

trunk of it. The man's face was to the tree and he was so thoroughly secured by the chain round the upper portion of his body, and by thongs of tough bullock-hide round his legs, that he was unable to turn himself in the least degree, despite of the desperate struggles he made to free himself. Then sitting down among the men, who made room for me, and telling them who I was, I enquired about the prisoner they had got, and asked what it all meant. "Well, mate," said one next to me, with bared arms and open breast, bronzed by years of exposure to sun and wind, "this is what it is and what it means. That fellow we have hard and fast, and mean to keep him hard and fast until we have done with him, came over here the day before yesterday from the Bullinda station, and asks whether we could give him a job of splitting shingles, as he had left his place and was out of work. We told him we did not want a hand, but if he was hard up he could stop a week if he liked, or a fortnight for that matter. His tucker didn't matter to us. Well, he stops that night and a part of yesterday, when my woman asks him if he minded going down to the creek for a couple of buckets of water? He said of course he would; and the woman tells him her little girl would go and shew him where the dipping place was. The girl ain't much more than eight years old, and the creek lays about three hundred yards down in the bend of the hollow. Well, you see, mate, the two had been away more nor half an hour when my woman begins to wonder what had become of them, specially of the girl. So she waits a bit longer, and then she goes down to the creek to see what keeping of 'em. And then she sees her child rolling on the bank in great pain, and crying dreadfully. But she doesn't see no man. It wasn't very long before she makes the whole affair out. Do you know what that was she made out?" asked the man passionately, as he placed an iron grip on my arm. "Well, never mind guessing; I will tell you what my woman made out. She made out that that man—that fellow, you know, as is chained to a tree, and will be chained until he is done with, had abused that girl, and after she was well-nigh killed he leaves her and makes off. I ain't going to tell you what that man did who is chained to that tree, but I suppose you are not so young but that you can guess. Well that's what that hang-dog did. The girl is in the hut, and we don't know yet whether she is going to live or die. When my woman tells me what had happened, the six of us knocks off work, and getting on the man's track, it wasn't very long before we came upon him, and we collared him, and there he is chained to a tree; and there he will stop till we have done with him, and we ain't done with him yet." I told the man—the others had never spoken a word—that it would be his duty to hand the prisoner over to justice.

"Justice, do you say, mate? Justice lives down at Melbourne, which means a four days' tramp, with a prisoner in charge. If we didn't let him escape, Justice might. It's such a queer thing is Justice when you are only a lot of bushmen. We don't mean to chance Justice, and that is just all about it."

"Then," I said, "what do you propose to do with him?"

"Well, mate, that's what we have been talking over. You see the near woman over there, don't you? Well, that's my wife. We have only one belonging to us, and that's the girl which is laying in the hut. The same girl that that fellow at the tree did the worst any man can do for a girl, and he oughtn't to be allowed to live five minutes after he was taken hold of. I was for hanging him up to a tree and leaving him to dry in the sun after his neck had been broken, but my mates say it wouldn't do. So," continued the father of the ruined child, his features assuming a grim smile, "and so, young fellow, my mates think we had better leave this man in charge of the girl's mother for the matter of fifteen or twenty minutes, and all we shall leave her is this here." The "this here" was produced, and consisted of a thick strip of hard bullock-hide, about seven feet long, and as wide as a man's two fingers. It was doubled to reduce the length to one-half; and the sharp edges of this terrible thong were as hard nearly as iron. "You see, mate," said the man, "this affair belongs more to the mother of the girl than anyone else; so we mean to leave the man and her together; and, look here, it will be worse for you, or anyone else, to interfere in what

we have come to." I knew that with their passions aroused any expostulation on my part would have led to my getting knocked on the head or thrown into the creek, by one or other of the men, and I said nothing.

Then, after a minute or so, the father of the girl called the women to come over to him, and the order was obeyed. "Now," said he to the mother of the child, "just you understand that we don't interfere between you and that chap at the tree. We are going to leave you two together for a time; and you can forgive him, or not forgive him—just as you like, and if you don't forgive him, here's this for you, and you ain't to use nothing worse—mind that."

The woman's look was the embodiment of suppressed fury. The muscles of her hands

and arms twitched involuntarily. Her bosom nearly to her waist heaved, so that one could almost fancy he saw the palpitating of her heart. She was a short, stout, broad-shouldered woman. One who, in an encounter, would have taken a more powerful man than myself to have come off even second best.

"George," said the woman, "You leave that man to me." Don't none of you interfere, or it will be the worse for him that does. You go down to the shingle heap, and don't any of you come back till you are told. This man has served little Sue worse than I shall serve him, but I don't mean that he shall ever do the like to another woman's child, for a good bit of time at least.

"Come away, mate," said the father, speaking to me. "Come away, all of you; it will be much better. Now, old girl," said the man, turning to his wife, "there's to be nothing more than this—mind that," and he pointed to the thong on the ground.

"Go on, all of you," said the woman, "or I shall put an axe in the skull of the villain, and finish the job quicker than any of you would like."

Then, the father taking the lead, we walked away the distance of some three hundred yards, but before we had got as far as the shingle heap we heard the piercing screams of the wretched prisoner mingling with the curses of the woman. He was praying for mercy, but he might have prayed to a flint with as much hope of obtaining what he asked for. This continued for perhaps ten minutes. The shrieks of the wretch were terrible as they reached us down in the hollow, while the curses of the woman were even louder, shriller, and more fierce. "George," said one of the men, "we don't want murder, and murder is what it will come to if it ain't stopped. There's been quite enough done."

And we turned back and walked quickly to the tree, where the prisoner had been bound. The shirt had been torn from his back down to the waist, where it hung in ribbons. The flesh of the miserable wretch, from the nape of his neck downwards, had received an awful mutilation. The flesh was of a dark-livid colour, with purple streaks and knots raised by the dreadful blows inflicted. There was some but not much blood. The punishment might have been less terrible had more flowed. When we came up the man's head had fallen back towards his right shoulder. He was insensible, and his cries had ceased. The woman, exhausted and prostrate through her fury, was staggering, thong still in hand, towards a piece of dead wood to rest on.

"George," she said, as we came up. "I think I have done for him. Let him down; He's had quite enough for the present."

I thought that he had had too much for the present, and quite enough to serve him for a long life-time, for when the thongs which bound him had been cut, and the chain round his body had been unhooked, the body fell heavily to the ground with a thud. A flour-sack was thrown over the raw flesh of the back to keep away the blow-flies, and then the men, asking me to go with them, went to dinner. During the whole of the sitting there were not a dozen words spoken, and these did not relate to what had happened. After the meal was over, the husband, with myself, went to see whether the miserable sinner was dead or living. He was alive and just conscious. He asked for water in a faint voice, and this I brought him in a pannikin, and placed it to his mouth, the whole of which he drank and then instantly fell back in a swoon. By my direction some buckets of water were brought and poured over the lacerated and quivering flesh, to allay the burning agony. Then a blanket was brought and covered over the body. No work was done that day, and we went to rest about sundown. In the morning, on going to the spot, the wretched sufferer was not there. He had, as we supposed, crawled away, but whether none took the trouble to find out. Three weeks after the body of a man was discovered dead at a water-hole three miles distance from the splitters' camping-ground. Much of the flesh had been eaten away by wild dogs, and none knew who the man was or how he came by so terrible a death. There were some—myself among the others—who ventured to make a guess.

The other case of Lynching which I was witness of assumed a ludicrous feature, which I may tell in its place.

REMINISCENCES IN THE LIFE OF A COLONIAL JOURNALIST.*

No. VII.

[By "SNYDER."]

THE OUTBREAK OF THE VICTORIAN GOLD-FIELDS.

THE history of the Victorian goldfields, from their first outbreak up to the period of their fullest development and subsequent decline, has been written from many points of view. They have been described geologically, commercially, morally and socially. They have been commented on from a clergyman's point of view, from a digger's point of view, from a Government point of view. One writer has told us how the diggings have

tended to populate the colony with a bold, enterprising, and courageous race of men. Another has deplored that the discovery of such auriferous lands was ever made, as having brought the refuse of many nationalities together, leading to crime and deeds of violence, outrage, disorder, riot, and many other evils. I am neither philosopher nor moralist, but I know this much: I know that the discovery led to a poor colony becoming a rich one, and ultimately a great one; and I also know, that before the old regime of colonial life was broken up, and another made to take its place, a reign of disorder prevailed, such as none but the living witnesses of the time can picture to themselves.

Gold in Victoria was discovered as early as April, 1850, at Burnbank; some two months later, at Mount Alexander; in July, at Buninyong; and at Ballarat, in September, all in the same year.

No sooner had the news extended to the neighbouring colonies than men in thousands landed on the shores of Victoria, convicts from Tasmania, ex-convicts from New South Wales, free men from Southern and Western Australia, and settlers from New Zealand. Every day brought down fresh accounts of new discoveries, which further helped to heighten the general excitement to a pitch that men ran wild through the thoroughfares proclaiming to each other the vast riches which were awaiting them on one or other of the new fields. Geelong, the nearest town to the western goldfields, and the districts surrounding it, were deserted by all the male dwellers. Men had given up their ordinary pursuits. Shepherds left their flocks to the prey of the wild dogs. Bullock drivers unyoked their teams, and, leaving their wool-laden drays on the road, procured a pick or shovel and a tin dish, and made for the nearest diggings, or for ground which for the hour was in highest favour. Lawyers forsook their offices, leaving clients with suits pending over them; clergymen their congregations. Captains moored their vessels to the wharves or anchored them in the offing, for their crews had deserted them; the police threw up their situations; as did clerks, storemen, and overlookers. Custom-house and Government officers threw up their appointments; tradesmen were compelled to mind their own shops, their employees having left them without note or warning. Contractors threw down their tools and went off; contractors followed in their wake, leaving large jobs unfinished. Doctors left their patients, while patients, under the gold

fever, pronounced themselves sufficiently recovered to make for the goldfields. There were no men left to reap the crops or prepare the soil for the succeeding harvest; and great fears were felt of a coming famine. For while men, first in hundreds and later still in thousands, were pouring in, the ships that brought them brought not the provisions and necessaries which were to provide for the support of the comers.

Happily there was no famine; but crime in its most hideous form raised its hands to stay, to rob, to plunder and devastate. Scenes of the most deplorable character were of every day and every night and all night occurrence. Bands of marauders prowled through the diggings, robbing tents, stealing the gold from the rich holes, and committing outrages upon persons and property with the greatest impunity. Law was prostrate. Crime triumphant. Murders were committed with the most atrocious surroundings, while to this hour the perpetrators of them have not been discovered. One crime which might among such lawless bands have been supposed to be common, did not come to the front. There was, so far as my memory serves me, during the first three years of the gold discoveries, no outrages committed on respectable women, and not a few of these were living isolated by themselves, earning large piles of money in taking in washing at the small charge of 15s a dozen, counting a pair of socks as two articles.

With all the extravagance of those days, very few pairs of socks were given out to goldfields laundresses. One prostitute, I recollect well, and remember it now with a feeling akin to horror, had her head literally battered in by a Californian gold-digger. He had committed the murder with a leather belt filled with gold dust, which he wore round his waist. The violence used caused the belt to burst open, and the wretched woman's face and upper portion of her body, when discovered, was covered with flakes and small pieces of gold. The ruffian was soon afterwards seized and chained to a tree, until he could be given up to the authorities, but he escaped during the night and was no more heard of. Within three hours after the murder the body of the wretched woman, which lay in the tent she had occupied in life, had been divested of the gold, which had become strewed over and around her in the process of the wretched woman being battered to death.

Then came the crowding of the town of Geelong and the city of Melbourne. House rent first doubled, then trebled, then quadrupled itself. At length there was scarcely a price named, however high,

for the meanest tenement, that people were not ready to give. Hotels, lodging-houses, public-houses, private boarding establishments were packed from floor to ceiling. Men bought tents and lived in them in the greatest discomfort. When there was not a tent for sale, canvas was purchased, and the seams roughly sewn together were made to serve the purpose of shelter. When no more canvas was in the market, calico and blankets were used as a makeshift. Men slept under trees, or at the lee side of slaughter-houses or woolsheds, or other rough buildings in the distant suburbs.

Provisions rose to fabulous prices on the diggings,—eggs were fifteen shillings a dozen; flour, two shillings a pound; the four-pound loaf, weighing two pounds and a-half, four shillings; tea, eight shillings a pound; sugar, three shillings; a bottle of square gin, a pound; brandy (rank poison), twenty-five shillings. One sheep squatter, whose run was within five miles of Golden Point, Ballarat, had cultivated two acres of cabbages, for winter feed for his cows. He turned them to better account, for he sold the whole at one shilling and twopence a head all round, the purchaser to take them away as he wanted them, and to pay for them as they were taken away. I forget now how much money this squatter realised out of his two acres of coarse cabbages, but, I think, he told me between four and five hundred pounds. Carriage to the Ballarat diggings was, at the outset, ten pounds a ton, then twenty, then forty, ascending rapidly to fifty, sixty, until it eventually reach one hundred pounds per ton, at which figure I have seen a merchant engage a score of drays—humble and submissive in manner, for fear of offending the dray owners. The distance between Geelong to the Ballarat township, be it known, was just fifty-seven miles. But then the roads!

I have seen, where a creek had to be crossed, as many as two hundred drays brought to a sudden stoppage. The bullock-drivers would then help each other by coupling ten or twelve, and even twenty, pairs of bullocks to get a dray-load of goods drawn through four feet of thick mud, and up a steep bank in front of it. Between the small townships known as Meredith and Buninyong, a distance somewhere about fourteen miles, a mounted stable reported to the authorities three hundred that he had counted nearly three hundred dead and putrifying bullocks and horses, besides over thirty drays, laden and unladen, the wheels of which were broken or the shafts in splinters. Some of the cattle had died from exhaustion, while others had been put out of their misery by the summary process of a rifle-bullet sent through the skull, or a sheath knife drawn across the throat. On the plains, where there was little or no timber, the debris of broken drays served to feed the camp fires. It was a wild sight when one reached the diggings.

At night hundreds of fires illuminated the ground. Before turning in at night, the diggers would discharge their revolvers and rifles, either to fresh load and cap them, or, as a caution to prowlers and robbers, that a bullet would be employed to resist attacks. Then the inside of tents formed of calico and canvas, were lighted up and the shadows of men and women preparing to take their night's sleep would be thrown on the transparent walls, so that the beholder could see from without all that was passing within. Gradually the night fires would cease to flame, and assume a subdued red glare. After a little longer they would smoulder out, and all would be pitchy dark. Now was the time when "fossickers" emerged from their concealment to rob the rich claims, to make a raid upon such tents as they deemed the most defenceless, and to commit robbery only too often attended with