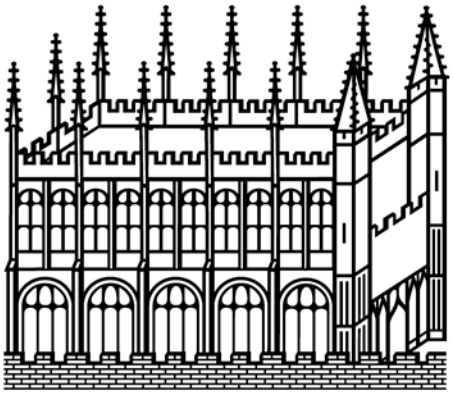

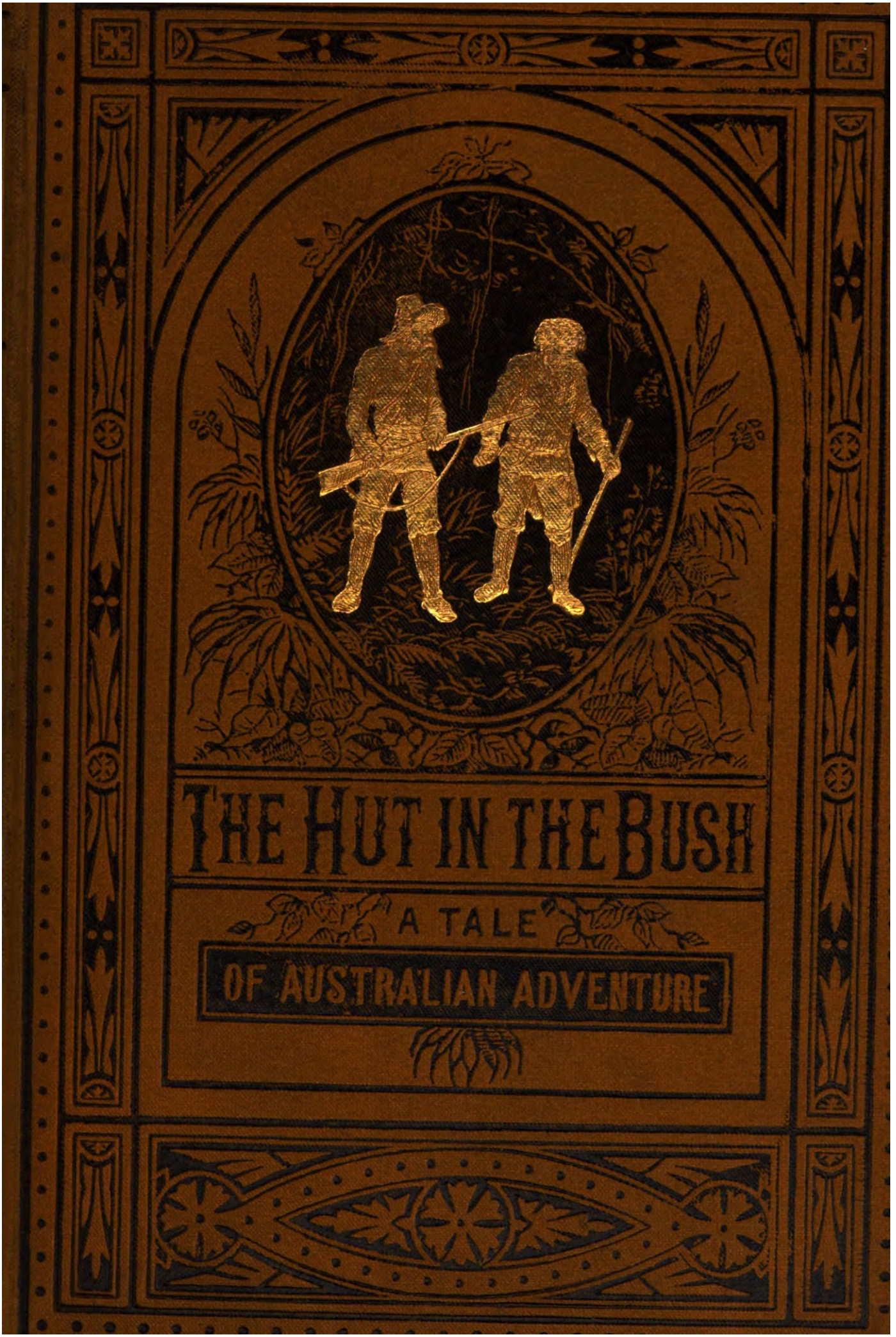
THE HUT IN THE BUSH
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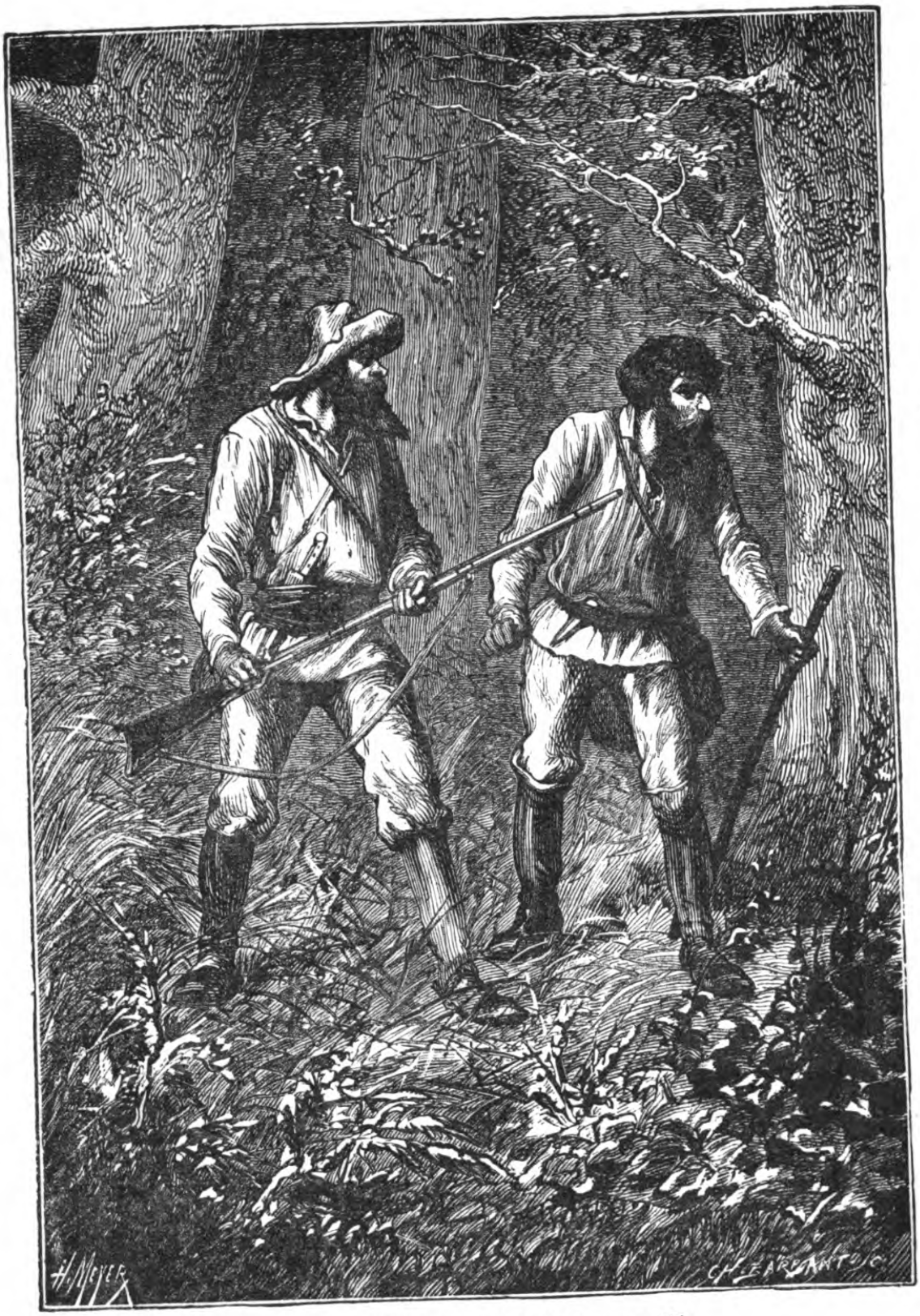

MESSRS. KING AND GORMAN.—P. 21.

THE HUT IN THE BUSH:

A TALE OF AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURE.

And other Stories.

BY

ROBERT RICHARDSON, B.A.,

AUTHOR OF 'BENEATH THE SOUTHERN CROSS,' 'PHIL'S CHAMPION,'
THE YOUNG CRAGSMAN,' 'THE BEST OF CHUMS,' 'RALPH'S YEAR IN RUSSIA,'
ETC. ETC.

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INSCRIBED

TO

MY BROTHER ALEXANDER,

IN MEMORY OF OUR BOYHOOD.

CONTENTS.

Two of the stories included in this volume, 'The Hut in the Bush' and 'Close Quarters with a Ghost,' are reprinted, under changed titles, from the *Boys' Newspaper* and *Little Folks* respectively, by kind permission of Messrs. Cassell, Petter, and Galpin. 'Close Quarters with a Ghost' has been recast, and in part rewritten.

EDINBURGH, *August* 1882.

THE HUT IN THE BUSH.

CHAPTER I.

'STUCK UP.'

I LEFT school when I was in my seventeenth year to begin my business life as clerk in a store in Kendal Creek, a small country town in New South Wales. I was an only son. It had at first been intended that I should proceed from school to the Sydney University, but the fortunes of our family suffered a sudden and unexpected decline. My father lost a great part of his means through some mining investments, and it was judged expedient that I should begin as soon as possible to do something for myself. This change of plans was a slight disappointment to me at first, but I entered upon my new life determined to make the best of things, and to indulge in no vain and unavailing regrets.

Kendal Creek is a remote as well as a small town, and at the time of which I am telling you had not reached the importance of possessing a single branch bank of any of the large Australian banking companies.

The township is situated at the head of a valley through which flows the Kendal river—a stream which in summer is little more than a creek. The hills which shut in the valley are thickly wooded to the summits, and re-echo few other sounds but the cry of wild birds and the woodman's occasional axe. The sense of seclusion and out-of-the-worldness (to coin a word) which you feel in the valley could hardly be exceeded.

There was but one other *employé* in our store besides myself—the manager. Our employers were the well-known colonial firm of Packer, Allware, & Co., the great Sydney and Melbourne wholesale warehousemen, who, besides their city houses, had stores in more than a dozen country towns. We dealt in everything, as a colonial storekeeper must—from a needle to an anchor, I was going to say. We could not at a moment's notice have furnished our customers with an anchor, nor yet with a pair of skates; but neither of these articles was likely to be in much demand in the settlement. Anything else I believe we could have supplied, from champagne to sealing-wax.

I found life at Kendal Creek somewhat dull at first after the city, but presently I became more accustomed and reconciled to it; and that I got to like my work more quickly than I might have done was in a great measure due to my principal, Mr. Halloran. Ralph Halloran, at this time, was nearly thirty years of age. There was nothing especially striking or heroic in his appearance, but he was, on the whole, what I call a pleasant man to look at.

My 'head' and I soon became the best of friends and companions. He soon showed that he wished that we should be comrades, and not merely in the relation of subordinate to superior, and I was nothing loth. Ralph Halloran took all pains to teach me business knowledge and habits, while out of business hours he was a frank and kindly friend. No fellow with honest and sympathetic feeling himself could have known Ralph and not liked him, for—in one word—he was such a gentleman; with no super-refinement of manners merely, but so simple and unaffected with all his shrewdness, so genuine and sound-hearted.

Ralph Halloran and I occupied rooms above the store, possessing a sitting-room in common, and here in the evening we used often to sit and chat while Ralph smoked a pipe. In this way I learned my principal's history previous to his

arrival at Kendal Creek. I shall give you the gist of it in a sentence or two in his own words.

'You might not guess, Will, the profession I was intended to follow. What sort of a parson do you think I should have made? Well, that is what I was to have been. But my father failed in business; all thoughts of my going to Oxford were abandoned, and I emigrated instead. I landed in Australia with little money and less influence, and my progress towards wealth and independence has not been especially rapid or brilliant. But I am not complaining. I *am* in a great measure independent now. I have been able to save something, and to send a little home to the old people, and I hope to work my way steadily to a moderate competence, which is all I desire. I don't regret the past, for I suspect I make a better storekeeper than I would have done a curate or a vicar, and a man may do his duty, you know, Will, as faithfully keeping an up-country store as looking after a parish.'

Ralph, after a while, confided to me a secret with which few except those immediately concerned were at that time acquainted. He had become engaged to a young lady resident in Goulburn, which is about fifty miles from Kendal Creek. Goulburn is regarded as the capital of the western districts of New South Wales, and Ralph Halloran had stayed for short periods in

the town during the several journeys which he had to make between Sydney and Kendal Creek. It was thus that he had become acquainted with Miss Escott, who was the daughter of a doctor in Goulburn. It was when I had been in Kendal Creek rather more than six months that he said to me one morning—

'Will, do you think you could manage the store for a couple of days without me?'

'Quite. We haven't such a press of business at any time, and things are rather slack just now,' I answered.

'That is just why I have chosen this time for what I am proposing to do. I should like very much to go to Goulburn and see the Escotts. I haven't seen Jessie for more than half a year, and though she is the prettiest and most punctual of correspondents that a man could desire, I am naturally anxious to see her kind face and hear her voice again after so long a time.'

'Go, by all means. Everything will be all right here—don't be afraid,' I answered.

'I am not, for you are a steady-going youngster, and I could trust you in a greater matter than this,' he was pleased to say. 'And yet I have my doubts about leaving the store for two days. Packer, Allware, & Co. are remarkably just people in their dealings, but they are also somewhat strict and particular in regard to what some

might consider little points. When you want a holiday they like you to ask for it, even if it be for but a couple of days. Now this idea of mine of going to Goulburn only occurred to me while I was dressing this morning, though the desire to go is as strong within as if I had been cherishing it for weeks. It would be a day or two, you know, before I could get an answer if I were to write to our people asking for leave of absence.'

'It really wouldn't be worth doing that in any case; why, it's a mere trifle,' I replied, wondering a little at my principal's scrupulousness, though I knew his character in this respect.

'Perhaps it is, and perhaps I am over-scrupulous in these matters. I take no credit for it—it is mere temperament. I hate anything like deserting one's post without leave; but I hope this doesn't come quite under that category, since I leave so capable a lieutenant as yourself in charge of the ship, Will,' said Ralph, with a smile.

'It'll be all right,' I said, with the confidence of youth; 'and don't let any thoughts of the old place here spoil your visit.'

Ralph started on horseback next morning. I need hardly say that there was no railway between such a young and out-of-the-way township as Kendal Creek and Goulburn. The highway was a coach-road, and a sufficiently rough and

primitive one at that. Ralph preferred horseback to the colonial coaches.

On the first day of Ralph Halloran's absence nothing occurred to interrupt the somewhat monotonous sameness of life in our township. It was, as I have indicated, a dull time with us, and fewer people even than usual came and went about the store.

On the night of the second day of my principal's absence I retired to bed earlier than usual. There was little to do in the Creek in the evening. I missed Ralph's companionship, had tired of reading, and had not felt so dull since my arrival in the township. Bed seemed the best and only cure for my *ennui*, and the vacant, almost fatuous condition of mind into which I was fast drifting.

It was between twelve and one o'clock, as I afterwards calculated, when I was awakened from my dreamful sleep by a sound which I think would have been hardly sufficient to rouse me from my ordinarily sound slumbers. I raised my head a little from the pillow and listened, and again caught a faint sound from below. My bed-room was immediately above the store. The noise ceased, and I thought it was some small article that had fallen, and was about to turn on my pillow again, when once more a slight sound came from below. I strained my ears again to listen. No! it was not the sound made by the

fall of anything; it was not in the least like that. It was like the noise of some one or something moving in the premises below.

What could it be? We kept no cat, and Ralph had taken his little terrier Skip—who was a great pet of his—with him, or I might have thought that the dog had got by some means into the store. I could not explain the matter to myself with any satisfaction, and it seemed clearly my duty to rise and discover the cause of the noise. I got up, partially dressed myself, and descended the stairs.

At the foot of the stairs a short passage led to the store through a doorway. I had but to turn the handle of the door to gain entrance. I had never heard of any case of robbery since I had been in the Creek, and I was collected and cool about the matter as much from want of thought and unconsciousness of danger as from boldness and command of nerve.

But immediately I entered the store a sight met my eyes which, I am not ashamed to admit, sent a sudden thrill of trepidation through me. Two men were standing at the clerk's high desk used by Ralph Halloran when making up the books or engaged in our ordinary business correspondence, quietly rifling the drawers, in one of which we commonly kept our loose cash. They were both tall, stalwart fellows, dressed in ordinary

bushmen's garb—Crimean shirts, doeskin trousers tucked into their high riding-boots; the one with a soft broad-brimmed felt hat, the other in a cabbage-tree. There was no mistaking what they were—bushrangers.

I had scarcely time to notice how the two men were engaged when they turned towards me, and the next moment the barrel of a revolver was staring me in the eyes. The light from a lantern held by one of the robbers glanced upon the weapon and made it gleam in my eyes with a cold, steelly brightness that caused me to blink involuntarily, and sent a quick thrill through me from head to foot.

'Cry out or stir a hand, and I send a bullet through your skull!' said the fellow who held the pistol, in a voice as calm and cool as though he were asking me to hand him a match to light his pipe. This man wore a long dark beard, while his companion's face was bare. 'We did not reckon on the pleasure of your company, youngster,' continued the man who had already spoken; 'we thought that we might have finished our business here without disturbing your peaceful slumbers; but now that you are here, you may be of some use to us.'

'Yes!' exclaimed his companion with an oath, and in a much rougher voice and manner.

'We have been looking for the key of that

strong-box, but have not found it yet,' said the man with the beard. 'It will save time if you will kindly tell us where you keep it. Quick now, young un, or'—

He had lowered his revolver, but now raised it again with a sufficiently expressive gesture. What could I do? I was utterly powerless in the hands of these desperadoes. I felt that to attempt to cross or baulk them was as much as my life was worth. I briefly told them where the key was kept, and watched them as they opened the small metal strong-box, which stood near Ralph Halloran's desk, and secured its contents—bank-notes and some gold, in all about fifty pounds.

'I thought there would have been more,' said the beardless man, with another oath.

'It isn't so bad, Dick, old grumbler, together with the other swag,' said the other, in the light, half-jocose tone which seemed a characteristic of the man, and which struck me as curious and almost incongruous in the circumstances. I had now somewhat recovered from my first emotion of trepidation, for as far as I could yet judge, the robbers did not purpose any extremity of violence towards me as long as I kept quiet.

The 'other swag,' as the man had called it, sufficiently proved the miscellaneous character of our stock-in-trade. While the bearded robber

kept a watch on me, the other went over the store and gathered together all the portable articles of any value which it contained. But by far the larger portion of our stock was, of course, of such a nature as to be impracticable, or not worth while, for the bushrangers to carry away; but they secured a number of watches, a lot of cheap jewellery,—for which we found custom among the wives and daughters of the farmers and small squatters of the district,—several excellent rifles and revolvers, some bottles of brandy, and a few articles of clothing.

'We're running short of togs, boss,' said the fellow, as he put up these latter articles, 'and such a swell as you don't look yourself in a loafer's suit.' And he gave a rough laugh.

'Right you are, Richard. Put me up a few spicy neckties,' the other answered.

All this time I had been standing with my back to the wall, hardly stirring, and silently watching the doings of my two unceremonious visitors with vigilant eyes, and I need hardly say with no small feeling of indignation in my heart. But the wrath and indignation which were burning within me I did my best so far to conceal as that no signs should appear in my face. I dreaded rousing the anger of the robbers, I am free to confess, especially in the case of the man Dick, who was a sufficiently dark and sullen-look-

ing fellow, and whose temper seemed to correspond with his countenance.

When Dick had stowed away his spoil in a canvas bag which he carried, both the men again turned their attention upon me.

'We're about finished now, young un,' said the bearded man. 'We've just one little finishing touch to put, and that concerns yourself. We're sorry to have to put you to any inconvenience, after you've been so civil and obliging; but needs must when a certain personage drives, you know.'

'Stow palaver, boss, and let's fix this young shaver. It's time we were off,' said the other.

The pair now took hold of me, and the man Dick, cutting off a piece of rope from a coil in a corner of the store, bound me firmly hand and foot, fastening my arms behind my back and my ankles close together. The fellow drew the cord with such pitiless tightness that it cut into my flesh. They placed me thus bound in a chair, and when seated I found that I could scarcely rise again, while, as for stirring hand or foot, it was a simple impossibility. The last thing the ruffians did was to bind a handkerchief over my mouth, and tie it tightly behind my head.

'There now, I think we've fixed you pretty comfortable, young un,' said the bearded robber. 'Our best respects to Messrs. Packer, Allware, & Co., and when you next have occasion to write

to them, you may mention that they have had the distinction of having one of their stores stuck up by Messrs. King and Gorman.'

With that the pair withdrew through the door leading into the street, and I was left alone and in darkness. They had left the door standing ajar—it would not shut, for the robbers had prised open the lock to effect an entrance into the store. I tried again to rise, but could not stand for more than a minute or two on my feet, so tightly were my ankles bound together.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE TRACK.

MY feelings as I sat in my cramped position in the chair were, as may be imagined, anything but pleasant ones. Anger, indignation, and mortification all burned within my breast. My position was a humiliating as well as a physically uncomfortable one. I thought of my people at home, all now quietly sleeping in their beds, and hoped their slumbers might not be disturbed by any dreams of the helpless, undignified, and disagreeable circumstances in which I was passing the night. The

contrast thus summed up in my mind struck me with something like a sense of ludicrousness, and I almost laughed aloud.

But this mood was momentary; the disagreeables of my situation were too many to allow of my bearing it with equanimity, let alone gaiety. I was too young to be able to command so much philosophy as that. Having nothing on but my trousers and shirt, I soon began to feel cold, for the season was autumn, when the nights in Australia, especially in the high districts, are sometimes chilly enough. I was presently aching all over from the cramped position in which I had been placed, and from the cords cutting into my flesh. And so my reflections grew and deepened in bitterness, resentment, and indignation against the bushrangers, as the long, dark, cold hours dragged themselves slowly on. I scarcely knew which of the two stirred my resentment most—the cool, jeering audacity of the bearded fellow who seemed to be the leader, or the rough, sullen brutality of the other.

At length sheer physical weariness compelled sleep, and in spite of coldness and aching stiffness I dropped off into a heavy but troubled slumber. The next sensation of which I was thoroughly conscious was of strong bright light dazzling my eyes—the clear morning sunshine streaming through the door. The next moment

voices were sounding in a confused hubbub about me, and I awoke to find myself surrounded by a little crowd of people.

'What's happened? What's up?' 'Burglary, I reckon. Bushrangers, ain't it?' were the questions which came from all sides, while two men were rapidly undoing the cords that bound me, and removing the bandage from my mouth.

'Yes, bushrangers, and nothing else; but for any sake let me get some clothes before you ask me anything more. I'm stiff with cold, and aching from head to foot.'

As I spoke a tall young fellow caught me up in his arms, carried me bodily up-stairs to my room, and began himself to put on my clothes. It was George Darley, my most intimate acquaintance in Kendal Creek after Ralph Halloran.

'But perhaps you would sooner go to bed, old man,' he said. 'You look most like that.'

'No, no; I have had some sleep, and I feel rather too much excited to go off again at present. There is nothing serious up with me—I am not hurt, only pretty stiff, and that will pass off soon.'

I told my story to the assembled company in the store below fully and succinctly, but as briefly as possible.

Men kept dropping in all the time I continued speaking, until the place was crowded to the door. Many and various were the comments

upon my story, and I need hardly say that the excitement created in the Creek was great. In fact it may safely be said that nothing had ever occurred in the history of the township which had so disturbed its usually uneventful routine, and so quickened its somewhat sluggish pulse.

'Well, it's the fust time the Creek's ever bin stuck up!' exclaimed Nat Hicks, the landlord of the 'Emu,' in a tone of reflective and almost admiring astonishment, as though the township had achieved a certain distinction in having been at last thought worthy of 'sticking up.'

'There's no doubt it was King and Gorman. I would have known them from your description, Mr. Frankland, without their telling their names,' said Mr. Tom Halley, the postmaster. 'But it's very odd. Everybody thought King and Gorman had cleared out of the country long ago. They've not been heard of for a year or more, and in fact there's not been a sticking-up case in the colony since then. He's a cool hand, Charley King—Dandy King they used to call him on the Victorian side, because he was such a swell about his togs, and because he could use such grand lingo when he liked. He kept a café in Melbourne, they say, before he smashed up and took to the bush. Some of you know the story of how he stuck up the Yandarring mail in a swallow-tail dress suit and white kid gloves. He likes his

joke, does Mister Charley King; but he'll maybe joke once too often, like many a tall fellow before him in the same trade.'

If it should strike any of my readers as rather remarkable that a robbery such as I have described should occur in a small place like Kendal Creek without being overheard by any of the neighbours, I must remind them of the plan on which colonial townships are usually built.

There were no two houses in any part of the Creek less than twenty yards apart. Australians lay out their townships generally on a liberal and spacious scale, so as to be prepared, presumably, for all possibilities of growth and expansion. Kendal Creek consisted of one long street which followed the course of the river, and at one end of which stood the little church, and at the other our store. It will thus be seen that the bushrangers had no difficulty in conducting their operations with so little noise that they ran no danger of being overheard by the neighbours.

Ralph Halloran arrived at noon. His surprise and mortification at what had happened were great.

'Who could have expected this?' he said to me when we were alone together. 'The colony has been free from bushranging for a long time past, and it was thought that these two men had disappeared for good.'

'The rascals! Can nothing be done?' I exclaimed, my anger again rising hot within me.

'I hope something can; but I don't quite see what just at present. But it almost serves me right,' continued Ralph, a little bitterly. 'I left my duty without leave, Will—deserted my post without orders, and you see what has come of it. I have almost a superstition on this point. Ever since I was a boy I have had the feeling that something untoward always follows upon the least swerving from duty. Make this a first rule of life, Will Frankland: stick to your post through everything. Apart from the moral obligation in the matter, you will find it the best of rules from a worldly point of view. See this case, now. You don't know, perhaps, what a serious business this may be for me. It will probably cost me my post. Packer and Allware are just people, as I have said before, but they are too strict business men to overlook a thing of this sort. I was away without notice, and I shall have to pay the penalty.'

'I hope it won't be as bad as that,' I said, with real anxiety for my principal.

'I expect nothing less. And if it turns out to be so, farewell to my hopes of getting married soon. The times are dull, as you know, Will, and it may be some time before I find another billet, and I still send home a trifle yearly to the

old people, who are now almost entirely dependent upon my brother and me.' As Ralph spoke, his voice increased in gravity and sadness.

That evening, while we were seated at our supper, which was by no means so pleasant and lively a meal as usual, for Ralph was silent and preoccupied, and I had not the heart to attempt to rally him, a visitor was announced by our serving-woman, and the next minute who should enter the room but Sing Loo, the Chinese gardener. He entered with a polite bow.

'Sing Loo wantee speak, Mees'r Hall'an, one minute,' said he.

'Very well; what is it, Sing?' said Ralph.

'Me know something 'bout bushee ranger.'

Ralph's manner at once became all attention, and I pricked up my ears with not less eagerness.

'Sit down, Sing, and have a glass of beer before you begin.'

Ralph poured out a tumbler of beer, which Sing drank with grave satisfaction.

'Now then, tell us all you know about these rascals.'

The Chinaman's account was this:—He had been returning early that morning from a visit of some days to a fellow-countryman who had a small farm some distance up the river. He had taken a short cut home through the bush, which led him past a deserted and half-ruined hut,

situated in a lonely spot at the entrance of a narrow gulley. This hut had once been occupied by two woodcutters.

As Sing Loo drew near the hut he heard sounds issuing from it, and cautiously approached to discover the cause. Peeping in at the broken window, his person concealed behind a clump of bushes growing hard by, he beheld two men seated in the hut drinking.

'Drinkee plenty whiskey out him big pannikin,' said Sing.

'And you think these two men were the same as those who robbed the store—that they are King and Gorman?'

'Me tinkee so, Mees'r Hall'an—me certain sure. One big long beard; one got none. Face, clothes, hair, allee same. Him Gorman and King.'

'Thank you for telling us about this, Sing,' said Ralph.

Sing gave his low ceremonious bow and withdrew, saying—

'Me thought Mees'r Hall'an and Mees'r Frankland likee know 'bout this.'

When the Chinaman had gone, Ralph Halloran's preoccupied and somewhat downcast mood had entirely vanished and given place to keen alertness.

'This is the very best thing that could have

happened, Will,' he cried. 'It has suggested a plan to me, when I was utterly at a loss what to do. We may be thankful for our good fortune, my boy; we shall be up-ends with these rascals yet.'

'Shall you go in pursuit of them—is that what you mean?' said I.

'That is just what I mean. We know whereabouts they are now, which is just what I wanted to know, and we have a good chance of coming upon them.'

'Isn't it rather reckless of them to hang about so near?' I said.

'They are cool, reckless, daring fellows—there hasn't been a cooler hand in the annals of bush-ranging than this same King. Besides, their choice of a hiding-place, comparatively near the scene of their robbery as it is, is not without method. Probably you don't know the story connected with Halkett's hut, as they call it. The place has the reputation of being haunted by Halkett's ghost,—he was one of the two woodmen who once occupied it,—and there is a pretty lively dread of the spot among many people hereabouts, even men who are brave enough in ordinary matters. I wonder how Sing Loo summoned up pluck enough to go so near the hut? but I suppose his curiosity overcame his fears. Well, the robbers have probably resolved to take advan-

tage of the superstitious dread of this place, and are trusting to that and their own reckless hardihood for security.'

'And have you fixed upon any definite plan of proceeding?'

'Yes. A plan sprang up in my mind, almost complete, while Sing was telling his story. Are you ready to join me, Will, in an attempt to capture these ruffians? I don't urge you in the very least, for you are but a youngster still, and I hardly expect it of you.'

'I will go with you, Ralph,' I answered. 'My blood is up against these fellows, as you may suppose, and I'm ready to "go for" them the best I can, as the Americans say. I hadn't a chance last night, and I should dearly like to be even with them. But of course you don't mean that we should go out alone against them?'

'No, no; the odds must be on our side—a little at least, not on theirs.'

'We can't get Harvey the trooper, for he's already started for Goulburn for assistance.'

Harvey was the single mounted trooper permanently stationed at Kendal Creek.

'No; but I wouldn't ask the help of the police, even if we could get it. I want this business to be done entirely by civilians, if possible. Bushrangers have as often been captured by private persons, you know, as by the

police—not that there is any discredit to the latter on that account. We shall ask George Darley to make a third with us, and three to two, if we set about the matter skilfully, will be sufficient.'

Ralph was now speaking in an animated yet perfectly collected and self-possessed tone.

'If the result comes about which I hope for from our enterprise, all will be right, and I shall have no fear of getting dismissed by our people, as I was gloomily anticipating a little while ago. And I am sanguine of success in this business. Law and right are on our side, Will; and, believe me, it is no mere platitude to say that this nerves the arm and the heart—it is simple truth, as history has proved a thousand times. Heaven helping us, we shall win in this game.'

An hour later and George Darley was in possession of all our plan, and had readily agreed to join us. George was a typical bush-bred Australian, both in appearance and temperament —tall and spare, and somewhat angular, but lithe and hard and sinewy, with an immense reserve force and endurance; a man who could stay all day in the saddle with the thermometer at 90° and never turn a hair, or suffer the least lassitude —in disposition somewhat slow to move, but intent and keen enough when once roused.

At this period of my life I was myself tall and

strong and hardy—as tall as ever I became, and I had, I may say, that courage and high animal spirit which often come of perfect physical health and unshaken nerves. There is not much of credit due to this kind of courage, and I claim none.

All our arrangements were completed and our plan of action discussed that night, for we were to start on our enterprise before daybreak next morning. For several reasons it was advisable that our departure should be unobserved.

'I daresay, too, that Harvey and the other troopers will be back from Goulburn pretty early, and we must get a good start of them,' said Ralph. 'And now I think we had best all turn in; sleep sound, both of you, for we must all be fresh and cool to-morrow. If we are successful in our undertaking, it will be worth a bit of trouble and risk, won't it? Bushranging I regard as the prime disgrace of the Australian colonies, and it is every man's duty to do all in his power to help to rid the country of that stain when the opportunity comes in his way. These two ruffians have given the country no little trouble from first to last, but an end must come to their career sooner or later, as it has to all their predecessors.'

'And there's a price on their heads for their capture, you know; I forget exactly how much,' said George, the practical side of whose character,

as is the case with the majority of native-born Australians, was well developed.

We started next morning in the grey still twilight that precedes the Australian dawn. George Darley had slept with us, sharing my bed. We were all well mounted and armed, each with a couple of excellent revolvers and a small sword, while Ralph carried also a carbine slung at his back.

'My word, there'll be some surprise in the Creek, when they find the store closed, and the manager and clerk not to be found. They'll think you've both been in the plot with Messrs. King and Gorman, and that it's all been a put-up job,' said George, laughing.

'Hardly, I think,' answered Ralph, a smile for a moment crossing the gravity of his face, for the expression of his countenance this morning was one of grave intentness.

We were soon on the coach-road leading to Goulburn, with the bush spreading on all sides. Before mid-day we reached a narrow, sandy bridle-track, branching off from the main road. This was the track which Sing Loo had followed on the morning before, and which led by a short cut to Kendal Creek.

'This passes within ten yards of Halkett's hut,' said Ralph, as we drew rein. 'Now, my notion is this: that King and Gorman make the hut

their night quarters, and that they will return to it for at least a night or two yet, until they find that the police have got wind of their whereabouts, when they will move off to some other part of the country. Now this is our plan. We must wait patiently here—or rather a little farther along, at a spot we shall come to presently —until nightfall. The two men will pass either up or down the road, and from whichever direction they come we shall see them from the spot where I intend we shall camp.'

We rode a little farther along the road until we reached a part where the ground on each side rose in high banks, a foot or two higher than our heads. Here we dismounted and led our horses up the bank on the right. The trees and bushes grew thick and close along the edge of the bank, so that a man might lie perfectly hidden among the grass and undergrowth, and by peering out from his ambush observe any horseman or foot traveller approaching along the road from either direction for a distance of more than a hundred yards. 'Nothing could be neater for our purpose than this, you see, boys,' said Ralph Halloran. 'We shall spot them, if they do come along to-night, a hundred yards off.'

We made fast our horses at a little distance back from the road. There we lunched off some cold provisions which we had brought with us.

The afternoon passed somewhat slowly, as may be imagined when our condition of uncertain expectancy is considered. Towards sundown we had a second meal of cold tea, meat, and biscuit.

'They will not seek the hut before dark at least, I imagine; but there will be a bright moon, and we cannot fail to see them approach,' said Ralph.

The sun set, the brief southern twilight faded quickly, and the shadows of evening gathered thick around us. The forest grew silent; parrot, cockatoo, bell-bird, and laughing jackass had each and all ceased their several cries. The solemn and sombre silence of the Australian forest by night reigned around, interrupted only now and then by the plaintive wail of the curlew.

CHAPTER III.

THE HUT IN THE BUSH.

PRESENTLY the moon arose—a large, full orb, whose clear, bright light penetrated through the forest, and shed a shimmering radiance around, enabling us to see objects at a considerable distance. The white gum trees glimmered pale and ghostly in the yellow sheen. It was a perfectly still and windless night,

—not a leaf or twig stirred,—we could hear each other breathing as we lay side by side on our faces among the grass and ferns, our eyes fixed on the white moonlit road.

We had lain thus for some hours, and, in spite of the excitement which I had been experiencing more or less all the day, I was beginning to feel drowsy, from the long-sustained motionless position and the deep silence of the place. I was becoming dreamily unconscious of surroundings, when a hand laid on my shoulder at once roused me to sudden alertness again.

'Look!' said Ralph Halloran, in a whisper.

I directed my eyes up the road, and beheld two horsemen approaching at a leisurely pace. All my senses sprang, as it were, into keenest wakefulness at the sight.

'Are those our men? But I need hardly ask,' whispered Ralph.

'Those are they; I would know them anywhere,' I answered.

The two men rode up and passed us, talking together and laughing carelessly. We watched them until we saw them turn off the main road into the side track, which we could do from where we were.

'Everything is turning out just as we calculated,' said Ralph. 'They are making straight for the hut.'

We waited about half an hour longer, as we had previously arranged, and then, remounting our horses, proceeded to follow the two horsemen. I was now experiencing an inward excitement which it required all my self-command to prevent showing itself. I looked into my companions' faces. In Ralph Halloran's there was a look of quiet, fixed determination, that would have inspired courage and confidence into the most failing heart,—and mine was by no means failing me, I was glad to feel,—the sort of look that would have equally become the leader of a forlorn hope or the captain of a hazardous storming party. George Darley's face wore an expression of easy unconcern that made me wonder a little, though I was pretty well acquainted with the cool *sang froid* of George's character.

A ride of little more than half an hour brought us within a few hundred yards of Halkett's hut, where we dismounted. Having securely fastened up our horses, we approached the hut with increasing caution the nearer we drew to it. It was in truth a lonely and deserted-looking spot. The bushes and scrub grew close up to the hut in rank luxuriance, a circumstance which greatly favoured our plan of action.

When within a short distance of the hut we dropped on our hands and knees, and approached literally on all-fours, slowly and with the caution of

deer-stalkers, fearing lest the rustling of the grass or the snapping of a twig should betray us. We could hear sounds of voices from within, and now and then from behind the hut the neighing of horses. We had taken care to approach from a point from which we were out of sight of the horses.

The hut contained a door and two windows, or at least what had once been windows, but were now simple open spaces. Our plan of action had been determined beforehand. Ralph Halloran crept up to the door, and George Darley and I to the windows. Peering stealthily in from behind the bushes, almost holding our breath lest we should be overheard, we beheld the two men seated within the hut at a dilapidated table of unbarked planks, engaged in a game of cards, and with a bottle of spirits and tin pannikins beside them, from which every now and then they drank deeply. Every nerve in my frame seemed now as though strung to its highest tension, and I could feel my heart beating. As I watched the two men with fixed, riveted eyes, a shot rang out sharp and loud, and I saw one arm of the man King drop suddenly to his side as he was raising the tin cup to his lips.

'I shall fire first, and try and wing one of them. I do not fancy shooting a man dead

without a moment's warning,' Ralph Halloran had said.

The bearded highwayman sprang to his feet with a cry of pain and rage, and the next moment the three of us leapt from our concealment into the hut, and fell upon the two men. Both of our antagonists were now on their feet and at bay. The expression of their countenances in the yellow moonlight I shall not readily forget. Surprise, rage, hatred, and mortification were all revealed in their faces. They had evidently thought themselves secure from surprise and attack in their present hiding-place for some days at least, and they had grown careless.

Ralph Halloran threw himself upon King, while George Darley and I attacked the man Gorman. It is difficult to describe what followed, for it was a scene of wild confusion and excitement, in which shots rang out and fierce rapid blows were exchanged. George and I presently found ourselves locked in a close wrestle with our opponent, who fought with the fierce desperation of a wild beast at bay. All our revolvers were now discharged, and no shot appeared to have taken deadly effect, and the fight had become simply a hand-to-hand wrestle. Our antagonist seemed to possess arms like steel; but two to one were greater odds than he could contend against, and George and I, fighting with

every nerve and sinew in our bodies, feeling that now it was probably a matter of life or death with us, at last overcame our man. He was prostrate on the ground, and a knee of each of us was planted on his breast.

I was now able for the first time to glance towards Ralph Halloran and his opponent. The sight my eyes fell on filled me with alarm.

'George, one of us must help Ralph, or he'll be murdered!' I exclaimed hurriedly.

Ralph's antagonist had driven him against the wall of the hut, and we now saw our comrade struggling vainly in the bushranger's grasp. In height, weight, and strength King far outmatched Ralph, and even with his one arm was evidently too much for our brave and fearless leader.

'You must help him, Will, quick! I'll manage the fellow all right now. I can strangle him if he moves a hand's breadth,' said George.

George's hands were now closed in an iron grip about Gorman's throat, and I saw that he had the man completely in his power. A turn of his wrists and he could have choked the life out of him.

I rose from my kneeling posture, and with a bound was by the side of Ralph and King. I was not a moment too soon. The bushranger had forced Ralph into a half-prostrate position against the wall. and had his knee upon his

chest. His right and unwounded arm was drawn back, and in another instant the butt end of the revolver which his hand grasped would have descended crashing through Ralph's brain, when I caught his arm, and forcing it violently backwards twisted the weapon from his hands. The next moment I had my arms locked about the man's neck, and had dragged him off Ralph, who rose swiftly to his feet directly he felt himself free. Together we had not much difficulty in overpowering our adversary, who was now showing signs of failing strength, no doubt from pain and loss of blood caused by his wounded arm. When we had him on the ground and completely in our grasp, Ralph clasped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists which we had brought with us from the store. His feet we lashed tightly together with rope. He was now secure and helpless, and we turned to George Darley and his man.

'You can be as smart as you please, for, my word, this is real hard work, and my wrists are beginning to knock under,' said George coolly.

We did the same for Gorman as for King, while the man poured out a volley of the most forcible and uncomplimentary epithets—unlike his companion, who had uttered few words, and taken his defeat in a sort of contemptuous silence.

We placed our two prisoners on their own horses and again bound them, and, remounting

ourselves, proceeded at a foot-pace back to Kendal Creek.

'Thank God for the issue of to-night's work,' said Ralph Halloran seriously. 'It is as much by good fortune as by good management that we have come off victorious, for we made a miscalculation in our plans. The odds in our favour were too small. Men like that fight with the strength of desperation, which is almost a match even for the consciousness of right on one's side.'

'It was that neat shot of yours that did the business, Captain,' said George. 'Had not you broken King's arm I believe they would have outmatched us. They are both such long, tough fellows, you see, and they fought like wild men!'

It need hardly be said that the surprise in the township caused by our return with our prisoners was great. In a few days there was not a newspaper in the colonies, I imagine, which had not published a more or less detailed account of our affray with and capture of the notorious bushrangers King and Gorman, and some of the journals thought fit to indulge in a strain of commendation and compliment of the victors greater than the matter merited.

The hut was searched on the day following the above events, when all the bank-notes, together with the watches and jewellery, were found buried in a small box a few feet underground.

These the bushrangers would probably have found means of gradually disposing of. The sum they had secured in gold and silver they must already have got rid of, for only a few shillings were found about their persons.

The only shot wound sustained by any of the parties in the encounter, besides that which King had received in his arm, was a slight flesh wound in George Darley's left shoulder, which necessitated his using a sling for a few days. Our rapid attack, and the bushrangers' still more hurried defence, together with the partial and uncertain nature of the light, had not been favourable to deliberate and steady aiming, and thus, happily for us at any rate, no serious injury was sustained on either side.

Ralph Halloran was not overmuch elated by the public eulogiums which were bestowed upon him on all sides, but he was considerably gratified by the letter which he received from Messrs. Packer & Allware, in which they expressed their high sense of the promptness, energy, and intrepidity he had displayed in their service, and their increased confidence in him as an *employé*.

'Things often turn out better than we have the faith to hope for,' Ralph said to me, when he received the letter. 'This affair, which I at first thought a misfortune, has probably done me more good than harm in a worldly point of view.'

And it had; for a few months later Ralph was asked to take the managership of a much larger store, where he had several clerks under him, with a considerable increase of salary. King and Gorman stood their trial in Sydney, and were condemned to imprisonment for life. No case of murder could be proved against either of them, or their sentence would have been death. We duly received the Government reward which had been proclaimed as the price of their capture, alive or dead, on the occasion of a previous depredation of theirs. The sum was six hundred pounds, which we divided equally among us. George Darley and I wished that Ralph Halloran should himself take one-half, which was no more than his due as the originator and leader of the enterprise; but of this he would not hear.

Since the events I have narrated happened a number of years have elapsed, and my subsequent life has not been marked by more of adventure and vicissitude than falls to the average fortune of men. I have tried to write down a plain and unexaggerated statement of how my companions and myself went on the track of the bushrangers.

TOM CUTHBERT'S CHUM.

A STUDY OF BOY LIFE.

—o—

'JOE, Joe, you're very late again; you *must* come in earlier to your tea. How do you suppose I can keep it hot for you so long, and mind Lucy, and look after the shop and everything? It's very thoughtless of you, Joe, and too bad altogether. And I've been waiting for you to take a parcel to Mr. Hope's, too; he was in buying some paper this afternoon, so you must hurry with your tea, and start with it directly you're done. It's all ready tied up on the counter.'

'All right, mother; I'll be slippy with my tea. I couldn't help being late, really. I met Tom Cuthbert, and he asked me to play him "follow taw" home, and "follow" always makes one long getting home somehow. But you gimme Lucy for a bit, and I'll mind her. I can do that and take my tea at the same time, easy; and you go to the shop again. And I'll come in to

tea more regular after this. Honour bright, I will; you'll see.'

Mrs. Hepworth was a little mollified. Joe had made the same promise many a time before, and broken it as often; still his mother's aggrieved spirit was assuaged somewhat, as it had been on many a previous similar occasion, by her son's ready admission of his fault, and by his offer to relieve her for a while of Lucy.

'Very well, Joe; you may give an eye to Lucy while you are having your tea, as I have a bit of work I should like to finish, and I can do it in the shop. Lucy's not a bad child—not worse than others, at least; but she's just at the most restless and troublesome age, you know, and requires one's eye to be never off her.'

Mrs. Hepworth took up her sewing work from the table, and passed through the door which led from the small back-room in which the above conversation took place, into the smaller shop in front, which faced a busy street in the town of Torhaven.

Joe seated himself at the tea table, and took Lucy upon his knee. Having poured himself out a cup of tea, and cut from the loaf a round of about an inch in thickness, he proceeded to divide his attention between his food and Lucy. Taking a draught of tea, and with his cheek distended with a nugget of bread and treacle, he

would turn to Lucy and begin to jump her up and down upon his knee, making hoarse, inarticulate sounds from his crowded mouth the while.

It was, in truth, a somewhat rough and uneasy ride which Lucy was being treated to, but the child apparently appreciated it amazingly, crowing with excitement and delight, laughing till her eyes all but disappeared in her fat little cheeks, and fairly bubbling over with intensity of enjoyment. Joe's meal was over before Lucy tired of the fun; and when Mrs. Hepworth entered the room again, and Joe lifted her down from his knee, the little one's face changed its expression of exuberant mirth into one of frowning and pouting opposition.

'Now, Joe, get along with the parcel to Mr. Hope's, and don't delay in being back; and especially don't dawdle about in going to Mr. Hope's, for he should have had his paper before this.'

'All right, mother; I'll go like greased lightning, and be back in a jiffy.'

Joe started with the parcel under his arm, and Mrs. Hepworth turned her attention to tidying up the room a little for the night, and to putting Lucy to bed.

Mrs. Hepworth was a widow. Her husband had been third mate on board a merchant ship, and had died at sea shortly before the birth of

Lucy. With a part of the money which she had received from the company in which her husband had insured his life, she had stocked a small stationer's and news-agent's shop.

She was, besides being active and industrious, and not afraid of work, neat and orderly in all her habits and arrangements, qualities which served her well in her present calling. She was attentive and punctual in her business engagements, and had a good manner, so that those who once visited her little shop were disposed to return, and those whom she had once made patrons she usually retained. Friends who knew her during her husband's life, too, for the most part stood by her now, and gave her their custom.

Thus Mrs. Hepworth had managed to maintain herself and her small family in decency and moderate comfort, though it had only been by dint of a most watchful economy and unceasing industry. She had been able to put Joe to school and to keep him there up to the present, but the time was drawing near when she thought it would be advisable that he should be put to some bread-winning pursuit. Such time as he was not engaged in school work, or in the sports appertaining to his age,—and it must be said that his mother had always been very liberal with him in this regard,—Joe was employed in

odd jobs about the shop, such as the errand he was now engaged on.

Joe was long away, much longer than his errand necessitated. When he got home again, the shop was closed, although, it being Saturday night, it had been kept open to a considerably later hour than on other nights. Joe entered the house from the back, through a small yard, by which means he let himself in without requiring to ring or knock.

When he entered the little sitting-room, he found his mother seated at the table with her head leant forward upon it, in an attitude of manifest dejection and grief. He went up to her, and saw that she was quietly crying. Joe was a good deal surprised, for his mother was not, speaking generally, a tearful woman.

'Hullo, mother, what's up?' questioned Joe.

'O Joe, Joe! you'll break my heart,' exclaimed Mrs. Hepworth without looking up.

Joe gave a low whistle.

'Why, whatever's gone wrong now, mother?' he said after a short pause.

'Why won't you try and be a better boy, Joe, and not give me so much trouble and heartache? Why aren't you more like your father? He was never anything but what was kind and thoughtful to me.'

'Father was a man, and I'm on'y a boy yet,

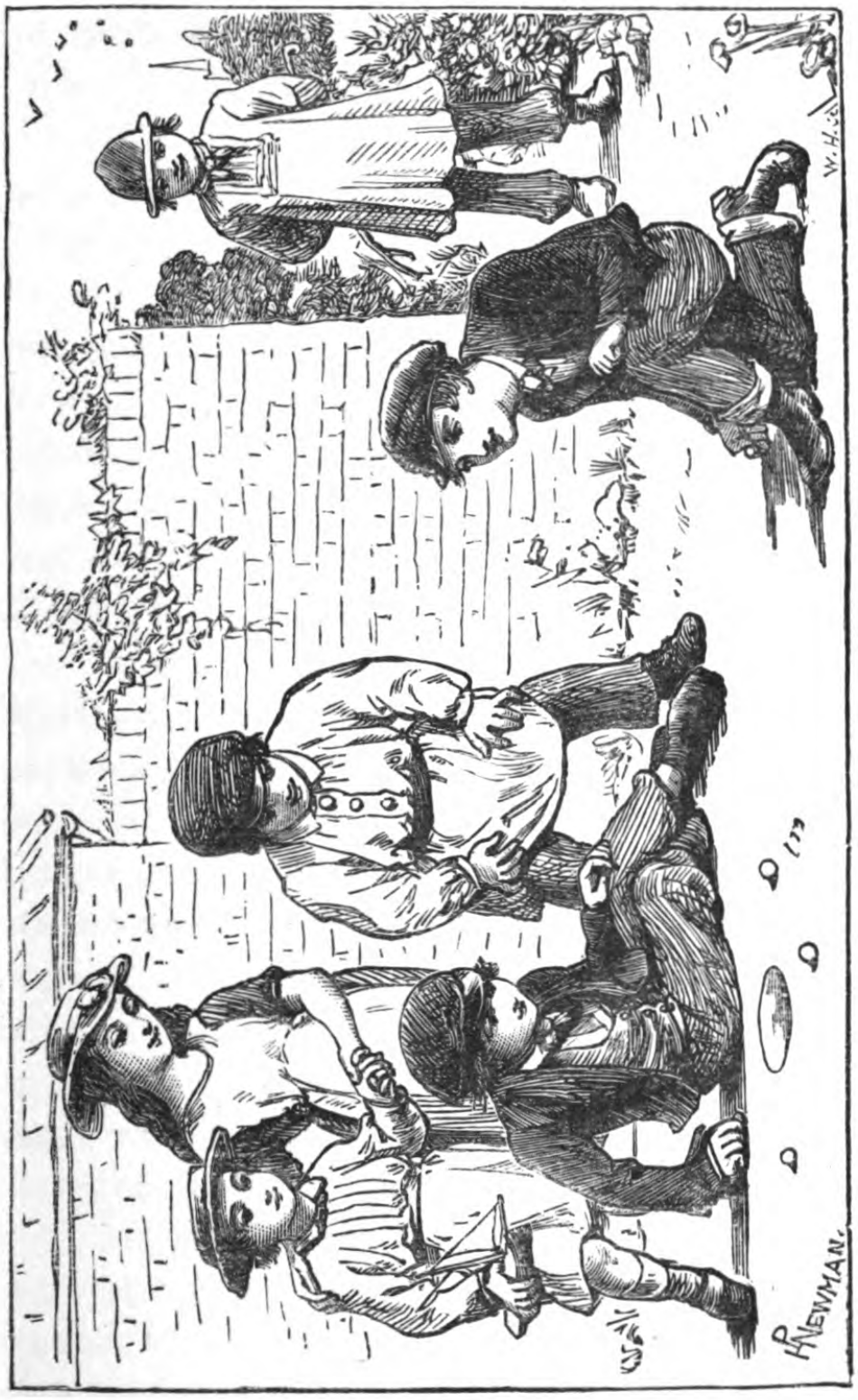
mother; that makes a sort of difference, you see. But what is it that's bothering you now, mother? Everything seemed all right when I left a little ago.'

'A little ago!' said Mrs. Hepworth, a brief flash of indignation for a moment displacing her tears. 'It's more than two hours ago.'

Joe made no attempt at present at excuse or self-justification.

'Well, but what's happened to you, mother? What have I done? I'm sure you're not making all this to-do just about my being a little longer than usual going to Mr. Hope's. I'll explain that by and by.'

'What have you done, Joe! why, everything—everything that's enough to make a poor woman lose all heart and hope. It's more than I can bear much longer, Joe. I work as hard as ever I can to keep you well fed and decently clothed and comfortably housed, and the child as a helpless little thing like her should be kept. I work late and early, and I'm willing to work till I can work no longer; but the sorrow and heart heaviness you so often bring me's harder on me than any work, and I can't bear up against both. It's more than any poor widow, with no one to look to but herself, could. You ought soon to be something of a help and a comfort to me, and instead of that you're little more than a grief



'LITTLE-RING.'

and a heartache, and if you don't soon change, Joe, and get more sense and manliness, and a better heart, you'll kill me outright.'

Again there was a short pause between the mother and son.

'Will you just tell me, mother, what it is that's vexing you now?' said Joe, a good deal subdued and sobered beyond his normal demeanour by his mother's speech.

'Much the same kind of thing that's vexed me so often before, Joe,' replied Mrs. Hepworth in a somewhat weary and hopeless tone. 'The teacher of your class at the school's been here, and he says that if you don't change your behaviour at school at once and completely, you'll be expelled from the school, and that would be a disgrace before every one you know. I could never hold up my head again before the neighbours. The teacher says he's warned you over and over of late about your conduct, and it doesn't seem to have any effect; and he says he can't let things go on much longer in the same way, because of the bad example you set to the other boys in the class.'

'I know well enough why Mr. Church has got such a down on me at present, and it's jolly mean of him, I consider,' said Joe in an indignant tone. 'A few days ago that sneak Will Ashford was playing "little ring" with Fred Jackson.

Fred is a little chap, you know, but a regular dab at marbles, and he was beating Will, and Will began to cheat right and left, and whenever Fred found him out, Will carried it off with bully and swagger, you know. I was standing by, looking on, but at last I got downright riled with the way Will was cheating and humbugging Fred, and so I just told him pretty plainly to drop it, and if he couldn't play square, to hook it. Will got rather rough, and began to swagger a bit, told me to mind my own business and all that, and at last fairly set me up, and so I just let him have it between the eyes, and he dropped upon the ground all of a heap, and presently got up and slunk off with his tail between his legs, like the cur he is. Well, the wretched sneak, if he didn't go and tell Mr. Church, and of course told the matter all his own way, and I've no doubt put in no end of crammers, and Mr. Church called me up next day and gave me a long lecture and some imposition work for fighting and knocking down Will without provocation, as he called it. And now, mother, that's the whole story, and I'm certain it's that chiefly that's brought Mr. Church to you complaining of me. Will Ashford's made ten times more out of the story than was really the case with his lies, and telling only one side. In other things I'm not much worse than other boys,

only somehow I'm oftener found out. Any fellow with an ounce of spirit in him would have done what I did if he saw a chap like Will Ashford cheating and bouncing a little fellow like Fred Jackson.'

'Well, Joe, it may be all true as you say; but you seem some way or other to be oftener in the master's bad books than most other boys.'

'It's just that way, mother; most of them do the same kind of things, only I'm more often found out, someway. It's luck, I suppose; bother it!'

'Just after Mr. Church left, Mrs. Cuthbert came in, and she told me that she can't have Tom going with you so much. She says you're a bad companion for her boy, and lead him into all manner of mischief and wickedness. He's not been like the same boy, she declares, since he came to know you. You're ruining him, she says, and she doesn't want you to come about her place so often.'

'Did Mrs. Cuthbert say all that, mother, honour bright?' asked Joe.

'Every word, and much more.'

'Then it's all gammon and stuff, mother. Mrs. Cuthbert's just one of those nervous, fussy people, frightened about the least thing, and would just treat Tom like a girl, and give him knitting and pocket-handkerchiefs to do on wet

days, and never let him slide in winter, or climb a tree, or row in a boat, or anything, if she had her way. I'm not ruining Tom any more than he's ruining me. It's just the most awful nonsense. Why, I've just been with him, and he never mentioned a word of this to me, so he mustn't know about it yet, any way. We were as jolly as anything together. I bet he'll not go in with his mother about wishing to see less of me. We're too good chums for that.'

'Is that what kept you so long to-night? You should have been back an hour ago. And you promised too, faithfully, that you would be as quick as possible. I am sure I let you have plenty of time for play. But you never think anything of promises, Joe. You don't seem to understand what it is to keep your word, and I'm sure you're old enough now to do so.'

'Yes, mother; I understand about it right enough, only I clean forget sometimes. But you know I was really awfully tempted to-night. First Tom and I had a swapping match, and that took up a little time. I gave Tom my fishing-rod for his three-bladed knife. I wanted him to throw in his top, and we argued about it a good bit; but he wouldn't, and now I'm blest if I don't think he's got the best of it. Tom's no end sharp at swapping, and I nearly always come off second best in a swap with him some-

how. Well, after that Tom asked me to go home with him to see his new lop-eared rabbit; such a beauty, mother, as big as a hare! And so we hung about Tom's place, and the time ran on, and I forgot all about my saying I'd be home soon to-night; and that's the truth.'

'Well, well, Joe, do try and be a little more steady at school, and please your master better. You're coming home late to-night's a small matter compared with that. And whatever you do, my boy, don't oblige your masters to make you leave the school. You've only got a short time longer to stay now before you must think of doing something for yourself. And now get to your lessons, Joe; you can give a full hour to them before you go to bed.'

'All right, mother.'

Tom got his books, and arranging them before him on the table, settled himself to his studies with an edifying appearance of purpose and determination. His brows actually grew knitted in the concentration of his thought. Meanwhile his mother sat at the other side of the table, engaged in making up her small account-book for the week.

For about a quarter of an hour, perhaps, Joe really gave his attention to his grammar and geography. Then his eyes slipped from his class-book to the page of a volume which lay adroitly

concealed under his grammar, and which was a thrilling and absorbing biography of the redoubtable Captain Kyd.

At the end of the hour Joe rose and placed his books aside.

'Do you know your lessons, Joe?' asked Mrs. Hepworth.

'Middling, mother; not very perfectly, but I'll get up early before breakfast on Monday and look over them again. Good-night now, mother.'

Joe put his arm on his mother's shoulder, and kissed her warmly on the cheek, and then betook himself to his small sleeping-room up-stairs.

On Sunday mornings there was some little latitude allowed in the matter of rising in the Hepworth's small household, as in other and more exalted circles throughout the land. As Mrs. Hepworth passed from her bed-room to the kitchen below stairs she looked in at Joe's door. Joe was awake, but still in bed, lying with his head propped high upon the pillow, and with a book held up before him.

As it would be a little time yet before Mrs. Hepworth could have the breakfast ready, she had no objection to Joe's lying a short while longer in bed. Moreover, she believed him to be well enough employed, for she took the book in his hand to be one of his Sunday class-books, and thought that he was looking over his lessons for

the morning. Alas! that a strict regard for the truth in this record compels me to state that the volume which was engrossing Joe's attention at this moment was the chronicle of Captain Kyd.

Joe had to walk some little distance before reaching the Sunday school, and on the way he looked over his verses and catechism. It was the first time he had looked at them during the week, yet he managed to repeat them in class not so much amiss.

After the lessons for the morning were over, the teacher began his little homily on the text for the day; and then Joe's attention presently strayed far away from the speaker and his theme, out through the open schoolroom door into the bright summer world outside, a glimpse of which he could catch from where he sat—away to the hills beyond, where the cloud shadows were drifting across the downs, and the long grass waved in the cool sea breeze.

There was a short intermission between Sunday school and church, occupied by the young scholars in the interchange of various gossip, which usually took a somewhat worldly colour, I am afraid, though this reaction from more serious themes was perhaps only natural, and not without precedent among older Christian people.

Joe sought out Tom Cuthbert this morning as usual. But Joe became quickly aware of a differ-

ence in his comrade's manner towards him to-day. There was a coldness, a distance, and an amount of constraint about Tom which for a moment puzzled Joe. But pretty soon a suspicion of the truth flashed upon him. He was a boy apt to go straight at things, and not prone to beat about the bush when he wanted to get to the root of a matter.

'Why, Tom, what's up?' he said; 'what's gone wrong?'

'Mother says we mustn't be so much together, Joe,' answered Tom in a cold voice; 'says she'll knock off my threepence a week if I go with you any more. We mustn't be chums no longer, Joe.'

Joe made no answer whatever. He turned away from his old comrade without a word, cut to the heart. For two years he had shared whatever he possessed of boyish wealth freely and gladly with his chum, tops and fishing tackle, marbles and kites, apples and hardbake. His heart had been given with a strong, warm affection to Tom, and he had thought his friend was as staunch and loyal to him. The disappointment he was now experiencing was keen and bitter.

For many days Joe went with a graver face and a heavier heart. His sports had for him less zest and relish, not so much because they were unshared by his whilome comrade, as because of

the reason which separated his old mate from him —Tom Cuthbert's utter faithlessness. Some of the sunlight seemed to Joe to have died out of his world.

The day came round on which the Sunday school which Joe attended was to have its annual summer excursion. The roll-books of the school, during several weeks past, had been showing a rapidly swelling list of attendance up till the eve of the *fête* day, a condition of things which is apt to occur in the history of Sunday schools, and the causes of which may afford a problem to the curious in such speculations as to the ethical soundness of picnics as an incentive to youthful morality.

The children attending Joe's Sunday school, with their friends, were carried up the river on which Torhaven is situated, to a beautiful spot in the grounds of a county magnate who had given up his park to the holiday-makers for the day.

The children roamed at will through the shady avenues, under the broad-shadowed elms, and amid the rocky dells and leafy nooks of the demesne, and scrambled over the rocks at the river's edge, and rambled along the deep Devonshire lanes, where the overarching network of boughs and wild briar all but shut out the blue; and were exuberantly mirthful and unspeakably happy.

If there was an exception to the general high standard of happiness that maintained among the young people, it was to be found in the person of Joe Hepworth. Joe still carried in his heart the memory of Tom Cuthbert's faithlessness. The recollection had grown blunted somewhat, but traces of it still survived, enough to make him view the festival of the day in a less bright and gladsome light than he would have done had it come off a few weeks back, when things between Tom and him were on their old footing.

Moreover, the occasion had revived old thoughts and associations in Joe's mind; for he could not but recall the last *fête* day of the school, when Tom and he had been as merry as crickets together. Tom was present at the picnic to-day with his mother, but he had studiously avoided Joe all the morning. So Joe was taking the pleasures of the day somewhat sadly and with only half a heart.

At midday the children were gathered together by sound of gong for lunch, and arranged in rows and tiers around the provision baskets; and soon a murmur and babble arose into the summer air as of the multitudinous hum of the night in far southern lands, when every insect hidden in grass or tree tunes its note in the cool dark.

Joe Hepworth was actively engaged upon a toothsome mutton pie. Joe's appetite was always

up to time; there was an undeviating character about it which not even his present somewhat depressed state of spirits could affect. He was giving his undivided attention to the business in hand, and was not keenly awake to what was going on in other quarters around him, when he felt a light hand laid on his shoulder, a light hand as though of an unconfident and diffident owner. Joe removed his teeth from his pie, and looked round to behold Tom Cuthbert. Tom had slipped from his place in the ranks, and crept up to Joe's side.

'Joe,' said he, 'I don't care what mother says. I want we should be chums again.'

Joe did not immediately reply, but a quick look of pleasure gathered and brightened in his face.

'Honour bright, Tom?' he questioned, with a thread of doubt and hesitation in his voice.

'Honour bright, old man. As sure as anything I do,' asseverated Tom. 'I've been jolly miserable all the day, and ever since we've not been chums.'

'Is that so, Tom? then so have I; and we won't say any more about it, but be just as we were before, eh?'

'Just exactly, Joe,' said Tom, and the two boys' hands closed in a strong, warm clasp.

Never were two boys happier than Joe Hep-

worth and Tom Cuthbert during the remainder of that day. In the course of the afternoon various games and contests for prizes came off among the boys and girls. There were foot races and jumping matches, cricket contests and pole climbing, running in sacks and three-legged races, and a dozen other sports for the boys; and skipping matches and croquet matches, and battledore and shuttlecock tournaments and the like for the girls; and all for small prizes, the wherewithal for which had been provided by the bounty of the master of the manor within whose demesne the festival was happening.

Joe shone prominently in the athletic sports, carrying before him all that he contested for. He had never felt himself in better spirit and humour for the various sports. With not more ardour and enthusiasm did an Athenian youth compete in the Olympian games than Joe contested the race, the vault, and the long jump.

None of his rivals seemed to have a show against him to-day. He bore away the palm in the principal of the foot races, the prize for which was two broad new half-crown pieces, one of the few money prizes given. Immediately on receiving the money, Joe made Tom Cuthbert accept one of the shining coins.

When the sun was well down in the west, and the shadows in the woods were lengthening

in the evening cool, the party of holiday-makers re-embarked, and the steamer put off from the wooden jetty. The evening had grown very still. A summer hush had fallen on hill, and wood, and water. The river was calm though the current ran strong. The children, wearied at last by the day's exertions, were subdued and quiet enough, as they usually are on such occasions at this hour.

The steamer had left the jetty some distance behind, and was holding swiftly and smoothly up the river back to Torhaven. No sound broke the evening stillness save the beat of the paddle-wheels. Joe and Tom were seated in the stern of the vessel, looking over the taffrail and watching the long trail of creaming foam left in the steamer's wake.

Suddenly a shrill cry caused every heart in the company to leap and then stand still. Those who were in the aft part of the steamer had heard a splash in the water.

'Somebody's fallen overboard!' passed in terrified whispers, and then in louder voices, from one to the other. All eyes were turned to the water. A black object was seen floating away to stern, already a considerable distance behind, now lost to sight for a moment, now reappearing.

The sailors and several of the school teachers

rushed to the boat hanging at the stern of the steamer. The boat was difficult to unfasten; the ropes were stiff and unyielding, the iron davits from which it hung rusty, most of the men startled and flurried.

Long before the work of unloosening the boat was accomplished, another plunge in the water was heard. For a moment all thought it to be a second accident, but presently a boy was seen striking out with a strong and rapid stroke towards the black object floating on the surface of the water, now far astern. It was Joe Hepworth. By this time all knew that the other was Tom Cuthbert.

When Joe reached Tom's side, the latter was in sore extremity—his strength well-nigh spent, his consciousness beginning to fail him. Tom was by no means so strong and hardy a boy as Joe, nor so active a swimmer. He had been trying to make way against the stream in the direction of the boat, but the current was too strong for his swimming powers, and he had not been able even to hold his own against it; he was being drifted faster and faster down stream. When Joe reached him, exhausted by his efforts to stem the tide, he was able to do nothing more than tread water and keep his head above the surface, and would not have been able to do even this much for many minutes longer.

Supporting Tom with one arm and striking out with the other, Joe faced again towards the steamer. Tom was hardly able to help himself at all; he hung almost like a dead weight on Joe's arm, who found that, despite his most desperate efforts, he could make no headway against the current, burdened as he was. The most Joe could do was to keep himself and Tom, who was still making a feeble paddling with his feet, from being drifted down stream.

Meantime the boat had been loosened from its fastenings and lowered over the steamer's side. Half-a-dozen men jumped in, the rowers bent to the oars, and all possible speed which the somewhat bulky and clumsy craft allowed of was made in the direction of the two boys.

Before the boat reached them, Tom Cuthbert had lost all consciousness, and seemed to Joe to have fainted. He hung heavier than ever on Joe's supporting arm. Joe himself was feeling his strength rapidly giving way. He felt that he could not hold out much longer; a humming sound was in his ears, a haze was gathering over his eyes dimming his vision, his heart felt like bursting.

When the men in the boat bent over the gunwale, and with strong, quick arms lifted the two boys in, Joe had just slipped into the state of unconsciousness in which Tom had been for

some minutes. In another moment both would have sunk to rise no more.

The steamer had meanwhile been put about, her head turned down stream again, and steered for the boat. It was only a few minutes after the boys had been drawn out of the water, when the steamer was close alongside the boat. They were lifted on board and laid on rugs spread on the deck. The people pressed around, but the minister stood in their midst, and besought them to stand back, and a circle was made about the two motionless and rigid forms to allow of air.

Brandy was poured between the white, cold lips of Tom and Joe, their clothes were torn aside, and the stiff limbs chafed. All methods of restoration known to those present, and within their means, were applied. Meanwhile the steamer sped homewards.

At length the efforts of the anxious minister and his helpers seemed to have effect on at least one of the boys. Tom Cuthbert opened his eyes, and looked confusedly around him. His body grew warmer to the touch. He lived and was saved.

Not so warmed the form of the other. His eyes remained fast closed; his body grew colder every minute. The minister kept his hand always on Joe's heart, hoping, longing that it

would again begin to beat. But it did not. At last the minister rose from his kneeling position at Joe's side, and in a choking voice—

'It is all over with the poor brave lad; he is gone,' he said.

It was true, the gallant little heart would never beat again.

A low wail broke from the crowd. It was not the dead boy's mother—she was not among the company. It was Tom Cuthbert's.

'Oh, the poor, dear lad! Heaven pity his poor mother! And I to forbid him to be friends with my boy; and how he died to save my Tom!'

The minister knew the dead boy, his character, and the main circumstances of his life. As one of the 'intractables' among his young people, Joe had been not seldom in his thoughts, and sometimes in his secret prayers.

'May we not trust he is forgiven much?' the minister murmured; 'for surely he loved much.'

CLOSE QUARTERS WITH A GHOST.

—o—

'WHAT is this absurd story about a ghost at Lawson's Hut, Harry?' said my mother.

We were sitting—my father, my mother, and I—in the broad verandah which stretched round three sides of our house at Bendemere Station. It was just after tea, in the short Australian twilight. My father had his pipe, I was fixing the lash of a stockwhip, and my mother was sitting with her hands folded before her; it had become rather dark for the sewing work which she had just laid aside.

'One of the shepherds, Hicks, I think, is the "first great cause" of the matter,' said my father in answer to my mother's question. 'Since he first brought the story others have heard or seen the ghost, and now all the men are agog about it. It only takes a small matter to rouse excitement on a station, you know.'

'What and where is Lawson's Hut? I don't think I know exactly,' said my mother.

'It's an old, ricketty, tumbledown place near Bebeah—almost a ruin,' said I. 'It's a good bit from the head station, in an out-of-the-way corner; so perhaps you have never seen it, mother.'

'I don't think I remember it. Who was Lawson? and why is the hut in such a forlorn condition?'

'Lawson was a stockrider here long ago, before you and I knew one another, my dear,' said my father. 'The hut was chiefly occupied by him, and was a sort of out-station. In the autumn of 185– we had tremendous rains here, such as I hope never to see again. The Bebeah Creek rose, and made havoc of the little hut, and I did not think it worth while having it repaired again. I had another put up in a more convenient spot.'

'Do the men really believe this story?' said my mother.

'Probably some of them half believe it at any rate, for Hicks has put together a pretty circumstantial story, his imagination no doubt helping out his facts, though I think he has a thorough belief in the genuineness of his spectre himself. He was shepherding in the neighbourhood of the hut, and about dusk one day lately, rain coming

on, took shelter inside. While he was waiting there he was startled by the sudden apparition of a tall grey figure moving about the hut in the semi-darkness. I suspect Hicks must not be of a particularly cool or courageous temperament where the supernatural is concerned, whatever he may be at other times, for I don't think he stayed very long to investigate the ghost. Since then several other men have been curious enough to visit the spot by night, and two declare they have seen the ghost, describing it, like Hicks, as a tall grey figure, which is not the orthodox colour, but we do everything topsy-turvy in Australia. Others of the men say they heard strange and mysterious sounds issuing from the hut, which perhaps prevented them from examining more closely into the matter.'

'We certainly don't appear to be surrounded by a very courageous set of men just at present, Harry,' said my mother.

'They're brave enough, Helen, where the vicissitudes and hardships of bush life make a demand upon their courage; but bushmen are as superstitious as sailors. Men who lead a solitary life, such as a shepherd's is, are apt to be. But this story will probably be no more than a nine days' wonder, if it lasts so long.'

While I was dressing next morning, an idea came into my mind, and took strong hold of me.

I thought I would like to sift the matter of the ghost at Lawson's Hut, and if possible get to the bottom of it. After breakfast I went in search of Hicks, and found him at the storekeeper's. He had not gone out with the sheep that day. I got into conversation with him on the subject of the ghost.

'And do the men still believe in it, Hicks?' I asked.

'Some on 'em, Master Bob. Why shouldn't they?' answered Hicks in a slightly offended tone. 'Seein' is believin', ain't it, sir? leastways, I dunno' what stronger proof a man can have.'

'A tall grey figure, you say?'

'Yes, sir, greyish, as well as I could make out, something like a woman in a long grey dress but it was pretty dark, you see. I know it ain't the right colour for ghosts, accordin' to most reports, but I can't help that. I reckon as there are ghosts and ghosts.'

Shortly after dinner—we always dined at mid-day at Bendemere—I said to my mother,

'Don't wait tea for me, mamma, if I am not back in time; I am going for a longish ride.'

'Very well, Bob, but I don't suppose you intend being much after six?'

'I don't know that I shall be, but any way you needn't wait.'

I went to the stables and saddled my little

mare, Nelly, and calling to Bayard, a splendid kangaroo hound which I had reared from a pup, rode away from the house, setting my face southward, in the direction of Bebeah, a native name signifying 'a good place to camp at.' My father and mother spent a part of every year at Bendemere, and the remainder in Sydney. I had always accompanied them back and fro since ever I could remember, going to school in Sydney, and spending my holidays, Christmas and midwinter, on the station. This arrangement had been of great benefit to me. The free, open-air life which I enjoyed on the station braced and invigorated me as nothing else could have done. I had learned to ride and shoot, to shift for and trust to myself, more quickly than is possible for any boy to do whose life is passed wholly in a city. At the time of which I am now telling you, I was nearly seventeen, had almost done with school, and was tall and strong for my years—as tall, indeed, as I ever became; I was, moreover, at this stage of my life always ready for whatever seemed to promise a chance of adventure and variety.

It was a glorious afternoon in May, one of the finest months in the Australian year—a deep cobalt-blue sky, flecked with a few fleecy clouds, and a radiant sun that steeped forest and plain in a warm, golden light. The breeze from the

south was just enough, as you faced it, to send up your pulse ten degrees or so, and set the blood stirring briskly in your veins. The wind sang softly in the gum-tree tops, where the white cockatoos swung and screamed, and the green and yellow paroquets flashed among the boughs. Nelly needed neither spur nor whip, but, sharing with her rider in the exhilaration of the moment, bounded in long, easy strides over the rolling plain.

A ride of some two hours brought me to Bebeah Creek. The hut stood close to the bank of the stream. I dismounted, fastened Nelly to a tree that grew near, and entered the hut, which was built in the usual bush fashion, of roughly-hewn slabs. The walls were still pretty perfect, but the roof was a ruin, the door was gone, and grass and weeds made a luxuriant matting for the floor, where a few rotting planks still remained of the original boarding.

There were the remains of a rude stone fireplace; and here, having managed to collect together a little heap of dry wood, I kindled a fire, for it was now almost dark, and growing chilly besides.

I seated myself by the fire, and prepared to wait patiently for events. Bayard was stretched at my feet, basking himself in the cheery blaze. I said that I was prepared to wait with patience,

but patience is not usually the commonest of virtues with boys of seventeen; and after I had sat for about half an hour, I began to grow a little tired of my position. Had I been able to spin the plot of a story, the opportunity was perhaps a favourable one, and the process would have passed the time; but I had no resources of that kind in those days, and when my thoughts had nothing fixed and definite to exercise themselves upon, I usually found them somewhat slow company.

Presently I began to grow sleepy, and I knew that Bayard also, if not quite, was very nearly off, partly lulled to slumber, no doubt, by the drowsy influence of the fire. My head was nodding lower and lower, and I was in vain endeavouring to struggle against my drowsiness, when a slight sound caught my ear. At the same moment Bayard stirred by my side; the noise had reached his ear—quick and light even in sleep—but was not sufficient to waken him.

I was myself roused into immediate wakefulness, and in a moment or two the sound was repeated, and Bayard leaped to his feet. It was an odd, pattering sound, curious to an unaccustomed ear, but to me, as I listened to it again, it did not seem altogether unfamiliar. I slipped my hand through Bayard's collar to hold him back, for the dog in another minute would have

dashed forward to discover the source of the noise, and this I did not desire just yet. I bent my head forward and listened intently, and again the sound was repeated. There was some one or something stirring outside the hut. I turned my eyes towards the doorway and kept them fixed there, but did not move from my place.

The fire was getting low. I had been on the point of replenishing it with my last bit of dry wood when the feeling of drowsiness began to creep over me, making me averse to stir. The light from the dying flame, therefore, now cast but an uncertain and wavering radiance throughout the hut. Still it was quite sufficient to enable me to make out any object that might approach at all near me; and presently, as I sat straining my eyes out into the semi-darkness, I saw something suddenly block up the doorway.

Bayard tugged and pulled to break away from me, but I succeeded in holding him back. The object advanced a little nearer, but still kept at the farther end of the hut. I could now make out, however, its whole shape and appearance—a tall, greyish figure, with small head, and broadening gradually downwards. An active imagination, or a *frightened* one, might have construed the figure into a ghost, for it did look a

'BAYARD TUGGED AND PULLED TO BREAK AWAY FROM ME, BUT I SUCCEEDED IN HOLDING HIM BACK.'—P. 78.

little like a tall female form in a long, trailing gown. But approaching the matter with all my wits about me, I was not to be deceived—it was a big 'old-man' kangaroo. There was no mistaking him. There he stood, not ten yards from me, as large as life—looking larger than life, in fact, as objects usually do in the gloom of semi-darkness.

My first feeling was one of keen regret that I had not my gun with me. I had never expected to need it, and had left the house with no thought of sport in my mind. Still I inwardly blamed myself now for not having brought with me a firearm of some kind, telling myself that I should have reflected that I might need it in some way, and that for a bush-bred boy I had been thoughtless.

While these thoughts were passing swiftly through my mind, Bayard was straining and tearing at his collar, until at length I found it impossible to hold him any longer. All the dog's hereditary and warlike instincts were aroused within him, urging him to dash forward upon his natural and traditional foe, for as such, there can be little doubt, a kangaroo hound regards a kangaroo. I could keep him back no longer, I slipped my hands from out his collar, and the next moment he darted forward like lightning, and sprang at the kangaroo's neck.

I feared greatly for my brave dog, for I felt certain that singly he was no match for his formidable antagonist. One dog, however strong and brave, has little or no chance in a pitched battle, on even terms, with an 'old man' kangaroo. But I was powerless in this instance to withhold Bayard from the contest any longer. In a few minutes it became evident that the struggle would result as I feared—in the defeat and death of the hound.

I was determined to do what I could to save the brave dog. I had with me, hanging at my belt, a long clasp-knife, which I always carried with me in the bush, and which was serviceable —in fact, indispensable—for various purposes of woodcraft, as well as for table uses when camping out. I drew my knife from its leathern pocket and unclasped it. It was bright and sharp, as a bushman's knife should be. This was my only weapon, but though a small, I knew it to be a trusty one.

I advanced warily towards the kangaroo. I well knew the danger of my undertaking; I was well aware of the power of those long, sharp claws which were at this very moment tearing Bayard's bleeding limbs with cruel fierceness. But the gallant dog was still fighting with undiminished pluck. He had got a formidable grip of the kangaroo, having fastened his teeth

deep in his throat. But he was being terribly torn and mangled meanwhile, and must have ere-long been compelled to relax his hold from faintness and loss of blood.

I saw that now, if ever, was my time, and that not a moment was to be lost. I approached within arm's length of the kangaroo, raised my knife, and with all my force aimed a blow at him above the shoulder-blade. The knife sank up to the haft, and the warm blood spurted out over my hand. The next moment the kangaroo turned upon its new foe, with a strong effort shook off the now faint and weakened hound, and before I was well aware I felt myself grasped as in a grasp of steel.

Immediately the kangaroo had me fairly in his grip, he made for the door of the hut. He was too heavily weighted to be able to leap far at a time, but as he dragged me on I was pulled every now and then fairly off my feet. Once outside the hut, he began making straight for the creek, and I at once knew his design—to hold me under the water until I was drowned. All the stories I had ever heard of dogs, and even men, being thus killed by kangaroos rushed through my mind during those few moments, intensifying my sense of the peril of my situation. If my foe once got me into the water I felt my fate was sealed.

My arms were pinioned to my sides by the fore feet of the kangaroo, so that I could barely move them to right or left. My jack-knife was still sticking where I had driven it, but it was in vain that I strove to reach it. As I was thus struggling to free my arms my hand struck against my waistcoat pocket, and came in contact with something hard. Immediately I remembered that I had my small penknife with me. I did not usually carry a penknife about with me in the bush, my jack-knife taking its place for most purposes, but that morning I had had occasion to use it, and had slipped it into my waistcoat pocket when done with instead of returning it to my writing-desk. Being thus unaccustomed to have it about me, I had forgotten that it was in my pocket, till my hand striking against it, recalled it to my mind.

It was the very thing I wanted, if I could but reach and open it—more serviceable far than my jack-knife would now be. Exerting all my strength, I at last succeeded in so far freeing my right arm that I could slip my hand into my waistcoat pocket. Pressing the nail of my thumb into the nick of the blade, with a little manœuvring I managed without great difficulty to get the knife open. By this time the kangaroo had dragged me to the bank of the creek, and in a minute or two more would have had

me in the water. There was not an instant to spare.

Grasping the penknife in my hand, I inserted its point into the breast of the kangaroo, and bending my elbow downwards, drove the blade its whole length into the creature's body. Then, gathering all my remaining energies into a last supreme effort, I forced my arm down and ripped a wound to the length of nearly a foot from the kangaroo's breast downwards. The kangaroo's grasp suddenly relaxed, he staggered back, reeled a moment on his hind-quarters, and fell to the ground, with myself on top of him. A yard nearer and we should have both rolled over the bank of the creek.

I rose to my feet, breathless, faint, and dizzy, shaken and aching in my bones from the kangaroo's vice-like grip, but with no bones broken, and, save for a few rather nasty scratches on face and neck, whole and unscathed in body. In a few minutes I had sufficiently recovered from my dazed and confused sensations to be able to turn my attention to the prostrate kangaroo. A very brief examination revealed that he was quite dead. Bayard had inflicted fierce wounds upon him about the throat, and the severe blows I had dealt him both with my jack-knife and penknife had completed what the hound had begun.

When I had satisfied myself that life was quite

extinct in the kangaroo, I turned towards the hut and re-entered it to see after Bayard. He was lying stretched upon the ground on the spot where he had been flung by the kangaroo. I bent down beside him and began examining him carefully. He was much torn about the neck and chest, and was bleeding freely, but the worst thing that had befallen him was that one of his fore-legs was badly broken. I felt thankful, however, that things had not turned out worse with him, for it would have been a pitiful thing to me to think that the gallant hound had met his death in so cruel a fashion.

I staunched Bayard's wounds as well as I could with some dry moss and grass which I collected, and tied up his broken leg with my handkerchief. When he had been thus tended and cheered, the dog rose to his feet, and I found that he could limp along better than I had expected. I now turned once more to the dead kangaroo, and with my jack-knife severed his tail from his body. This I did partly that I might carry home a trophy of my victory, and partly with a view of prospective soup. Slinging the tail across my saddle, I re-mounted and turned Nelly's head homewards, proceeding at a pace little quicker than a walk, in order that Bayard might keep up. At this slow rate of progress it was past nine o'clock

when I reached home. As may be supposed, I found my mother in a great state of anxiety, and even my father somewhat at a loss to account for my long delay in returning.

When I had drunk off a cup of hot tea I began my story, going on with my meal at the same time. My mother and father heard me to the end with few interruptions, though my good mother turned red and pale by turns as I continued my narrative.

'O Bob, Bob! how could you venture to attack a kangaroo in that way?' she exclaimed, when I had finished. 'It was a terrible risk.'

'I couldn't see Bayard killed before my eyes, mother, and you are exaggerating the danger a little, I think,' I answered.

'Well done, Bob,' said my father, quietly laying his hand on my shoulder. 'It was a little risky, perhaps, but I don't quite see how you could have done otherwise. It's all over now, my love, and we are thankful that our lad has been brought safely through his peril, are we not?'

'But isn't it a pity about Bayard?' I said. 'You should have seen him tackle the "old man," father; but he will never be good for anything again, though I will keep him till the day of his death. I don't believe I shall ever have so fine a dog again. If he had been killed I should

have written over his grave the motto of his great namesake, *sans peur et sans reproche,* but I'm glad I shan't have to do that for him yet.'

'Well, between you, you have laid the spectre of Lawson's Hut for ever, at any rate,' said my father.

'Yes,' I said, laughing. 'So ends the ghost's story, mamma; and if you like to go into the kitchen, you will see its *tail.*'

TRIED BY FIRE.

'NO, my dear, you do not know it; you must learn it more perfectly. It is quite simple, if you will just give your whole attention to it. Blanche has mastered it; why should not you?'

'Blanche is cleverer than I am, papa. I can't learn things as she can,' answered Helen Therry, the tears starting in her eyes. 'I shall never learn history, I know. The dates won't stick in my memory like they do with Blanche.'

'Let us both go to bed now, papa dear, and Helen will get up early in the morning and learn her history. I'm sure she'll manage it then. One's head is twice as clear in the morning, you know.'

'No, no, Blanche. Helen must try a little longer. It only requires a little perseverance.'

Mr. Therry was, in the main, a good father, but in regard to the education of his two girls,

who since the death of their mother were, to a great extent, companions to him, he erred slightly on the side of strictness, that is, he made little allowance for difference of mental capacity. Blanche was quick in everything that concerned her lessons, Helen just the reverse; but Mr. Therry thought that it was mainly a matter of endeavour and perseverance—that one person could always make up for being slower in learning anything than another by additional pains. Thus it happened that Helen sometimes met with rather cold and unsympathetic words from her father, even when she herself felt that she had been doing her best to master her French or history lesson.

Helen sat down to her task again, and endeavoured to fix in her memory the list of puzzling dates, but it was in vain. Her head seemed to be unusually dull and confused this evening. By no effort could she remember the lines of figures; they got jumbled up in her head in the most hopeless confusion.

'It is no use, papa; I cannot do it to-night,' she exclaimed at last, the tears glittering in her eyes, ready at a moment to fall in a shower. 'My head is beginning to spin like a top. The more I try to learn the figures, the worse I know them.'

'There now, papa, you see it's no use tryirg

to force things. Helen must just trust to to-morrow to learn her lesson,' said Blanche.

'Well, if it must be it must be, I suppose,' said Mr. Therry a little reluctantly. 'But remember, Helen, I shall trust to your getting your lesson before breakfast to-morrow. You have given me your word. Good-night now, my dears.'

Mr. Therry kissed his daughters, and they left the room together.

'O Blanche, I wish I was like you!' said Helen, as the two girls were preparing for bed. 'I wish I could learn things as you do, and please papa. But I never shall, and he thinks it is only because I don't try enough. I know he thinks that.'

There was a little more than a year's difference in the ages of the sisters, Helen being the elder.

'Well, never mind, Helen dear,' answered Blanche sympathetically; 'perhaps papa does think that a little. I suppose he can't help it; it's just that he doesn't understand, I suppose. But if you keep on doing as well as you can, he will find out at last that you try your best, and then I am sure he won't bother any more, but just take your lessons as well as you can do them.'

'He will never come to see that, I don't

think,' said Helen despondingly. 'He ought to have found out by this time that I try to do my best. It makes lessons just a misery. Sometimes I feel inclined to give it up altogether, and just let things take their chance.'

'Oh, Helen dear, don't speak like that. Just keep on, and you'll see things will come all right by and by.'

'I hope so, Blanche, but I can't think it; I feel so wretched about my lessons sometimes.'

Blanche kissed her sister softly.

'I'll help you all I can, dear,' she said.

'You always do, Blanche. But for you, I would be twice as miserable; but you are such a good sister!'

'Not so good as you, Helen. You are much better tempered than me. Nothing but your lessons ever puts you out.'

'I don't think I feel so much put out, Blanche, as sad and miserable,' said poor Helen.

'Well, try and worry about it as little as you can, dear, and it will all come right some day. Papa will see things rightly by and by. Good-night now. We'll get up early, and I'll help you with your history.'

'You can't fix dates in my head, Blanche,' said Helen, with a faint little smile.

'Yes, I can. I'll show you how it's done; and your head will be ever so much clearer and

quicker in the morning, you must recollect that,' answered Blanche, smiling back brightly at her sister. 'But go to sleep now, dear, and don't think once more about history and things, or you'll be having horrid dreams about it.'

The two girls retired each to her own bed, which stood at a little distance from each other. But Helen did not drop off to sleep with her usual facility. As Blanche had half-jokingly hinted might prove the case, disturbing thoughts kept chasing each other through her mind, banishing sleep, and causing her to turn this way and that upon her pillow. She heard Blanche's soft, regular breathing, while she was still wide awake. But at last her restlessness began to pass off,—she knew not how,—her eyes grew heavy, her thoughts mingled and confused; she was at length gliding swiftly into dreamland, when a peculiar sensation caused her dulled senses to start into sudden wakefulness again.

It was not any sound that wakened Helen, it was a smell—the familiar smell of something burning. But presently a sound caught her ear too, a faint, rustling, crackling sound, which increased every moment. Helen was now wide and keenly awake. She sat upright, and glanced towards her sister's bed, whence the smell and the crackling noise proceeded. One look informed her of the cause of both.

The white chintz curtain of Blanche's bed was on fire. A small table stood between the two beds, on which the girls usually placed their candle before extinguishing it. The candle was still standing on the table, rather close to the curtains of Blanche's bed, but yet far enough away for safety. But the curtains were long, and the fringes, lying on the floor, extended a foot or so out from the bedside. Blanche, who had been the one to put out the candle, had done so rather hastily and carelessly, and had not noticed that a spark had fallen from the wick upon the carpet. The spark caught the drugget, at first smouldered slowly, but crept steadily on till the light reached the curtain, when it started up into flame.

As Helen looked the flame was half-way up the curtains, and in a few moments would envelop the bed.

She sprang out, and in another instant was at her sister's bedside. Blanche still slept, unconscious of her terrible danger. Helen caught her in her arms, and dragged her from the bed. She woke, and gazed with a startled and confused look at Helen.

'Blanche, Blanche, see the place is on fire!' cried Helen.

Blanche was now thoroughly awake, and gazing with a face of shrinking terror at the burning bed.

'Quick, Blanche; there is not a moment to be lost,' said Helen. 'Here is your dressing-gown. Let us call papa immediately. There is no chance of our putting out the fire by ourselves.'

They drew their dressing-gowns hurriedly about them, and rushed to the door. It was locked. Helen hastily tried to turn the key, but, to her dismay, found that she could not do so. The lock had taken one of the perverse turns which locks sometimes take, and resisted all the efforts of both Helen and Blanche to unfasten it. The girls were hurried and nervous, and the more they twisted and worked at the key, the stiffer and tighter it became.

'O Blanche, why did you lock the door? What is the use of doing it?' exclaimed Helen.

'I don't always; I know it's very foolish. But oh, what shall we do, Helen?'

Blanche was about some things a timid girl, and one of her fancies was to have her bedroom door locked at night. She could not have told what it was exactly that she feared from its being left unlocked. What should they do indeed? The question was a terribly grave one. The two girls were fast locked in a burning room. They turned their eyes from the door to the bed. It was now wrapt in flames, that were spreading faster and faster every moment. Already they felt the hot breath upon their faces.

'We must call out,' said Helen.

They raised their voices to their utmost pitch, and called 'Papa, papa!' again and again.

They waited eagerly for a reply, but none came. They shook the door, and beat against it, and called aloud once more. No answering voice or sound of any kind came from the rooms below.

'They cannot hear us. It is no use. Oh, what shall we do?' cried Blanche, with a terrified sob in her voice.

'Don't, Blanche dear, don't get frightened,' answered Helen, with a tremor in her own voice, which she was struggling desperately to hide. 'Keep as calm as you can, Blanche, for we shall need all our courage. I have a plan.'

As Helen spoke, she moved quickly towards her own bed, and took from it the blankets and sheets.

'You must help me, Blanche,' she said, 'and we must be quick. See, we must knot these sheets and blankets firmly together; make a rope of them, you know; then I will let you down from the window to papa's room, and you must shake and knock at his window. He is sure to hear you then. Is it not fortunate that his room is right below ours? I don't know what we should have done if it had not been.'

The two girls worked at the knotting of the sheets and blankets together as fast as their

fingers would move. As they worked, they felt the fire approaching nearer and nearer to them, and, turning their heads, they saw that the floor of the room had now caught light. The heat of the room was becoming every moment more oppressive. When they had finished their task, Helen, with Blanche's assistance, drew forward the washing-stand to the window. Then they tied one end of their rope round a leg of the washing-stand, while the other was firmly secured about Blanche's waist.

'Ought I to go first?' said Blanche.

'Yes, certainly,' answered Helen. 'I can manage by myself afterwards better than you could; I am stronger than you.'

Blanche got carefully out of the window, grasped the rope of sheets in her hands, and was slowly lowered by Helen, who allowed the rope to slide as easily as possible over the window-frame. Blanche reached the window of her father's room in safety, the rope just sufficing in length, and her feet rested on the stone window-ledge. She could not open the window from the outside, but she rapped with her closed hand upon the panes, and presently, to her joy, she heard a stirring within. In another moment her father was at the window, and had it opened, and Blanche felt herself clasped in his arms.

'Blanche, Blanche, what is this?' he exclaimed in a terrified voice.

'Our room is on fire, papa. Helen is up there. See! she is pulling up the rope again; but oh, she cannot let herself down, it will be too dangerous.'

Mr. Therry was now himself distinctly sensible of a smell of fire through the open window.

'I wonder no one has discovered it before,' he exclaimed hurriedly. 'No, she cannot possibly descend by herself. She must try. But why did you not get out by the door?'

Mr. Therry was now hurrying from the room, accompanied by Blanche.

'We could not open it; it was locked.'

Mr. Therry rushed down-stairs to his tool-room, where he kept his lathes and carpentry work with which he amused his leisure hours, caught up an iron bar, and again ascended the stairs to his daughters' room. A few vigorous blows drove in the door, and as it fell with a crash, a volume of smoke rushed out, almost blinding him. He could see nothing but smoke and flame. It was impossible that he could advance a foot into the room. A terrible dread seized him.

'Helen, Helen, are you there?' he cried aloud.

'Yes, papa; but I am going to let myself down from the window. I cannot stay here a minute longer,' came through the black cloud of

smoke, in a voice that sounded low and faint above the crackling and roaring of the flames.

'I shall be ready to seize you,' was all Mr. Therry replied, and hastened down the stairs to his own room again.

By this time Blanche had roused the house, and the three servants were all assembled in Mr. Therry's room, with scared faces, terrified and bewildered. One of them was immediately despatched by her master to alarm the neighbours and procure help.

'Helen is coming down, papa,' cried Blanche from the window.

Helen was letting herself down, hand over hand, with an unavoidable rapidity, which made those beholding shudder as they beheld Mr. Therry stretched as far out of the window as was absolutely safe; and the moment Helen came within reach, he caught her in his arms, and drew her in at the window. A terrible weight of anxiety and dread was lifted from the father's heart, as he once more felt his child safely locked in his arms.

'Thank God, my darling, you are safe,' he said, in a voice that trembled with the intensity of his feelings. 'My brave little girl, you have saved both your sister's and your own life.'

All the party now hurried down-stairs to the ground flat of the house, and from thence out

into the street. A crowd of people had collected in front of the house, and presently the district fire-engine came rushing up with steaming, foam-flecked horses. The hose was soon at work upon the burning house, sending long spouting streams of water upon the flames in all directions. It was fortunately a still, calm night, and there was no wind to fan the flames. The fire had been taken in time, and the house being a detached one, a villa standing in a small garden, there was no danger of any of the adjoining houses catching. These several circumstances were in favour of the fire being more quickly got under, and when the two engines—a second one had come up shortly after the first—had been at work for about two hours, the flames were finally got under. But ere this was accomplished, the whole of the top storey of Mr. Therry's pretty villa had been reduced by the fire to a blackened ruin. Yet, when Mr. Therry thought of what might have been the result of the fire, he was deeply grateful in his heart, and his loss of property weighed with him as nothing against the peril from which he and his had been saved.

When the final extinction of the fire allowed him once more to turn his attention in other directions, he took his two children again in his arms. But a slightly fonder caress, and a softer kiss, rested upon Helen. It did not escape

Blanche's quick eye, but there was no faintest pang of jealousy in her heart as she noticed the circumstance.

'My brave Helen,' Mr. Therry said softly, a little mist dimming his eyes as he spoke, 'there are many things I don't understand so well as I ought to. There are other things which are good for my girls to have, I see, besides cleverness at lessons.'

'Brave! you may well call Helen that, papa,' exclaimed Blanche, with generous warmth. 'I wish you had seen her. She kept so quiet and brave when I was trembling all over, and hardly knew what I was doing. And yet I know she must have felt frightened too, for her voice shook, and her face was quite pale, only she kept it down, you know, while I couldn't. That is what must be true bravery, is it not? What should I have done without her by myself?'

'I was the eldest, Blanche, dear; I ought to have been the one to do what I did,' said Helen simply.

There is a greater equality of gifts among people than many imagine. The talents with which God endows His children differ perhaps more in kind than in degree; and it is a foolish thing for any one to make light of the talent of another simply because it differs from his own. Parents are apt to esteem the gifts of one child

above those of another, because they are more in sympathy with their own, forgetting that a God who sees the end from the beginning, endows each of us with the talents which are to be most useful to us in life. It is our own part to get thoroughly to understand what our talent is, and then to make the most of it, of whatever sort or degree it may be.

Blanche had intellectual quickness and mental power; Helen possessed power of another kind—courage, calmness, presence of mind, and readiness of resource in the face of physical danger; and though the father of the two girls esteemed the gifts of the younger above those of the elder, the gift with which an all-wise God had endowed Helen stood her in stead when her sister's talent was of no avail.

EMBRACING A TIGER.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

—o—

WE were sitting in our verandah one fine summer evening—my father, my mother, myself, and Mr. Lawrence the missionary. Mr. Lawrence had just returned from India. He was an old college chum of my father's, and was staying with us for a few days. A splendid specimen of a missionary, a man who looked as if he could go through any hardships or dangers—hardships of climate and travel in wild lands, and dangers from barbarous and savage tribes. He had braved perils not a few, for the scene of his labours lay in one of the most remote districts of India.

Mr. Lawrence was tall and broad, long-limbed and deep-chested, his physical appearance suggesting a life-guardsman or a sergeant of police, rather than a minister. But he had needed all his strength and vigour of body to carry him

through the life of hardship and privation he had had in India, where he had done a great deal of pioneer work in the cause of missions.

My father and mother and Mr. Lawrence had been talking for a long while about missionary work in India. I had listened pretty attentively for some time, but at last, I have to confess, began to wish they would talk of something else. Of course, a boy could not be expected to take quite so much interest in these subjects as his elders.

'Did you ever have tiger-hunts in India, Mr. Lawrence?' I said at last, during a short pause in the conversation.

'I never exactly engaged in a tiger-hunt, Jack,' Mr. Lawrence answered, with a smile; 'hunting is hardly in a missionary's line, you know; but I once had an adventure with a tiger, and such a one as did not tempt me to wish for a further acquaintance with those gentlemen.'

'Oh, tell us about it, Mr. Lawrence, please!' I exclaimed.

'Very well; you shall have it, Jack. It doesn't take very long to tell. My adventure occurred while I was staying in the village of L——, an out-of-the-way place among the hills. One day, after I had held my morning class of young people which I had recently formed, I felt strongly inclined for a bathe in the river, which

flowed at a little distance from the village. It was only ten o'clock, but was already very warm; and the river, which was a clear and bright one with a fine sandy bottom, looked very tempting for a swim. A quarter-of-an-hour's walk from my bungalow brought me to the bank of the stream. I undressed, placed my clothes in a little heap under a clump of bushes, and in a few moments was plunging in the stream, swimming, diving, and disporting myself in the cool waters with as much zest and enjoyment as you do, Jack, in your river at school. I stayed in the water perhaps a quarter of an hour, and then began to think that it was about time I was bringing my bath to a close; but when I turned my eyes towards the bank again, I beheld a sight that sent the blood coursing through my veins very much quicker than it had been doing previously, while my heart seemed suddenly to have got up into my throat. Crouching over my clothes, his eyes gleaming like two balls of lurid light, looking as if just in the act to spring, was a huge tiger—one of the largest I had ever seen in or out of a menagerie. The sight, you will readily believe, was about as disagreeable a one as can well be imagined, and my position as awkward and perilous as a man could be placed in. I was in a perfect trap; escape seemed impossible. The tiger was completely master of the situation,

and had me entirely at his mercy. I strove to keep calm and preserve my presence of mind; but I found it no easy matter, I can tell you, with those two fierce glaring eyes fixed upon me, and the conviction in my mind that the brute was every moment about to spring into the water upon me. However, I am glad to say that I succeeded in preserving my self-command and keeping my wits about me. The tiger and I remained there in our respective positions for perhaps five minutes, though it seemed far longer to me at the time—I not advancing a foot nearer the bank, but supporting myself by treading water, my enemy crouching almost motionless on the bank. I had formed no plan as to what to do, for nothing occurred to me, and was simply trusting to God to deliver me in some way from my terrible strait. I had been in danger before more than once or twice in my life, but never in anything like this. I kept my eyes fastened upon the tiger, watchful if he should make any move, when suddenly I beheld a flash in the air, as it seemed, and I knew the tiger had sprung at me. I dived, and the next moment heard a heavy splash in the water behind me. I stayed as long under water as I possibly could, but at length could hold my breath no longer, and rose to the surface. As I did so my head struck against something, and I felt myself impeded; I raised

my hands, and they touched something soft and hairy. To my horror, I discovered that I had risen exactly below the tiger. I thought my hour was verily come, but at that very moment an idea flashed through my mind; I raised my arms, grasped the tiger tightly round the neck, and with all my strength and might dragged his head beneath the water. My own head was now above the surface, I had obtained a good purchase over my foe, and I clung on to the tiger's head and held it under the water with a desperate and fierce energy. In a few minutes he was suffocated, and floated upon the stream a dead carcase. It was all over in less time than I take to tell it, and as I gazed upon the huge brute by my side, I seemed to have just awakened from a horrid dream. My heart rose in thanks to God for my merciful deliverance from what had looked like instant death, and I turned and swam somewhat feebly to the shore. Half an hour later some men from the village had secured the dead body of the tiger, whose skin I have still, in the shape of a travelling rug.'

DREAMING OR WITCHERY?

NOT a hundred years ago there lived in the south of Ireland a baronet named Sir Philip O'Hara, who possessed estates of considerable extent. Sir Philip did not live much at home. He was fond of travel, and had wandered over a large part of the world. Now, Sir Philip had a butler, one Anthony Trickett by name, who also acted as steward or general manager of the estate. Sir Philip being so frequently absent from home, you will understand that Mr. Trickett's duties as a butler were extremely light, and that therefore he could easily unite the two offices. Trickett was a portly, rather short gentleman, a little over fifty years of age, with a florid bare face, and a keen eye.

Report said that Anthony Trickett was given to be hard and strict with the peasants and dependents on his master's land, and report in this instance was true. Some of this may possibly have reached Sir Philip's ears, but it is

very likely that he was not fully aware of the facts of the case, for he really knew little of what went on in his estate. Trickett seemed to him to manage things pretty well and economically, on the whole, and so he had come to have considerable trust in him.

When this true story opens, Sir Philip had just returned home after an absence of more than usual duration. He proposed remaining on his estate for some little time, and was giving a series of dinners and other entertainments to his friends among the surrounding gentry, most of whom he had not seen for a long time. On one of these occasions, on which a large number of guests were assembled, there was need of more wine at the dinner table, and the host, summoning his butler, ordered him to fetch a fresh supply.

So Anthony Trickett, taking his large jingling bunch of keys, descended to the cellar. But when the heavy door swung on its hinges, a strange sight met the startled eyes of the butler. A brilliant light filled the chamber, and hundreds of diminutive creatures, in green doublets, brown leather buskins, and tall peaked hats, thronged the place. Each wore at the buckle of his belt a bright gem that flashed out on all sides rays of sparkling light.

The pigmy horde were busily engaged in diminishing the wine in Sir Philip O'Hara's casks.

Over each tap was seated, straddle-wise, a grinning imp, who turned on the wine, while one below caught the liquid as it fell in a silver flagon, and distributed it among the laughing crew who thronged around him, brandishing golden wine-cups.

The entrance of the butler caused not the least disturbance among these tiny revellers, for they only grinned at him, wagged their heads, and winked in a most provokingly familiar fashion. When Anthony beheld them making so free with his master's choicest wines, his wrath at once rose. He made at one of the tap-teeming imps, and would, beyond a doubt, have utterly demolished him, had not the fay, slipping somehow from under his very hand, and leaping lightly to the ground, escaped his angry grasp. Then the imps wagged their heads more than ever, and one, who was dressed somewhat differently from his companions, wearing a cap with little silver bells, and carrying in his hand a short staff, made a jocose remark in reference to the rotundity of Anthony's person, at which the whole crowd shrieked with laughter until the walls of the cellar seemed to tremble and shake.

Then the wrath of the butler redoubled, and again he would have attacked the grinning throng, but he was checked by the shrill voice of him who wore the cap and bells.

'Stop, stop! good Anthony, not so fast. You had better by far draw off what wine you want, get back as quickly as may be to Sir Philip, and leave us to our revels. There is plenty of wine and to spare both for your master and for us. But we warn you, that if you attempt to lay hand on any one of us again, it may be somewhat to your peril. So take my advice, old Barrel-paunch, and don't be a fool.'

Old Barrelpaunch! and a fool, forsooth! that was quite enough for Anthony Trickett, and indeed it would have been for most men. Heedless of the imp's threat, he made a sudden and fierce swoop at him, when, lo! in an instant he felt himself seized, drawn to the ground, pinioned, and borne down, down, down, so quick that it took away his breath. When this strange and not very pleasant motion ceased, and the astonished butler was able to look about him, he found that he was being carried by his new acquaintance through a fair and pleasant country, with a soft but lustrous emerald light flowing over all.

It was some little time before his eyes got accustomed to the soft greenish light, and his ears to a certain drowsy sound like the faint murmur of a shell, that pervaded the place. When they did so, he saw and heard many pleasant things. Tall, feathery-foliaged trees,

green flower-starred meadows, and silver-bright streams delighted his eyes, while the song of rainbow-plumaged birds, mingling with the low dreamy murmur of the brooks, filled his ears.

Anthony and his escort had not travelled far when they reached a green glade, at one end of which stood two thrones, whereon sat two golden-crowned fairies, whom Anthony guessed to be the king and queen (for he now understood that he was in the realms of Fairyland). Around the thrones of the king and queen hundreds of other elves were seated, more than half of them ladies—dainty little dames, in long grass-green kirtles, and wearing round their waists shining girdles.

When they reached the king's throne Anthony's captors set him down on the ground and made obeisance to their monarch. Then Anthony, thinking it wise to be as polite as possible, made a very low bow too, which the king acknowledged by graciously inclining his royal head.

'Triptung,' said the king, 'what mortal have we here?'

'Sir Philip O'Hara's butler, and please your majesty,' answered the fay with the cap and bells, 'he thought to disturb us while making merry with his master's wine, so we have brought him hither to taste our fairy cheer.'

'He is heartily welcome,' said the king. 'But

I fear me that he'll find our pleasures but little to his liking.'

'Oh, he'll do well enough, I doubt not, your majesty,' quoth Triptung. 'Moreover, he may be of great service to us sometimes, for in the cold nights we can warm our hands at his face instead of at a fire; it will serve quite as well. See how ruddily it glows! If you threw water on it, I warrant it would hiss like a hot iron.'

At this the elves set up a shrieking laugh at the expense of Anthony.

When the king had recovered somewhat from his mirth, he said—

'You must not mind, good Anthony, all our jester says. It is his privilege to talk nonsense, and he seldom lets a chance slip of airing his wit.'

Anthony could only bow low; he did not feel sufficiently at his ease to return any suitable answer.

Then the king, turning to the jester, said—

'Triptung, it will be your duty to find amusement for Mr. Trickett during his stay with us. As it will be some little time before we sup, do you fill up the interval by entertaining our guest as your imagination may suggest.'

'That will I do, your majesty, to the best of my powers. I do not doubt but that I shall find some entertainment to Mr. Trickett's liking.'

As he said this the fairy jester winked in a most comical and mischievous manner, but this escaped Anthony's notice. Then taking him aside, he led Anthony some distance away to where there stood a small but beautiful pavilion-shaped building. They entered, and Triptung conducted his companion to a room in which there was a shining crystal mirror.

'Now,' said Triptung, 'I am going to show you, Anthony Trickett, two or three scenes in your past life whereof you have reason to be proud. You yourself are the best judge. Look into this mirror.'

Anthony looked, and beheld a picture which made him feel—well, not very comfortable. A family of poor peasants were being turned out of their cottage. They had been for some time behind-hand in their rent, which was a thing the steward never tolerated. It was a cold, bleak winter's day, and the pale, wretchedly-clad children were clinging and cowering around their sad-faced parents. In the background of the picture stood the steward, waving them off with a stern hand.

'Is that picture to your liking, Mr. Trickett?' said Triptung; 'is it not pretty true to life? Do you recognise the face of the steward at all? But let us try another.'

The fay tapped the mirror with his staff, the

picture faded away, and another took its place. A pale woman sat in a small, low-ceilinged, and dimly-lighted room. She was sewing at some piece of clothwork with swift fingers. A thin-faced little girl sat at her feet. The room was very poorly furnished and carpetless, and the woman and the child were scantily clad. Anthony knew well the woman's face. It was that of his half-sister, who had married against his wishes. Her husband had died two years after the marriage, and the mother and her child had been left entirely dependent on what the former could earn with her needle. The poor woman had twice applied for a little help to her brother, but he had not yet seen fit to forgive her for the crime of marrying a man who had not happened to find favour in his eyes, and he had hardened his heart against her. As Anthony now gazed on the picture before him, his face grew white.

'Trickett, Trickett! that is much to your credit, is it not, that poor half-starved woman and child?' cried the jester. 'But you look somewhat gloomy. I can show you a less sorrowful picture.'

Again the elf touched the mirror, and again the scene was changed. It was now a room in his master's mansion upon which Anthony looked. A portly, ruddy-faced butler was holding by one hand a pretty, rosy-cheeked girl, from whose lips

he seemed trying to snatch a kiss. But the maiden did not appear to be at all desirous of the honour, for she was heartily boxing the ears of her would-be admirer with her disengaged hand, and otherwise resisting his advances. When Anthony beheld this picture, his face assumed a very different colour from that which it had worn while contemplating the preceding scene. He turned as red as a cabbage rose, and hung his head, Triptung meanwhile laughing immoderately, and poking him in the ribs with his staff.

'Ho! ho!' laughed the elf, 'what a sly fellow you are, Trickett! and what a dangerous lady-killer you must have been in your younger days, when your girth was a little less, and your step a trifle lighter! But you weren't particularly successful with yon dark-eyed maiden, were you? I warrant she sent you off with a hot face. You foolish fellow, you might perhaps have won and married her, if you had set about your wooing in a proper manner, and like a gentleman. But you thought a farmer's daughter hardly a match for you, forsooth; and you thought you might still have a little fun with her now and then, and that she would consider it an honour. But she considered nothing of the kind, had her proper pride and self-respect, and very rightly would have nothing to say to you. You never made a greater mistake in your life than then, and you

were very quickly made aware of it. I don't think you'll ever get married now, Anthony; your chance has gone by, I'm afraid. Nobody would have you as a gift. You're too stout, and too gouty. Ha! ha! ha!'

Anthony couldn't help wondering how the fairy knew so much about his private affairs, but he said nothing.

'Well,' continued Triptung, 'I daresay you've had enough of pictures for the present, and it's about time we were returning to the king. But ere we do so, I will give you a little piece of advice which you will do well to keep steadily in mind, Anthony, while you are here in Fairyland. Never try to deceive us by an attempt at concealment or untruth, and under all circumstances endeavour to keep your temper.' The two now returned to the king and the rest of the fairy court. Anthony saw that preparations were being made for a banquet. Numbers of elves skipped hither and thither, bearing vessels of silver and gold, which they arranged in a fanciful and picturesque order on the soft green grass. Others brought jewelled wine-cups and flagons, brimming with bright wine.

When all was ready, the king invited Anthony to sit on his left hand, and with a very low bow in acknowledgment of this mark of favour, Trickett took his allotted place. The covers were

lifted, a fragrant odour rose suddenly into the still air, and the banquetters disposed themselves to the business of the hour. Soon there arose the merriest noise of jingling knives and forks and clinking wine-cups, mingled with the chatter of voices and the rippling flow of light laughter. The king plied Anthony with the daintiest dishes and the choicest wines. As he quaffed the dulcet liquor, Trickett felt himself growing bolder and more at his ease, and conversed with the king and others around him with tolerable freedom. A thing that puzzled him not a little was that though the wine-cups were unusually small, he could never empty them. Drink deeply as he would, there always remained a little wine at the bottom of the cup, as it did in the goblet that the giants gave the Scandinavian god Thor to drink from.

'Try this Spangling Dew, Trickett,' said the king. 'It is mellower, you'll find, than Sir Philip's oldest port, and a deal less heady.'

'What does Anthony know of his master's port, your majesty?' exclaimed Triptung. 'You never taste a drop of it, do you, Trickett?'

'Well, no,' answered Anthony, 'except'—

'Except now and then, eh,' interrupted Triptung, 'when you take it for the gout, you know? Ha! ha!'

'You are pleased to be witty,' said Anthony, rather confused for a reply.

'If wit goes by size, what a deal you must have, Anthony!'

Then the butler thought he saw a chance of being even with his tormentor, and answered—

'If wit goes by size, Master Triptung, you have very little indeed.'

At this all the elves laughed in great glee, Triptung as heartily as the rest, and the king said—

'A fair hit, Triptung; you are paid in your own coin.'

'I admit it,' said Triptung, 'and I should have known that wit should have nothing to do with *sighs*.' Whereat the company again broke into laughter at the jester's little pun.

When the company had refreshed themselves to their content, the king rose, and taking the queen by the hand, led the way to a retired glade in the forest.

'Here,' said the king, addressing Anthony, 'it is our nightly custom, after supper, to smoke a quiet pipe before joining in the dance. Do you smoke?'

'Occasionally,' said Anthony.

Then Triptung handed Anthony a long, slender-stemmed pipe, and the fairy monarch and all his court, the ladies, of course, excepted, being provided with similar pipes, seated themselves on the grass and began to smoke. Anthony lit his

pipe and commenced too, but he had not taken many whiffs, when he suddenly dropped the pipe and leaped to his feet with a shriek of pain. His throat and tongue felt as hot as a live coal. The king and all the elves shouted with laughter as the tortured butler danced in his pain, gasping and spluttering like a fish out of water.

'Hallo, Trickett!' cried Triptung, 'whatever's the matter?'

'Matter!' gasped Anthony, 'why, that abominable pipe has nearly burned my tongue out!'

'Why, I thought you told us you were accustomed to smoking?'

'Smoking! you little wretch,' roared Anthony, swelling with anger. 'I didn't say I could smoke gunpowder.'

'Gunpowder! nonsense; that's our very mildest tobacco you've got. You're not accustomed to it, that's it, perhaps. But, Anthony,'—and here Triptung lifted a warning finger, and spoke aside to Trickett,—'remember what I told you; you're forgetting my advice.'

Then Anthony recollected Triptung's caution and managed to restrain his anger, not without some effort.

'Well, Trickett,' said the king with a smile, 'I see you're not quite able for our tobacco yet, as Triptung says. You had better try and amuse the ladies while we finish our pipes. I know

the queen is eager to enjoy the pleasure of your conversation for a little.'

Anthony was glad enough to comply with the king's suggestion, so he went and seated himself by the side of the fairy queen. The two soon fell into a pleasant conversation; and the lady said so many charming and complimentary things, that Anthony presently forgot all about his little mishap, and was growing to feel quite proud of his conversational powers. He had never thought himself so strong in this way before. As the queen paid him compliment after compliment, the vain old fellow began to believe himself the very ideal of a handsome and accomplished gentleman, and his ruddy face blushed redder than ever.

'What very fine hair you have, Mr. Trickett!' said the queen.

Anthony's hair was of a whitey-brown colour, and certainly luxuriant for his years. In answer to the queen, he replied with a smile meant to express modesty—

'Your majesty is too flattering.'

He had hardly spoken when he observed a tittering among the ladies, and at the same time he felt a sudden coldness about the head. He looked up and beheld—horror! his fine hair dangling in mid air half-a-dozen feet above his head. At the same moment the shrill voice of Triptung fell upon his ear.

'Hullo, Trickett! who's your wigmaker?'

Then Anthony saw that his wig was suspended by a slender cord, one end of which was held by the grinning jester seated on the fork of a tree overhead. The butler's face waxed purple with rage, shame, and confusion. He made a dart at the wig, but with a jerk Triptung removed it beyond his reach. Again he made a spring at it, and again the dancing wig eluded his eager hand. He was hot with anger. If he could but have got the daring Triptung for two minutes within his grasp! How he longed to do so!

Meanwhile the king and the whole fairy company were holding their sides with laughter, some of them rolling about on the grass in the ecstasy of their enjoyment of the scene. Ludicrous and mirth-provoking enough it was, as I think you would have confessed if you had been there—the stout, bald-headed old butler, wild with anger, making frantic leaps at the bobbing wig. At last Triptung took compassion on poor Anthony, and dropped the wig dexterously on his bare shining pate. Then he descended from his perch, and going up to Anthony whispered in his ear—

'You forgot my advice again. Did I not tell you that it was in vain to try to deceive us? Did you suppose that we did not know, as well as yourself, that you wore a wig, you foolish fellow?'

Anthony could not refrain from making a grasp at the speaker, but with a nimble spring the fairy moved out of his reach.

'Don't lose your temper, sir; keep cool,' he said.

This, under the circumstances, was not an easy matter; but after a little Anthony managed to regain in a great measure his temper and equanimity.

Then the king, having by this time finished his pipe, rose and proposed a dance, and turning to Anthony, said—

'Of course you dance, Mr. Trickett?'

'To be sure he does,' broke in Triptung. 'He's just famous at a jig, your majesty.'

'A jig!' cried the horrified butler; 'I haven't danced a jig for fifteen years.'

'The more fool you, then, Anthony Trickett,' answered Triptung. 'But you must dance now; every one dances here.'

'But I'm subject to the gout,' said Anthony, 'and any violent exercise or over-fatigue is liable to bring on an attack.'

'Nonsense! a dance will do you all the good in the world,' said the jester. 'If you had had a good jig every now and then, you might never have had the gout.'

Anthony saw that he would be obliged to yield, however much against his inclination. He feared that if he opposed the will of his new and power-

ful acquaintance, something worse would probably overtake him. Then the king made a sign, and a band of elfin musicians, with pipe, and harp, and lute, began to make sweet and blythe music. The king led forth his comely queen, each fay selected his lady, and Anthony being provided with a fair and lively partner, the dance commenced. Lead up, lead down, advance, fall back, merrily the elves footed it, scarcely bending the grass blades beneath their twinkling feet; while

> 'Where'er they trip, where'er they tread,
> A daisy or a bluebell springs;
> And not a dewdrop shines o'erhead
> But falls within their charmèd rings.'

A strange vigour seemed to have come upon Anthony; he appeared to have suddenly renewed all the agility of youth, and leaped, skipped, and snapped his fingers in a manner truly astonishing. As the dance advanced, the pace grew faster and faster. At last Anthony, who was but mortal, began to feel somewhat fatigued, and would have fain rested awhile, when he discovered, to his horror and amazement, that he was unable to stop himself. In vain he tried to stay his flying feet. Fast and furious waxed the music. Anthony's head began to whirl. And now the trees around seemed to him to be joining in the dance. One moment he imagined he had a tall elm for a partner, and the next he was joining

hands with a rugged old oak. His limbs ached terribly. The perspiration stood in big round drops upon his forehead, and rolled in streams down his cheeks, and still he kept twirling amid the giddy crowd. At length he lost all consciousness, fell reeling and fainting to the ground, and immediately fell into a deep sleep.

How long he slept puzzled him many a time in after years. When he awoke it was some minutes before he could realize his situation. Where was he? He rubbed his eyes. Yes, there were the four dark stone walls, and there stood the big wine-casks. He was lying on his back in his master's cellar. He tried to rise, but found that he was bound down by what looked like chains of silver, or steel, or some bright metal. Then he heard a voice in his ear which he knew well. It was that of Triptung, the fairy jester.

'Trickett, never forget your visit to Fairyland. Recollect the pictures I showed you, and try to mend some of your ways, and lead a more charitable life. You had better get up now, and draw off your wine, for I hear some one calling.'

The voice ceased. Then Anthony found that he could rise quite easily. What he had thought to be metal chains, were nothing more than webs of shining dew. By his side he found his tankard and his keys. So he filled the vessel with wine,

and returned to the chamber where he had left his master and his guests on the night before, as he thought. To his amazement he found Sir Philip still at dinner with his friends.

'Why, Trickett,' said Sir Philip, 'you've been an unpardonably long time drawing off that wine.'

Anthony was too astonished and confused to reply.

Next morning the bewildered butler told his story to his master, who laughed heartily at it, but refused to believe a word of it.

'How you could have got such a story, Trickett, I can't imagine,' he said. 'I can only suppose you must have dreamt it.' Anthony gravely shook his head.

'No, no, sir,' he said, 'I've two proofs of its truth—a severe cold in the head, and a stiff and aching body.'

But Sir Philip was still more than doubtful. However, he advised Anthony not to mention the matter to anybody else; for if the story got about, he would be pretty sure to be well laughed at by most people, and of course disbelieved.

Anthony saw the wisdom of his master's advice, and kept his own counsel. But the adventures he had just gone through had made a deep impression upon him, the effect of which was to be lasting. He at once set about improving his life,

as Triptung had recommended. He visited his sister, forgave her, if that can be called forgiveness on his part where there was nothing to forgive, and settled upon her a yearly sum of money sufficient to keep her and her child in comfort. He got a small cottage done up for her on his master's estate, and there henceforth she and her little daughter lived. It was not long before the latter had found a way to her uncle's heart, and year by year his affection for his niece grew, until she became a necessary part of the old man's happiness. In his office as steward, also, Anthony henceforth became more lenient and less exacting. He lived to a ripe age, but never till the day of his death was his belief shaken that he had spent a night, or what seemed a night, in Fairyland.

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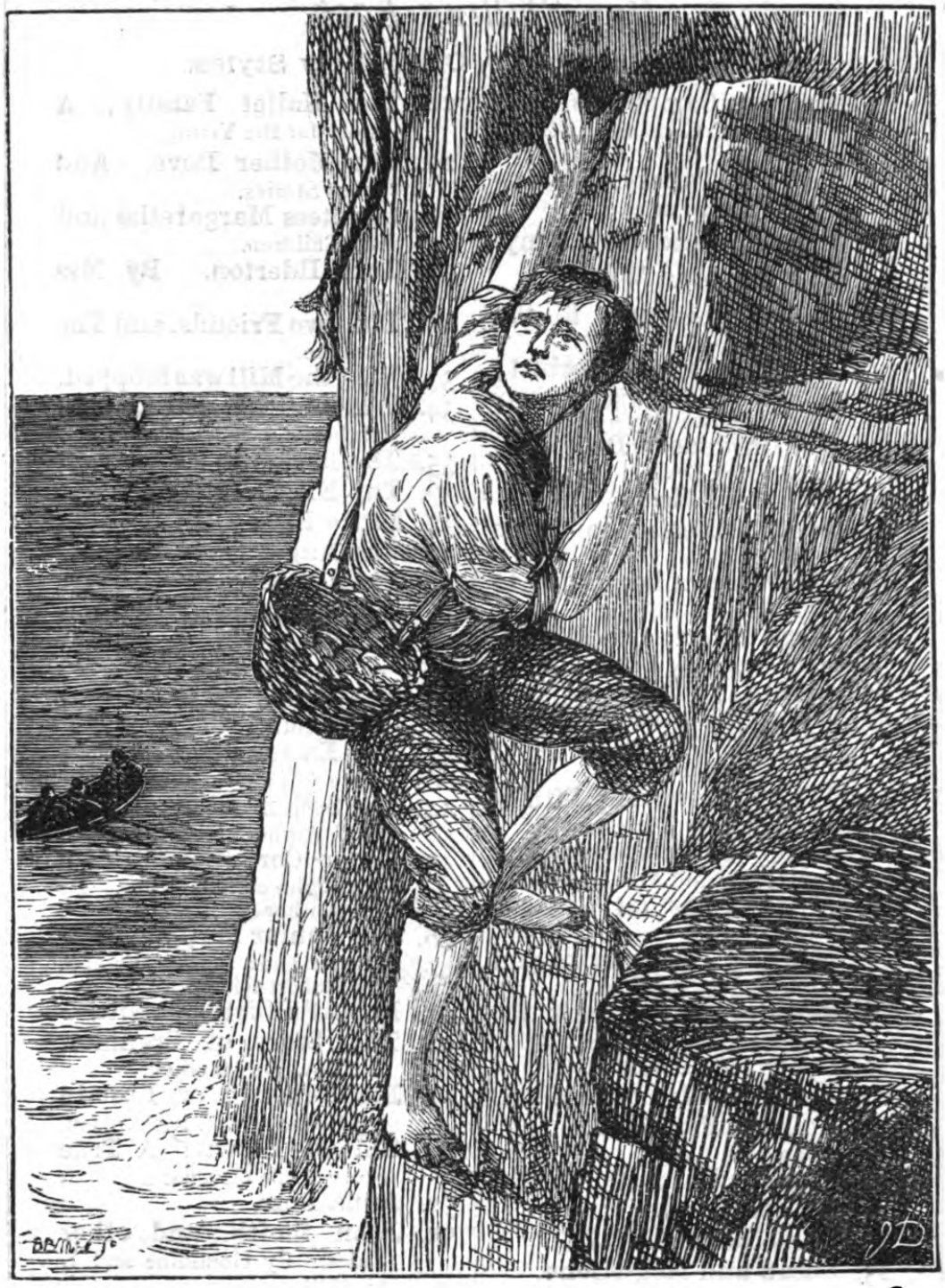

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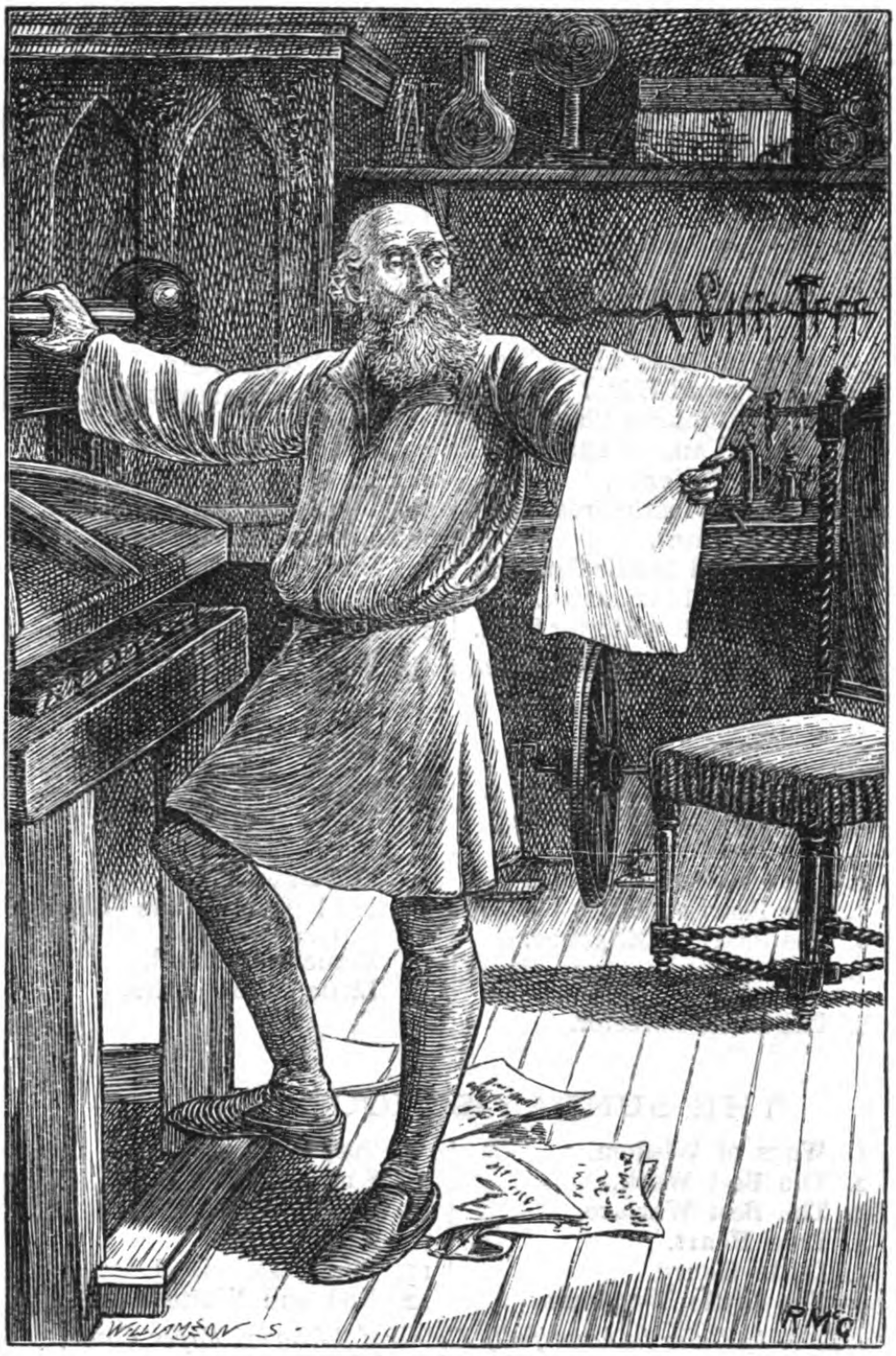

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