corner of the stack, and reconnoitred the homestead. Near the back-door, Jim had just saddled the horse, and, with the near flap resting on her head, was taking up the slack of the girth with her teeth, whilst her left hand, grasping the rein close to the horse's mouth, prevented the animal from taking a piece out of her. Presently Dad trotted out of the house and took possession of the horse, while she stepped back a pace. Then she seemed to say something of great pith and moment, for Dad paused, evidently questioning her. At last he returned hastily into the house, leaving the horse again in her charge.

I made an effort to concentrate my remnant of faith on a double event, namely, that he would n't delay long, and that he would come my way when he started. He, at least, was a man and a brother. I would interview him as he passed, and—

Faith scored. He didn't delay long, and he came my way straight. But he came on foot, and he came with a gun; speaking over his shoulder to Jim as he bustled past. Even in the distance, I fancied her attitude was that of a girl who had imprudently set in motion a thing that she was powerless to stop.

I could n't believe in the reality of the spectacle. But the illusion was there, palpable enough; and it consisted chiefly of a determined-looking man hurrying toward the stack, his right hand on the lock of a long duck gun, his left partly along the barrel, and the cheek of the stock resting against his hip. Beyond doubt he was after something, and beyond doubt he meant mischief. I glanced behind me, and round the expanse of bare fallow, but there was n't even a magpie in sight. At the same time, the sportsman's general bearing, his depressed head and downward vigilance, showed that he was stalking ground game, and was n't interested in anything perched on the stack. This was apparent to me by the time he had got within thirty or forty yards, and was holding the gun ready to clap to his shoulder. Also I noticed that several other women had joined Jim, and were watching his progress. Having now approached within point-blank range, he deployed to the left, in order to outflank whatever he was after.

Of course, you would have rushed him; you would have wrenched the gun from his grasp, and broken it across your knee; you would have despoiled him of his —, and cuffed him home with ignominy. Yes, I know. So would I.

What I actually did, however, was to make two kangaroo-rat springs, which landed me in the bottom of the drain. I called to mind that, less than half-way down to the lagoon, I had noticed a deep, narrow, miniature ravine, eaten into one side of the drain by a tributary channel, and well sheltered by the foliage of large docks, now run up to seed. In thirty seconds, I was rustling into this friendly cover. There my confidence speedily returned, and, raising my head among the seeding stems, I noted the guerilla tactics of that white savage.

Still holding his weapon at the ready, he had circled round the stack till his view commanded all its recesses. Then he looked up and down the drain, peered under the culvert, and cast his eye across the fallow in every direction. Apparently satisfied, he

threw the gun on his shoulder, and started off toward the lower end of the garden. I saw him disappear in the whipstick scrub, between the garden and the lagoon; then I backed out into the drain.

But I could gain nothing by staying there, and just as little by going back to my camp; whereas from the stack I could see any advantage that might offer itself, either about the house or across the lagoon. And, logically, the stack ought now to be one of the safest places in the province. So I returned to my old post, and, almost hopelessly, brought one eye to bear on the homestead.

I was just in time to catch occasional glimpses of Dad's head above the foliage of the fruit trees, as he rode down along the farther side of the garden to the dry crossing in the lagoon; and presently I saw him go up the opposite bank, and disappear in the scrub. Another instance of erratic shunting on my part. If I had stayed at my camp, I might have accosted him on neutral ground, without his gun, and with his mind unpoisoned by any of Jim's hysterical imaginings. What on earth had she told him about me? She had certainly told him something.

Just at this moment, the sun, which had risen behind a dense bank of clouds, suddenly burst forth. The colourless monotony of the scene flashed into many-tinted loveliness under the magic pencils of golden light; and, against the sombre background of river timber, a pair of white —, hanging, with other drapery, on a line between the house and garden, leaped out in ravishing chiaro-oscuro!

A lifelong education, directing the inherent loyalty of human nature, invests anything in the shape of national or associational bunting with a sacredness difficult to express in words. Loyalty to something is an ingredient in our moral constitution; and the more vague the object, the more rabid will be our devotion to the symbol. Any badge is good enough to adore, provided the worshipper has in some way identified the fetish with himself–anything, from the standard of St. George to the "forky pennon" of Lord Marmion; from the Star-spangled Banner to the Three Legs of the Isle of Man.

Now, with insignia, as with everything else, it is deprivation only that gives a true sense of value; and, speaking from experience, I maintain that even the British Flag, which covers fabulous millions of our fellow-worms, dwindles into parochial insignificance beside that forky pennon on the farmer's clothes-line, which latter covers, in a far more essential manner, one-half of civilised humanity. Rightly viewed, I say, that double-barrelled ensign is the proudest gonfalon ever kissed by wanton zephyrs. Whoop! Vive Les—! Thou sun, shine on them joyously! Ye breezes, waft them wide! Our glorious Semper eadem, the banner of our pride.

There was no time to lose. The bifurcated banner might be taken into the house at any moment. In the meantime, several sharp-eyed women were unwittingly maintaining a sort of dog-in-the-manger guard over their alien flag. The — to him who can wear them, thought I. I must give this garrison an alerte, though I should have to sacrifice the old straw-stack. 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes between the pass and fell incensed points of mighty opposites: the old straw-stack is the baser nature; the mighty opposites are the meteor-flag and myself.

Few men, I think, have a healthier hatred of incendiarism than I have. This hatred dates from my eleventh year, or thereabout; when I was strongly impressed by a bush-fire which cleaned the grass off half the county. The origin of that fire still remains a mystery, though all manner of investigation was made at the time; one of the most dilligent inquirers being a boy of ten or twelve, who used to lie awake half the night, wondering what could be done to a person for trying to smoke a bandicoot out of a hollow log, without thinking of the dead grass.

But now it was a choice between the old straw-stack and my citizenship, and the former had to go. I am aware, of course, that the Law takes no cognisance of dilemmas like mine, and has no manly scruple against raking up old grievances that would be better forgotten; but, as I said before, Come on with your clue.

Embittered though I was by Abraham's idea of hospitality, I still felt some lingering scruple as my order of battle unfolded itself in detail. Every great operation, as well as every small or middle-sized one, consists of details, as a circle consists of degrees; and the person responsible for the grand enterprise must unavoidably be responsible for its most uninviting detail. The details of a death-penalty, for instance, are revolting enough; and here you must judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. You must perceive that the white hands of the ultra-respectable judge are the hands which reeve the noose; which adjust the same round the neck of the man (or woman); which pull down the night-cap; which manipulate the lever; and which, if necessary, grip the other person's ankles, and hang on till he is dead-dead-dead and the Lord has mercy on his soul. It is as unreasonable to despise M. de Melbourne, or M. de Sydney, for his little share in a scragging operation as it would be to heap contumely on comp. or devil because of this somewhat offensive paragraph.

Having, in the present instance, no subordinate to carry out my details, I realised their unpleasantness, even whilst speciously justifying the enterprise as a whole. Further provocation was required to overcome my aversion to the dirty work; and this provocation was forthcoming in ample measure.

I had withdrawn from the corner of the stack into my nook, to lay a few plans, and to hastily review the ethics of the matter; now I crept back to feast my eyes once more on the —, before making my coup-de-clothesline. But another object met my sight first; and I nearly fainted. When I recovered myself, a few minutes later, I was in the lagoon. I daren't swim across, for I would have been in full view from the stack. A cluster of leafy reeds, growing in two feet of water, and the same depth of slimy, bubble-charged mud, was the nearest cover; and in the midst of this I cowered, hardening my heart against society, and watching Jim herself as she tripped blithely past the end of the stack, and looked into my recess. It seemed incredible; and yet, in spite of the cold and misery and difficulty of the situation, I could n't wake up to find myself in my possum-rug.

I always make a point of believing the best where women are concerned, and I had been prepossessed in Jim's favour; yet it now seemed to me that if she had been worthy of her high calling, she would have brought that pair of white — off the line, with, perhaps, a supplementary garment or so, and modestly left them in the drain, instead of thus seeking further occasion against me. She looked under the culvert, across the paddock, and toward the lagoon, as Abraham had done, then walked round the stack, and finally returned home by the lower end of the garden, even pausing to look over the picket fence, and scanning right and left as she entered the whipstick scrub.

Enough, and to spare, thought I. These barbarians have given me the sign of their Order; now let me respond with the countersign. Not without practical protest shall I die a nude fugitive on their premises; and not if I can help it shall the post-mortem people find the word — written on my heart.

The intervening garden and whipstick scrub effectually concealed my movements from the enemy as I recrossed the lagoon, and made my way with all speed to the unfurnished lodgings I had occupied on the preceding night. There I selected a piece of thick bark, about the size of your open hand, and solid fire for half its length. I swam the lagoon with this in my teeth, and in a few minutes more had buried it in the broken, half-decayed straw at the base of the stack. Then I returned along the drain, but instead of crossing the lagoon, sneaked through the thick fringe of whipstick scrub to the lower end of the garden, and there waited for something to happen.

I had to wait a good while. The old straw-stack wasn't in sight from my post; and I began to think I should have to get another piece of bark, when I heard a youngster's voice squeak out,

"Oo, Mam! th' ole straw-stack's a-fier!"

Then followed sundry little yelps of surprise from the women; and, after giving them a start of a minute or two, I went loping round the left-hand side of the garden, and into the back yard. Before the enemy's vanguard reached the stack, I had captured the flag that braved a thousand years, and applied it to its proper use. I also made free with another banner, which I tucked into the former. I was like the man who wrapped his colours round his breast, on a blood-red field of Spain.

Glancing into the combined kitchen and dining-room, I saw a row of wooden pegs along the wall, with several coats and hats hanging thereon I appropriated only an old wide-awake, shaped like a lamp-shade, even to the aperture at the top; and from three pairs of boots under the sofa, I chose the shabbiest. Astonished, like Clive, at my own moderation, I next rummaged all the most likely places in search of a pipe and tobacco, but without avail. I even extended my researches into the pantry, and thence into the sacred precincts of the front parlour. But the tobacco-famine raged equally everywhere. The place was a residence, but by no stretch of hyperbole could you call it a home.

The side window of the parlour looked toward the conflagration; and there I counted four women, one half-grown girl, and a little boy. Three of the women, to judge by their gestures, were laughing and joking, whilst the fourth, and most matronly, was talking to the others over her shoulder as she turned her steps toward the house.

Then I bethought myself of Dugald Dalgetty's excellent rule respecting the provant, and re-entered the kitchen. Early though it was, the breakfast-things had been cleared away; so I took the lid off the boiler under the safe, in search of the cake which ought to be kept there. But the house was afflicted with cake-famine too. However, having no time to fool-away, and being constitutionally anything but an epicure, I just helped myself to the major part of a dipper of milk which stood on the dresser, then secured a scone and a generous section of excellent potted head from the safe.

Eating these out of my hand, I departed without ostentation; reflecting that it was better to be at the latter end of a feast than the beginning of a quarrel; and pervaded by a spirit of thankfulness which can be conceived only by those who have undergone similar tribulation, and experienced similar relief. Relief! did I say? The word is much too light for the bore of the matter.

There is a story–bearing the unmistakable earmark of a lie, and evidently not a translation from any other language–to the effect that once a British subject, in a foreign land, was taken out to be shot, just for being too good. Pinioned and blindfold, he stood with folded

arms, looking with haughty unconcern down twelve rifle-barrels, all in radial alignment on his heart of oak. Twelve foreign eyes were drawing beads on the dauntless captive, and twelve foreign fingers were pressing with increasing force on the triggers, when a majestic form appeared on the scene, and, with the motion of a woman launching a quilt across a wide bed, the British Consul draped the prisoner from head to foot in the Union Jack! That's all. The purpose of the lie is to convey the impression that it is a grand thing to be covered by the flag of Britain; but give me the forky pennon before referred to, and keep your Union Jack.

Cardinal Wolsey, you may remember, as a consequence of putting his trust in princes, found himself at last so badly treed that his robe and his integrity to heaven were all he dared now call his own. The effect was a peace above all earthly dignities. So with me, but in larger beatitude. Having my — and my integrity to heaven, I found myself overflowing with the sunny self-reliance of the man that struck Buckley.

And before you join the hue-and-cry against the "barbarous incendiary" of the — Express, just put yourself in my place, and you won't fail to realise what a profitable transaction it was to get a puris naturalibus lunatic clothed and in his right mind by the sacrifice of a mere eyesore on a farm. The old straw-stack was n't worth eighteen pence, but I would gladly have purchased its destruction with as many pounds–to be paid, say in nine monthly instalments. To be sure, it did n't belong to me; but then, neither did the splitters' bark. So there you are.

Crossing the dry place in the lagoon, I dived into the whipstick scrub and turned northward, intending to get across the river as soon as possible, and follow up the New South Wales side to my camp. I should have been–well, not exactly happy; having taken degrees in philosophy which place me above a state fit only for girls–I should have been without a ripple on my mirrored surface, but I was n't. Serenely sufficient as I felt, and fit for anything, some ingredient seemed lacking in my fennel-wreathed goblet. There was a vacant chair somewhere in my microcosm. I knew I was forgetting something–but how could that be, when, in the most restricted sense of the word, I had nothing to forget?

Thus musing, I had gone through half my provant; now I turned round to give the rest to — Ah! where was Pup? I knew he had followed me on my first journey up the drain, but I had n't seen him since, and had been too busy to notice his absence. He would probably be at the farmhouse. I must get my clothes changed, and look after him.

It was about a mile and a half northward to the river. Before reaching it, I saw, crossing the flat in the direction of the Victorian river road, a swagman whom I recognised in the distance as my friend Andy. In casual surprise–for, as you may remember, I had last seen him on the New South Wales side, eight or ten miles away, and going in the opposite direction–I went on without exchange of greeting. Shortly afterwards, I came plump upon Abraham, sitting on his horse, and talking to a young fellow with an axe on his shoulder. I respectfully swerved aside, not wishing, in this particular case, to come under the provisions of that unsound rule which judges a man by the clothes he wears.

Presently I became aware of the jingle of a horse-bell, and the smoke of a camp-fire; and, close to the river, I found a tilted spring-cart, near which an elderly man, with tattooed arms, sat on a log, enjoying his after-breakfast smoke. Now, if I had only known this a couple of hours earlier!

After the usual civilities, I reinforced my provant by a pannikin of tea, some fried fish, and a slice off the edge of a damper which rivalled the nether millstone in more than one respect; thus assuring myself that I had attained Carlyle's definition of a man: "An omnivorous biped that wears —." Meanwhile, in response to my host's invitation to tell him what I was lagged for, I explained that I was travelling; my horses were on the other side of the river; I had come across to see a friend, had been bushed all night, and wanted to get back.

He could manage the river for me, he said. He followed fishing and duck-shooting for a living; but there was so many informers about these times that a man had to keep his weather-eye open if he wanted to use a net or a punt-gun. People needn't be so particular, for there was ole Q— had been warning and threatening him yesterday, and here was the two young Q—s out this morning at the skreek of daylight, falling red-gum spars to build a big shed, and the ole (man) out on horseback, picking the best saplings on the river. Ole Q— was a J.P. His place was just across the flat, with a garden reaching down to the lagoon. Q— himself was the two ends and the bight of a sanguinary dog.

After breakfast, the old fellow furnished me with smoking-tackle, and paddled me across the river. During the passage, for want of something else to say, I mentioned to him that I had seen Andy crossing the flat, apparently from his camp. He explained that the swagman had been on his way to a new saw-mill, the day before, but had met one of the owners, who told him the mill would n't start till after harvest, and promised him work on the farm in the meantime. So Andy, on his return journey, had seen the outlaw's fire in the dusk; and, after some one-sided conversation across the river, the latter had ferried him over, and entertained him for the night. I mention this merely to show with what waste of energy the so-called

sundowner often hunts for work, particularly if he happens to be the victim of any physical infirmity.

On reaching the north bank, I reminded the old fellow that I wanted to return by-and-by to look after a dog I had lost when I was bushed; and he promised to bring his skiff for me when I would sing-out.

In a couple of hours I was at my camp. In another fifteen minutes I was arrayed in my best and only. Shortly afterward, my horses were equipped, and Cleopatra being in fine trim, was bucking furiously in the sand-bed where I had mounted. In an hour and a half more, I had unsaddled and hobbled both horses on a patch of good grass, nearly opposite where the spring-cart stood. My persecuted acquaintance, in response to my coo-ee, appeared with his skiff, and ferried me over. Then I hurried across the flat, to the residence of Mr. Q—. A man loses no time when such a dog as Pup is at stake.

It could n't have been later than half-past-one when I walked up along the garden fence, and approached the door of the kitchen. A modest-looking and singularly handsome girl had just filled a bucket of water at the water-slide, and was hammering the peg into the barrel with an old pole-pin. I recognised her as Jim, and forgave her on sight.

"Good day to you, ma'am," said I affably. "Sultry weather is n't it? I'm looking for a big blue kangaroo dog, with a red leather collar. Answers to the name of 'Pup'."

She hesitated a moment. "You better see my father. He's at dinner. Will you come this way, please."

I followed her into the parlour. In passing through the kitchen, I noticed that dinner was over, and a second young woman–apparently the original owner of my boots–was disposing the crockery on the dresser. In the parlour, Mr. Q—, a man of overpowering dignity, redolent of the Bench, and, as I think, his age some fifty, or by'r lady inclining to threescore, was dining in solitary grandeur, waited on by young woman number three. Lucullus was dining with Lucullus.

"Good day, sir," said I, with a respectful salaam. "Have I the honour of addressing Mr. Q—?"

"Your business, sir?" he replied, surveying me from head to foot.

"I'm looking for a dog I lost last night, or this morning; a big blue kangaroo dog, with a"–

"Are you sure he's your dog?"

"Perfectly sure, Mr. Q—."

"How did you come in possession of him?"

"I bought him eight months ago. Am I right in assuming that he's on your prem"—

"Steady, my good man. Who are you? What's your name?"

"I must apologise for not having given my name at first. My name is Collins– of the New South Wales Civil Service. I'm Deputy-Assistant-Sub-Inspec"—

"And what leads you to imply that I've got your dog?"

"Information received."

"Leave the apartment, Naomi," said the magistrate loftily. "Now, Mr. Collins," he continued, pouring out a glass of wine, and holding it between his eye and the light; "I want to ask you"–he drank half the wine, set the glass on the table, and leisurely wiped his mouth with his serviette–"I want to ask you"–he paused again, pursed his lips, and placed his forefinger against his temple–"I want to ask you how you come to imply that the dog is here? 'Information received' was your statement. Be precise this time, Mr. Collins. I'm waiting for your answer."

"I had my information from a man who saw the dog on your premises, Mr. Q—."

"Very good, indeed! At what time did he see the dog? Be punctual, Mr. Collins. Punctuality implies truth."

"About sunrise, I think."

"You think! Are you sure?"

"Well, yes; I'm sure."

"Describe your informer, please."

"Describe him! If I described him ever so accurately, you would n't know him from Adam," I replied sharply, and withal truthfully. "Is my dog here, Mr. Q—? If he is, I'll take him, and go. I don't want to be trying your patience after this fashion."

"Steady, Mr. Connell. Was your informer a man about my height?"

"I have no idea of your height, Mr. Q—."

"Was he a man about your own height? We'll get at it presently."

"You've got at it first try. I should say you've struck his height to about a sixteenth of an inch."

"Sunburnt face? Skulking, fugitive appearance generally?"

"Your description's wonderfully correct, Mr. Q—. You might, without libel, call him a sansculotte."

"I'm seldom far out in these matters. How was he dressed?"

"In a little brief authority, so far as I remember But is my dog—"

"Do you imply a sarcasm?" inquired the J,P. darkly. "I would n't do so if I was you. I'm not thinking about your dog. You and your dog! I'm thinking about a valuable stack of hay I had burnt this morning; and you've give me a clue to the incendiary." He paused, to let his words filter in. "You done it without your knowledge, Mr. O'Connell," he continued pompously, again holding up his glass to the light.

In the silence that ensued, I could hear the murmur of the girls' voices about the house, and the irregular ticking of two clocks; while there dawned on my mind an impression that somebody had fallen in the fat.

"I'm sorry to hear of your loss, Mr. Q—," I remarked, at length.

"So far as the loss goes, that gives me no inconvenience, though it might break a poorer man. I been burnt out, r—p and stump, by an incendiary, when I was at Ballarat"—

"Ah!" said I sympathetically, but my sympathy was with the other party—

"And then I could afford to offer a hundred notes for the apprehension of the offender, before the ashes was cold."

"But mightn't this last affair be an accident, Mr. Q—? A horse treading on a match for instance? I think you ought to make strict inquiries as to whether any horse, or cow, or anything, passed by the stack shortly before the fire was noticed."

"I know my own business, Mr. O'Connor," he replied severely. "I been the instigation of bringing more offenders, and vagabonds, and that class of people, to justice than anybody else in this district. If I'd my way, I'd stamp out the lawless elements of society."

"I admire your principles, Mr. Q—; and you may count upon my assistance in this matter. By-the-way, there are two illicit red-gummers down here"—

"I was talking to you about this stack-burning affair," interposed the beak. "I'm annoyed over it. I been on the wrong lay, so to speak, all this morning; but that never lasts long with me. I got the perpetrator in my eye now, in his naked guilt; and, take my word for it, Mr. Connor, I'll bring him to book. I'll make an example of him. I'll make him smoke for it. It was an open question this forenoon; but to show how circumstantial evidence sort of hems in a suspected party–why, here I can lay my hand on the very man; and, what's more, he can't get out of it. I can point out the very mark of his body, where he slep' at a fire among the whipstick scrub, just across that lagoon. And a party I'm acquainted with seen him yesterday afternoon, some distance up the river, on the other side; and I seen him this morning, crossing the flat here, more or less about the time the fire was noticed. What do you think of that for circumstantial evidence, Mr. Connelly? And in addition to this, I can point out his incentive–which I prefer to hold in reserve for the present. He might think his incentive justifiable; but the Bench might differ with him." And El Corregidor held me with his glittering eye while he sipped his wine.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Q—," said I, clearing my throat. "I can't help taking a certain interest in this matter. Would it be impertinent in me to ask who the person was that saw the suspected incendiary up the river on yesterday afternoon?"

"I've no objection to answer your question, Mr. Conway. I quite expect you to take a strong interest in the matter. In fact, I'll require to know something of your whereabouts after you leave my premises. I think you'll be wanted over this affair. The party that seen the incendiary yesterday was Mr. H—, of H— Brothers."

"Mr. Charles H—?" I inquired casually.

"No; Mr. Arthur H—. Very respectable man, having personal knowledge of the incendiary." Again the J.P. sipped his wine; and the girls' voices murmured, and the clocks ticked, and the hens clucked in the yard; also, the magpies tootled beyond the lagoon, and a couple of axes sounded faintly across the flat; and I even heard, through the open window, the noise of some old back-delivery chattering through a crop of hay on an adjacent farm. "Give me your address," continued Mephistopheles, replenishing his glass. "Writing-material on the side table."

I wrote my name and official title, giving our departmental office in Sydney as a fine loose postal address, and laid the paper on the table beside the magnate. It reminded me of old times, when my Dad used to send me to bring him the strap. It was time to shake my faculties together, for ne'er had Alpine's son such need.

"I've made a study of law, myself, Mr. Q—," I remarked thoughtfully. (This was perfectly true, though, in the urgency of the moment, I omitted to add that my researches had been confined to those interesting laws which govern the manifold operations of Nature). "I've made a special study of law; and I think you will agree with me that a successful criminal prosecution is a Pyrrhic victory at best. At worst–that is, if you fail to prove your case; and, mind you, it's no easy matter to prove a case against a well-informed man by circumstantial evidence alone–if you fail to prove your case; then it's his turn, for malicious prosecution; and you can't expect any mercy from him. When you think your case is complete, you find the little hitch, the little legal point, that your opponent has been holding in reserve. Now, you 're a gentleman of substance, Mr. Q—.You're a perfect target for a man that has studied law." I paused, for I noticed the Moor already changing with my poison. "By heaven! I'd like to have a shot at you for a thousand!" I continued, eyeing him greedily.

"One of the obstacles in a position like mine is the thing you just implied, Mr. Connellan," responded the waywode, almost deferentially. "Same time, this case ought to be followed up, for the sake of the public weal. As valuable as the stack was, I don't give that for it." And he snapped his finger and thumb.

”You may be morally certain of the identity of the scoundrel, but your proofs require to be legally impregnable,” I continued, pressing home where he had disclosed weakness of guard. “I know a very respectable man– a Mr. Johnson–who dropped something over a thousand in a case similar to this. The scoundrel was a deep subject; and he got at Johnson for false imprisonment. These roving characters can always get up an alibi, if they’re clever. Excuse my meddling in this case, Mr. Q—, but you’ve interested me strongly. You have evidence that this suspected incendiary was seen somewhere down the river yesterday–or up the river was it?–and you saw him somewhere here, this morning. Very well. Would the two descriptions of dress and deportment tally exactly with each other, and with the appearance of the person whom, independently of that evidence, you know to be the perpetrator–I mean the scoundrel of the camp-fire? Consider the opening for an alibi there! You hold the incentive in reserve, I think you said? Pardon me–is it a sufficient one?”

”It don’t take much incentive to be sufficient for a vagabone without a shirt to his back” replied the ratepayer, suddenly boiling-over.

”True,” I conceded; “but, ‘Seek whom the crime profits,’ says Machiavelli. What profit would it be to such a scoundrel to do you an injury, Mr. Q—?”

”The propertied classes is at the mercy of the thriftless classes,” he remarked, with martyr-pride.

”But incendiarism! Mr. Q—,” I urged in modest protest. “Why, the whole country lives by the farmer: and I’m sure”—

”We won’t argy the matter, Mr. Collingwood,” replied my antagonist, lowering his point. “Possibly I won’t trouble you any further over this affair. Your business keeps you on the move,” he continued,\ looking at the paper beside him; “and it might be difficult to effect service. You want your dog. Go into the kitchen; inquire for Miss Jemima, and tell her I authorise her to give you the dog. And a very fine dog he is.”

”Thank you, Mr. Q—. Good day.”

”Good day,” replied the boyard, acknowledging my obeisance by a wave of his hand.

It was a near thing, but I had scored, after all. You can’t beat the pocket-stroke. Passing through the kitchen, I met the graceful Jim.

”Are you Miss Jemima?” I asked, in the tone you should always use towards women.

A dimple stole into each beautiful cheek as she nodded assent.

”Well, Mr. Q— authorises Miss Jemima to give me the kangaroo-dog.”

”Come this way, then, please.” There was a slight flush of vexation on the girl’s face now. And, indeed, it was scarcely fair of Dogberry, when his own soft thing had fallen through, to make Jim cover his dignified retreat. With deepening colour, she led the way to the stable, and opened a loose-box, disclosing Pup, crouched, sphynx-like, with a large bone between his paws. The red collar was gone; and he was chained to the manger by a hame-strap. Of course, I did n’t blame the franklin, nor do I blame him now; rather the reverse. There seems something touching and beautiful in the thought that respectability, at best, is merely poised–never hard home; and that our clay will assert itself when a dog like Pup throws himself into the other scale. But I could feel the vicarious crimson spreading over Jim’s forehead and ears as I unbuckled the hame-strap, whilst vainly ransacking my mind for some expression of thanks that would n’t sound ironical. A terrible tie of sympathetic estrangement bound this sweet scapegoat and me asunder, or divided us together; and each felt that salvation awaited the one who spoke first, and to the point–or rather, from the point. All honour to Jim; she paced—

”You call him ‘Pup’,” observed the girl girlishly. “He’s a big pup.”

”His proper name is ‘The Eton Boy’,” replied the wretch wretchedly. And neither of us could see anything in the other’s remark.

But the tension was relaxed; and, leaving the stable together, we gravely agreed that a thunderstorm seemed to be hanging about. Still a new embarrassment was growing in the girl’s face and voice, even in the uneasy movement of her hands. At last it broke out–

”I s’pose you haven’t had any dinner?”

”Don’t let that trouble you, Miss Q—.”

”Father’s not himself today,” she continued hastily. “He blames us for burning an old straw-stack; and I’m sure we never done it. Mother’s been at him to burn it out of the way this years back, for it was right between the house and the road; and it was ‘78 straw, rotten with rust. But I’m glad we did n’t take on us to burn it, for father’s vowing vengeance on whoever done it; and he’s awful at finding out things.”

”Mr. Q— mentioned it to me,” I replied, with polite interest. “But don’t you think it seems a most unlikely thing for a stranger to do? Perhaps some of your own horses or cattle trod on a match that Mr. Q— had accidentally dropped there himself?”

”That couldn’t be; for father never allows any matches about the place, only them safety ones that strikes on the box. And he hates smoking. My brothers has to smoke on the sly.”

”Have you many Irish people about here, Miss Q—?”

”None only the Fogartys; and they’re the best neighbours we got.”

”And was nobody seen near the stack before the fire broke out?”

”Not a soul. I was past there myself, not twenty minutes before we seen the fire; but I was going middling smart, and I did n’t see anybody–nothing only Morgan’s big white pig, curled under the edge of the stack, that always jumps out of the sty, and comes over here, and breaks into our garden. Well, father’s always threatening to shoot that pig; and me, never thinking, I told him it was there; and he got his gun and went after it; and us in a fright for fear he would find it, but he did n’t. Then when we seen him well out of sight, I went over to the stack quietly, to shoo the pig home, but it was gone; and there was no sign of fire then, and nobody in sight. Then my sisters and me was just starting out to the milking-yard, and mother had begun to take the things off the line, when little Enoch seen the fire. We couldn’t make it out at all; and I examined up and down the drain for boot-marks, but there was none. And just before you come, I picked up the track of the horse I was riding, to see if his feet had struck fire on anything; but I was as wise as ever.”

”Ah! the horse was shod, Miss Q—?”

”No; he’s barefooted all round. Well, he trod on a piece of a brick, near the corner of the garden; but the fire never travelled from there. It’s very unaccountable.”

”Very. I wonder would there have been such a thing as a broken bottle anywhere about the stack, Miss Q—? The sun came out unusually strong this morning, I noticed; and it’s a well-known scientific fact that the action of the solar rays, focussed by such a medium as I have suggested, will produce ignition–provided, of course, that the inflammable material is in the angle of refraction.”

”I don’t know, sir,” she replied reverently.

”Why, gold has been melted in four seconds, silver in three, and steel in ten, under the mere influence of the sun’s heat-rays, concentrated by a lens”– she shivered, and I magnanimously withheld my hand. “If this hypothesis should prove untenable,” I continued gently, “we may assume spontaneous ignition, produced by chemical combination. Nor are we confined to this supposition. Silex is an element which enters largely into the composition of wheaten straw; and it is worthy of remark that, in most cases where fire is purposely generated by the agency of thermo-dynamics, some form of silex is enlisted–flint, for instance, or the silicious covering of endogenous plants, such as bamboo, and so forth. A theory might be built on this.”

”It seems very reasonable, sir,” she murmured. “Anyway, I’m glad the old stack’s out of the road. The place looks a lot cleaner.”

”Well, I won’t keep you out in the sun,” said I reluctantly. “Good bye, Miss Q—. And I’m very much obliged to you.”

”Oh, don’t mention it! I’m sure we’re very happy to”— she hesitated, blushing desperately.

”Well, good-bye, Miss Jemima.”

”Good-bye,” she murmured, half-extending her hand.

”I might see you again, some time,” I remarked, almost unconsciously, as our fingers met.

”I hope so,” she faltered.

”Good-bye, Jim,” said I, slowly releasing her hand.

”Good-bye.” The word sounded like a breath of evening air, kissing the she-oak foliage.

Then the maiden with the meek brown eyes, and the pathetic evidence of Australian nationality on her upper lip, returned to her simple duties. And the remembrance of Mrs. Beaudesart came down on me like a thousand of bricks. Such is life.

But my difficulties were over for the time being. My loco. had jolted its way over the rough section, carrying away an obstruction labelled V.R., and had reached the next points. I was still two or three days ahead of my official work; and there had happened to be a stray half-crown in the pocket of the spare oriflamme I had unfurled at my camp. Should I push on to Hay on the strength of that half-crown, draw my £8 6s. 8d., and send my clothier a guileful letter, containing a money-order for, say, thirty shillings? This would test his awfulness at finding out things, besides giving myself, morally, a clean bill of health. Or should I first walk across to B—’s and get Dick L— to shift some of my inborn ignorance re Palestine?

I decided on the latter line of action, and followed it with–Well, at all events, I have the compensating consciousness of a dignity uncompromised, and a nonchalance unruffled, in the face of Dick’s really interesting descriptions of South-eastern Tasmania. Concerning my lapse of engagement on the previous evening, I merely remarked that the default was caused my circumstances over which &c.

I spent a couple of days, besides Sunday, at B—’s place; while the fisherman kept an eye on my horses. I helped B— to work out a new and rotten idea of a wind-mill pump; Dick handing me things, and holding the other end. On the first afternoon, a couple of hours after my arrival, I drove into for some blacksmith work; and, whilst it was being done, I looked in at the Express office, and had a gossip with Archimedes on the topics of the day.

And now, whilst duly appreciating the rectitude of soul which has carried me through this trying disclosure, you will surely condone the obscurity in which I have been compelled to envelop all names used herein.