

country but little explored. The bleached bones, forming the skeletons of men denuded of all flesh by wild dogs, were discovered from time to time as the forest became more traversed and small holdings sprang into existence. The Macedon ranges formed a portion of this country, — a wild, broken, inhospitable district, timbered with huge trees of stringy bark and white gum, towering to a height of from one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet, while the foliage of one tree had so entangled and interwoven itself with another that in the brightest sunshine all was a settled gloom. The ground, even in the height of a Victorian summer, was wet and sloppy; but there was good feed for sheep, nevertheless, and that was then, as now, the squatter's delight. While, after a long hot season, the grass on the open lands would be parched up and so bleached that at a distance the plains dazzled the sight, pained the eye, and occasionally caused temporary blindness, the low country running towards the thickly-timbered ranges always retained as much moisture as nourished the rich undergrowth of grass. Here it was that, under the shelter of a gully, I dwelt for several weeks in the society of four working bullocks, which I had to hunt up every morning and night, and bring to the camping ground. My gully was the very simplicity of construction. There were two forked saplings, some eight feet high, the ends of which were rammed into the ground ten feet apart. This done, a ridge-pole was cut and made to rest on the forks, and over this was thrown a tarpaulin, stretched out to resemble the top of a Noah's ark, and then pegged down to the ground on either side. The spare folds were gathered in at the rear, and secured at the bottom by a heavy log of timber. The front was left open for entrance and exit. So much done, sheets of bark were stripped from the adjoining trees, and these were made to overlap each other on the outside. A ridge of bark above all, and fastened down with thongs cut from a bullock hide, made a bachelor's residence complete. What was deficient in space was compensated for by snugness.

My personal effects consisted of two blue serge shirts, one pair of moleskin trousers, the same of high-low water-tights, two blankets, an opossum-skin rug, and half-a-dozen dried sheepskins. What more could a reasonable man desire, when to this I add that I was provisioned for a three months' occupancy.

My stores consisted of a sack of flour, a barrel of salted beef and mutton, some tea, sugar, salt, a supply of twist tobacco, a kettle, two tin pannikins, a three-legged iron pot, a frying-pan, and an income of a pound a week for doing nothing except attend upon myself and see that four working bullocks attended on themselves.

A man must be of an ambitious turn of mind indeed who could have wished for anything more than this to make a start in life with. If I felt the want of society, there was solace in the pipe. If I suffered from ennui, I had but to occupy myself with the manufacture of a damper, the boiling of a piece of beef, or the preparation of a kettle of tea. For a fire, I had only to yoke up two of the bullocks, which would draw me as much dead timber in an hour as would last me a week. For water, I had merely to scoop a hole in the ground at the side of my bunk, and it would gush up in a pure crystal stream.

At night, I would be lulled to sleep by the howlings of packs of wild dingoes who were out in search of sheep, but always giving the preference to lambs. These dingoes never ceased their search for prey throughout the night, nor their howling until daybreak. I must confess to a feeling of nervousness when I was compelled to listen to the sniffling of the varmints as they sneaked stealthily round my gully, drawn near by the smell of the beef barrel, or the iron pot, which served as a patent dish-cover, by simply turning it bottom up, to preserve the meat saved from one day to the other.

I don't pretend to speak for everyone, because there are such varieties of tastes in the world, but I know that a bush life in a fine climate, and a large and only partially occupied country, has its special charms. There is no necessity for taking thought of to-morrow. There are no bills falling due to meet, and it wouldn't be of much consequence if there were; for one couldn't meet them, and the thought of a bailiff would have given me no uneasiness whatever.

I knew of an official in the Melbourne Customs Department who, suffering long from ill-health, under the recommendation of medical certificate, obtained six months leave of absence from his duties that he might obtain change of air. He didn't take ship or steamer to another colony, and he didn't go meandering about the country spending the six months' salary allowed him, but he went on to a station, dressed as a bushman, and engaged himself as a hut-keeper, with £15 wages for the half-year, including rations and hut accommodation. His whole duty consisted in cooking for two shepherds, shifting a couple of sets of hurdles, and attending to his own wants. At the end of his time, he went to the home station, drew his money, and returned to Melbourne fourteen stone twelve pounds, having left it at eleven stone eight. He was in the best of health and the highest of spirits. Men who have been long accustomed to bush life may be likened to sailors—always longing for a change, but when the change has come always hankering to return to their old ways again. In the days I now refer to, many men then engaged as shepherds afterwards became among the wealthiest of squatters and land-owners. Their sons at this day are the lords of large estates, and their daughters the wives of

merchant princes. These men, for the greater number, had emigrated from Scotland, where they had been engaged as herds and hinds and in the tending of sheep upon the large properties of lords, earls, and dukes. They were thrifty men; men of some education; men ever watchful and careful of the interests they had been entrusted with; men with wives, prudent, honest, and thrifty as themselves; men with children reared in the love and fear of their Maker; men who were no eye servers, but would tend a lambing or a shearing season as if the sheep or lambs were their own property, instead of that of their employers. They bargained less for wages than for being allowed a small share of the increase of the flocks, which with good and thinking employers was allowed them. Presently these men would become the owners of a hundred or two of ewes, with a few rams. Then their little flock would in time increase to five hundred, and so on to a thousand. Following on this, they would travel in search of a bit of unoccupied country, which they would take up under the then existing squatting regulations, and after years of patient waiting and steady industry would come to rank among the wealthy squatoocracy of the day. They were returned members of Colonial Parliaments, and became men of great mark, noted for their

shrewdness, their great good common sense, and for resisting all invasions upon their squatting rights. Like most men who have risen from the bottom of the ladder to the topmost rung, they were selfish. They would not part with an acre of sheep-run to allow the tiller of the soil to cultivate it. For many a long year the squatter had his own way, but public opinion and the public will at last, as it always does, prevailed, and the sheep farmer holding acres of fine soil, by the tens of thousands, upon a mere nominal annual rental, had to give place to the agriculturist. The squatter in Victoria, if he now desires to hold his land, must buy it in fee-simple, in competition with others who may desire a share of it. The influence of the squatoocracy is fast becoming a power and an abuse of the past.

How shrewd, clever men, possessing neither education nor money, became possessed of large estates in those days I will relate an instance. It is only one of several which have come under my notice. The man I refer to, and with whom I had been personally acquainted some years, landed in Hobart Town in 1844 from a whaling ship. His "lay" amounted to something under £40. With this he worked his way to Port Phillip (Victoria), where he engaged himself as shepherd to a squatter in the Western district of Geelong. Here he served two years, and by hard saving added £60 to the £40 already in his possession. This man could do no more than just read, and sign his name. With a hundred pounds he started a small bakery in Geelong, and it was here he showed his powers of turning an honest-earned penny into a pound sterling. He did not solicit the custom of householders or of tradesmen, excepting only to a very small extent. But he went to a colony of brickmakers, located on the banks of the river Barwon, in the suburbs of the town. These men and their families he supplied with bread, tea, sugar, and, I think, grog, taking no money, but bargaining to receive payment in bricks. For every sixteen shillings they were debited with he received a thousand bricks, and these he disposed of to builders at twenty-five shillings for every thousand delivered. Afterwards he transacted the same kind of business with bush sawyers. He supplied them with bread, meat, and rum, taking payment out in timber, which he again sold at a good profit to the keepers of timber yards. But he never sold the whole of his bricks, nor the whole of his timber, but, with great forethought, accumulated kiln upon kiln of the former, and stack upon stack of the latter. He had stored away numerous stacks of bricks, and over one hundred thousand running feet of sawn timber. In 1851 bricks had risen from 16s. a thousand to £5, and sawn timber from 12s. per hundred running feet to £3 10s. In 1852—towards the end of it—bricks had risen to be worth £15 per thousand, and sawn timber 9d. per superficial foot. Then the shrewd old whaler sold out, and without anyone knowing or even imagining it, accumulated close upon £15,000. He always, in his business, appeared in an ordinary bushman's dress—drank nothing stronger than tea, and fared hard every day of his life. But for years he had an object in view, and this was to become possessor of the station on which he had been engaged as shepherd.

After the shearing, the owner came to town to draw against his wool with his banker, settle with his merchant, and lay in stores. Then it was the old whaler called at the hotel he was staying at, when something as follows passed:—

"Mr. Hoyle, I suppose you have hold of the same station that I was shepherding over for the matter of more than two years?"

"Yes, I have the same station; but I suppose you are above engaging as a shepherd now. You have gone into buying bricks, I am told. Isn't it rather a risky business, Charley? Wouldn't it be better to accept wages than go into a line of trade you don't understand?"

"Well, perhaps you are right, Mr. Hoyle; but what I come to ask is whether it wouldn't be wiser for you to sell your station and go home to your friends? I think I know a buyer for it, if the buyer is allowed to know your price for it."

"Well, Charley," said Mr. Hoyle, "everything in this world has its price, and my price is a pound a-head for my sheep, the station and fixings thrown in."

"And how many head of sheep may you have, Mr. Hoyle?"

"Close upon twenty thousand."

"Which means, Mr. Hoyle," says the old whaler, "twenty thousand pounds all told, or there nigh about. Now, Mr. Hoyle, what are your terms? How much cash do you want, and how much credit will you give for the balance?"

"The terms will be half cash, and the other remaining over for five years at eight per cent., with a lien upon sheep and pre-emptive right. Who is the customer you know of as likely to mean business?"

"Why," said the old whaler, "if you will come over to your lawyer I will show him to you, and, so far as I can see, there won't be much difficulty in the business being settled, if it's business you mean, and at the same time mean doing the business right off."

The shepherd and his old employer went at once in company. "Now," said Charley, "we have got witnesses to the transaction; you want a pound a-head for your sheep, with station, bullock-drays, cattle, and the like thrown in, don't you? Your terms are half cash, and the balance on security of sheep and property payable in five years, at eight per cent. interest, isn't that it? You say yes. Well, what I say is, that I am the buyer, Mr. Hoyle. This here gentleman, the lawyer, knows my money's ready when everything is drawn up fair, square, and straightforward, signed, sealed, and delivered, and possession of the station is handed over to me, everything being regular."

In a fortnight the old whaler was in charge of his station, one of the very finest throughout the Warty Yallock district. In two years, instead of five as allowed, the balance of the purchase money was paid off. In seven years the old whaler had sold out for ninety thousand pounds, when he went home and drank himself to death in six months, leaving a wife and family to inherit his property. The wife married again, and the second husband gambled his share away. The children grew up into manhood and womanhood, but how it came to pass I do not know, but none of them have benefitted in the least by the large sums left them by the shrewd old sheep-farmer, ex-whaler, and ex-convict.

REMINISCENCES IN THE LIFE OF A COLONIAL JOURNALIST.*

[BY "SNYDER."] 10

No. X.

LYNCH LAW.

I REFERRED in my last to a time when I was retaining possession of a tract of land for Mr. John Pascoe Fawcner. I have described how, where, and in what manner I was living. What happened me then I will now relate:—For several nights I had come to be impressed with the conviction there was a liveliness about my blankets and rug which could only have been the result of fleas.

Why fleas should give a preference to thick bush lands, instead of taking up their residence in comfortable homesteads where they could obtain a supply of more delicate and tender nourishment, I am quite ignorant; but, in the parts I was located on there was scarcely a patch of ground that did not produce them in large self-contained colonies. There is a simple bush method of relieving blankets from fleas. This is to find out an ant-hill and to throw them over it. Whether fleas don't like ants, or that ants do like fleas, I am not going to pronounce; but I know this, that if a pair of blankets dyed brown with fleas only be thrown over an ant-hill, these vivacious little nippers make a rapid disappearance. Hel-loway's pills, in conjunction with that philanthropist's ointment, never effected a more rapid cure on the human frame than will the application of an ant-hill on a flea-inhabited blanket.

Well, it came about that I could find no spot occupied by these hard-working and intelligent insects nearer than half a mile from my private residence. Here I took my rug, my blankets, my spare serge shirt, and all that was mine in the bedding and clothing line. Then I departed to indulge in dinner where there was nothing to disturb either my digestion or my imagination. Two hours afterwards I thought I would stroll in the direction of the ant-heap, and never was Robinson Crusoe more surprised at the print of a man's foot in the sand than I was when I arrived on the spot to find that the whole of my wardrobe and bed-coverings was absent. I was not long in solving the cause for so mysterious a disappearance. The clear impression of many naked feet around the spot, and then the impression of the same feet leading in the direction of a high tier densely covered with scrub told me that a party of aboriginal blacks had come across a treasure greater to them than the possession of a goldfield. Swearing would not restore my losses, or I should have been in immediate possession of them. To have tracked the blacks to their quambing ground would simply have resulted in my body being riddled by their spears or my skull smashed in by a boomerang. I returned to my dwelling thankful that I had as much tobacco left in stock as would enable me to smoke myself into a mind peaceful with calm resignation. My bed that night was my bare bunk. My covering was an empty flour sack and a sheet

of bark. My arms, a felling axe, with which I lay down in company, fearing that before morning the rascally blacks would be upon me for the flour and beef after they had learned to appreciate the luxury of my blankets. I did not know then what I should afterwards learn, and this was that the Victorian aboriginal tribes, only one or two excepted, never make a night attack. This note have been so ordained, not shepherd or a hut-keeper on an open station but would have had a spear through his body, or his brains smashed in with his murderous waddy. But I didn't know this then, and it had an effect upon my sleep, produced very ugly dreams and made me wish for the day-break.

When morning did come at last I said myself, having no one else to say it to, that this sort of thing was not in my line. I was eighty miles from Melbourne and fifteen miles from the nearest station; and as this station was owned by a squatter who considered Mr. Fawcner had robbed him of a valuable property, he had intended to take possession of the son of his son, I knew it was very little sympathy or help I should get there. I had been told that about eight miles to the south of the quambing ground there was a small colony of splitters and fenceers—men who were released from Tasmania—conditionally pardoned men, who were at liberty to live anywhere in the colonies, but not allowed to leave under penalty of forfeiture of the indulgence granted them.

These men engaged themselves to squat by the year to supply sheep-hurdles at much per score, shingles at so much per thousand, and posts and rails for fence purposes by the hundred. As a rule they were quiet, hard-working, and industrious. By the time their year had expired they would each of them have from one hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds to draw, when with the cheque in their possession, and with their wives and their women in company they would go down to Melbourne and Geelong, where they would have a debauch, which continued until their last sixpence was spent. Then they would come back and enter into another year's engagement, to end in another prolonged debauch. So long as these men were employed upon bush work, and were unable to obtain drink, and a more kindly, hospitable, or better hearted set were to be found anywhere. As the same was to be said of the women, if, by any chance, facilities were offered to get up a keg of rum by some return of a dray, then were both men and women, as long as the rum lasted, converted into fiends, and the horrible orgies they indulged in for a time would beggar description. Fortunately it was very seldom that rum could be got on the ground. And so for the whole year these small colonies of splitters and fenceers would pursue their occupations from sunrise to sunfall, always, however, looking forward to the time when the engagement would terminate, to all of another round of hard drinking in the towns. Should a man pass by with a swag on his shoulders on the look-out for a job of shepherding or hut-keeping, the men would give him shelter and food until he had thoroughly recruited himself; and

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this hospitality they would extend to a dozen as willingly as they would do to one or two. The women would wash their shirts, and bathe and dress their blisters, never even looking for so much as a "thank you" for such kindly offices performed. I have lived in the early days of the colony among convicts who have undergone long and terrible sentences, crimes of the deepest dye, and I can say after they have undergone their term of servitude, only keep these men from towns and from drink and do nothing to awaken their passions, when one may see his property and his life without fear of tainting spoliation or injury. It is true, it expires and conditionally-pardoned men a great hatred to the constituted authorities and for the law that was administered to them, but their redeeming qualities consisted in being kind to their fellow-men, knowing what they have been and what were, had sufficient confidence to trust themselves upon their hospitality.

It was to a body of these bushmen I terminated to make my way to see what I could beg or borrow a couple of blankets. Striking across the bush, in the direction of where these men were employed, in about three hours I reached their quambing ground. It was about high noon, and not hearing the sound of the axe or the crash of falling trees I guessed the men would be at their dinner. When I got up to their huts, for these when they had taken a year's engagement before setting into work, always found themselves a substantial slab and room to live and sleep in;—I when I got up to the huts saw six or seven men sitting round a dying embers of a fire, over which a iron pot hung suspended. At about a yards' distance were four women talking each other. Between the men and the women I observed a man, haggard and soiled, seated to a tree by a bullock-chain passed round