

west, that is across the arid deserts and wastes of the Australian continent, in its blast striking Victoria from its north-western to its eastern limits, and carrying destruction with it over plain, and forest, and bushland. With the change in the direction of the wind the whole firmament became overcast by a haze which prevented the largest objects being seen beyond a few hundred yards. Through the haze the sun shone blood-red, and the air thickened, causing men's breath who were exposed to it to choke in the throat. Then, as the morning advanced, the hot sulphurous air thickened and darkened, and men in their homes or out and a-foot feared as for a great calamity about to fall upon them. Sheep ceased to feed, and "coiled" hours before their time. Cattle sought shelter from the blast at the lee-side of trees, while horses ran in circles round their paddocks leaping fences, or, thrown back in the attempt, lay with injured limbs on the ground. It was on this day I had commenced a journey on horseback from a settlement known by the name of Camperdown. It was when I had reached the edge of the large salt Corangamite Lake that I halted my horse for the purpose of trying whether, through the dense, murky gloom, I could see some form of life—some shepherd with his flock, or some stock-rider rounding up a mob of cattle. The gloom was so intense and the silence so profound that I would have given much for someone to speak to. Men face an unknown danger more bravely in company. It is when there is a fear of some impending evil, and we know not what it may be, or from what direction it may come, that man seeks for the companionship of his fellow-men. From the margin of the lake where I had reined in my horse, the scene I could only compare to a grand painting I once saw in the

National Gallery, upon the canvas of which the artist, in the fulness of his rich conception, had painted "The Last Day." Those who have hung in silent admiration over this great work will be able to form for themselves some idea of the awful isolation I felt. Milton's words of "darkness visible," in his description of Pandemonium hits the scene in two words, which I would be unable to pourtray in many, and then only very inadequately. It was while contemplating indications so ominous that I turned my eye in the direction from which I had come, when I saw dense volumes of smoke in huge folds curling upwards, while below the smoke there was a long line of flame. Then I knew the plain was on fire, and that it would soon be upon me. My spurs went into the horse's flanks, and I was galloping onwards, when direct in front of me I saw another such dense volume of smoke with a similar line of flame as that I was hastening to escape from. To allow the flame to reach me which was from behind, or to dash through that in front, meant death by fire or suffocation to both myself and horse. Suddenly halting, I, after a few moments' reflection, galloped down to the edge of the Corangamite Lake, and rode in as far as where the water reached the horse's belly. Here I waited and looked on at the two coming fires. In ten minutes they met, and mingled smoke and flames each with the other. The flames, for want of dry grass and bush to feed upon, after a short battle, died out; but as far as the smoke would allow the eye to see, the plain was smouldering on fire. To gallop a horse over it would have been impossible, as the live ash from the burnt grass would have risen in clouds, and nothing human could have lived through it. Guiding my horse to the edge of the lake, I waited for two long hours, by which time the fire had ceased to smoulder; although I was well aware, by previous experiences, that the ground would be intensely hot and that here and there on the line of my travel there would be patches of thick scrub still in flames, to avoid which I should have to go far out of my way. There was no alternative. My throat was dry and parched with thirst, and my horse was suffering greatly. He was covered with foam and sweat, while trembling in body and limb. So mounting, I rode on at a quick canter over a blackened country, where I saw patches of fire to the right, to the left, and in front of me. I had ridden perhaps eight miles, when I suddenly came upon a piteous sight. It was that of a man and woman and several children

standing round a ruined homestead. The fire had caught their slab dwelling first, and in less than ten minutes it was burned to the ground. Then next went the out-buildings, the fence, and the crops that were stored for the market. The inmates had barely escaped with their lives, and that only by running to a water-hole, where they plunged in neck deep, and awaiting the sloop of the fire, held their heads and those of their children under until it had passed over. It was a scene of utter misery and desolation. Three families, each with young children, had not been able to save anything wherewith to cover or feed themselves. In all this calamity, so fearful to witness, I still felt a relief to think I was not now solitary by myself on the burnt and burning plains. It was a relief to feel I was in company with those I could speak to. To have offered consolation and to have spoken soft words would have been mere mockery. Beyond the suppressed sobs of the females no sound came from anyone. The men spoke never a word, and the children huddled together clinging to their mothers. Within an hour after I arrived on the ground, my horse stretched out his fore legs, gave a gasp, turned on his side, and fell dead through sheer exhaustion.

All that long afternoon, and all through that still longer night, I sat with these wretched people. Sleep there was none; nor was there food, could we have partaken of it. There was water, thick and muddy and tepid, in the water-hole, which we could only get at by going on our knees, and baling up with the hand. We watched the changing features of the red sky, which gave the reflection of distant bush fires. The opened country which surrounded us, each time a slight breeze crossed over, would lighten up wherever the fire still smouldered in the low scrub. The next morning, at daylight, I took my departure in company with one of the men who went to seek help, and to borrow a horse and dray to convey the women and children into Geelong. That afternoon we reached a small settlement known then, as I think now, by the name of Winchelsea. That township had escaped conflagration. Here I borrowed a horse, and rode homewards through a desolated country; passing homesteads still burning in their debris; passing the stands of corn and hay stacks devoured by the flames; passing the carcasses of dead cattle, horses, and swine; in every direction I saw nothing but misery and ruin, while as yet no assistance had come to hand. When I arrived at Geelong I was in time to be at a public meeting held at Mac's Hotel. It was crowded with the townsfolk. And it was here I heard the awful amount of distress caused by the fires so widespread over the country. A clergyman addressed the meeting in such pathetic terms that all who listened to the eloquent words which dropped from his lips were deeply affected, as only were very hard hearts indeed would not have been. He detailed the losses of poor families; he shewed how

relief must be given if men with their wives and children were not to perish. Aid must be given—aid in money and in kind. And this learned and eloquent preacher—for he was both—headed the list with a donation of £5, although it was well known he had a large share in a magnificent well-stocked station that had escaped all loss; and that besides beyond this he was a large landed proprietor. Well, his donation of £5 or guineas, for one of either these paltry sums it was, was seconded by one of £50 from a comparatively humble tradesman. The table was rushed by men to put down their names to subscriptions for the relief of the sufferers. Many hundreds of pounds were subscribed, and that afternoon and throughout the night, and the next day, good men and woman were travelling by drays laden with linen, and clothes, and bedding, and provisions, and money; and many were the good, and generous, and kindly acts done. Some families who had lost their homesteads and all that they contained refused assistance, because they had friends and some small means to begin the world with again, while so many there were who had neither money, nor friends, nor land, excepting what they held as tenants. It was a beautiful thing, the display of so much generosity, self-denial, patience, and long-suffering under so terrible a calamity. For several days after the fire accounts

continued to pour in from sufferers. Women came down to town with the nails dropping from their fingers, with singed hair, with burnt feet, and with severe wounds. Few lives were lost—perhaps not more than six or eight; but severe accidents were numerous. Three females with their children had run to a water hole to escape the flames, and while there two large affrighted kangaroos came down to the bank and leaping into the pool, struck one of the women so severely that several of her ribs were broken. Of five men who had run to a narrow creek and laid themselves down in the stream two were bitten by snakes, which swarmed the banks seeking safety at the edge of the water. One of these men died in horrible agony within two hours, but the other, beyond the pain of the bite and some slight inflammation, escaped unhurt. The snake that had bitten him was not venomous.

Within six months of the events I have spoken of anyone passing over the area of country over which the fire raged would have scarce seen a trace remaining of what had been so great a calamity. In the Cape Otway ranges many miles of impenetrable country was cleared by a fire which had not completely burned itself out at the end of three months. The aggregate of the losses sustained could never be calculated, but those direct and indirect—that is the burning of the enormous areas of grass land could not be estimated at a less sum than half-a-million sterling.

I only know of one humorous feature connected with Black Thursday. A tradesman who dealt in musical instruments told me that when he felt the hot blast of the wind he removed everything from his shop windows. "Well," says this tradesman, in telling his story, "I had taken everything out, as I had thought, from a Jew's harp to a tambourine. How it was I don't exactly know, but on the line running across the window I had left a common flute hanging by the key. Having locked my shop door, I went and laid down on the bare boards of my bedroom, while my wife, who was more heat proof than myself, sponged my face with water, and at moderate intervals moistened my throat with diluted claret. It was about three in the afternoon, I was awakened from a doze I had fallen into by a knocking at the shop door. On opening it, a sailor looking fellow, with a countenance the colour of very dark ebony, said, 'I say, mate, what do you want for that flute?' I said, 'It's seven-and-six-pence; but don't on any account come into the shop, for I am not doing business. If the sun maintains its present heat up to six o'clock the world will have been concluded. If, however, you insist upon possessing that instrument, hand me the money and the flute is yours.' 'Well, mate,' he says, 'I don't want to come in, and you needn't be afraid I'm come to rob you. Here's the money, and let's have the music.' I gave him the flute, which the intense heat had so curled up that the letter S was something more than a straight line in comparison. Five minutes after the man had gone there was a second knock at my door, and it was the same man returned. 'I say, mate,' he said, 'I can't bully any music out of this. A hurricane of wind wouldn't get a sound out of it.' My friend I said, 'you have bought that flute against my wish, and to the disturbance of my peace and quiet. Try and get that flute straightened out, when it will be equal for any solo you can play. If you can't get it straightened out, bring it back when the wind is from the south and you shall have your money returned, but not just now.' The hot blast at this time was raging furiously. There was not a soul on the street, and it was only with pain that we could breathe. My wife was in the act of sponging my hands and feet when a third knock was heard at the door. I answered it, and there was the same man with the same flute, crooked enough to have seized a dog by the collar." 'I say, mate,' says the sailor, 'the music won't come up this tube; I would like if you would change it for some beer and some fish-hooks.' Then I told the man I dealt in neither. I asked him whether he felt that the heat oppressed him. He said no, not in the least; he liked it, because it was about the temperature he had been accustomed to for the matter of the last ten years. He was a fireman on a steamer. Anything below the present heat made him catch cold. I entreated the man, as he held the door ajar, that he would call to-morrow. He said he would, but he never did."

Four days after "Black Thursday" the Skerne, brig, coal laden, arrived from Sydney. The captain reported that on the 6th of February, the day of the great hot wind, and when one hundred miles from shore numerous land birds fell dead on the deck of his vessel, while his sails, masts, and rigging were covered with fine ashes.

(To be continued).

REMINISCENCES IN THE LIFE OF A COLONIAL JOURNALIST.

BY SNYDER.

NO. XIV.

THE EUREKA MURDERS AND RIOTS.

It was not long after the terrible occurrence of Black Thursday that a great agitation was set on foot, which at one time threatened the dismemberment of the Australian colonies from the mother country. At no time before and at no time since had or have I seen a people so embittered against the Home authorities—the feeling indicating an expressed dislike for the Queen of England. The cause was this:—The Secretary of State for the Colonies persisted in his intention of landing convicts on the shores of New South Wales, Port Phillip, and Van Diemen's Land. A great anti-transportation league of the four Australian Colonies was formed in Tasmania, and was met with the most enthusiastic responses by the other three colonies—Port Phillip, which had a deep and special interest in the matter, from its proximity to Van Diemen's Land, taking the initiative by appointing a delegate to proceed to England to represent the wrong being done to the colonists, and to demand the redress of an intolerable grievance. But now it so happened that no sooner had the appointed delegate sailed for England than the great—indeed the greatest event of the present century—happened. This was the discovery of the goldfields. People who gave the subject ever so little reflection could not fail to see, on the goldfields' outbreak, the speedy cessation of transportation to the whole of the eastern colonies of the Australian group, however obstinate and infatuated Earl Grey might continue to be for a season. The interest in the subject subsided very rapidly throughout the colonial settlements, the anti-transportation movement having been superseded by the universal movement towards the goldfields. One of the colonial journals of the period announced this fact in a humorous parody on the "Death and Burial of Cock Robin," entitled "The Death and Burial of the League," the commencement of which was as follows:—

"Who killed the League?"
"I," said the digger,
"With spade and with cradle
I killed the League."

But the insane policy of Earl Grey had nearly lost England her valuable Australian possessions. Notwithstanding the repeated remonstrances and protests of a large majority of the reputable portion of the inhabitants of Tasmania, Earl Grey would not forego his determination. This conduct not only awakened a spirit of stubborn resistance to the continuance of such a monstrous infliction, but engaged the sympathies and aroused the ire of all the colonies. And it was for this reason:—It was quite apparent that Van Diemen's Land was regarded by Earl Grey as a thoroughfare through which successive importations of convicts from the United Kingdom might be passed on to the other colonies of Port Phillip, New South Wales, and South Australia. In short the transported villany of Van Diemen's Land was even then rapidly spreading itself over these fair and fertile lands. Port Phillip at that time was overrun with conditionally pardoned convicts of the worst type forwarded from Tasmania. And this at the time when the changes wrought by the gold discovery were so extensive and thorough that words can scarcely paint what these were. Murderers, burglars, forgers, horse stealers, violators of women and children, bushrangers, highwaymen, men convicted for unnatural offences, London thieves, swell-mobsmen, pickpockets, body-snatchers formed a portion of the community of a land which teemed with the rich yields of our goldfields. These men were in no way separated, nor were they separable from the respectable portion of the people. The tent of the clerk, the storeman, and the mechanic would be