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THE GULLY OF BLUEMANSDYKE

A TRUE COLONIAL STORY

Broadhurst's store was closed, but the little back room looked very comfortable that night. The fire cast a ruddy glow on ceiling and walls, reflecting itself cheerily on the polished flasks and shot-guns which adorned them. Yet a gloom rested on the two men who sat at either side of the hearth, which neither the fire nor the black bottle upon the table could alleviate.

"Twelve o'clock," said old Tom, the storeman glancing up at the wooden timepiece which had come out with him in '42. "It's a queer thing, George, they haven't come."

"It's a dirty night," said his companion, reaching out his arm for a plug of tobacco. "The Wawirra's in flood, maybe; or maybe their horses is broke down; or they've put it off, perhaps. Great Lord, how it thunders! Pass us over a coal, Tom."

He spoke in a tone which was meant to appear easy, but with

a painful thrill in it which was not lost upon his mate. He glanced uneasily at him from under his grizzled eyebrows.

"You think it's all right, George?" he said, after a pause.

"Think what's all right?"

"Why, that the lads are safe."

"Safe! Of course they're safe. What the devil is to harm them?"

"Oh, nothing; nothing, to be sure," said old Tom. "You see, George, since the old woman died, Maurice has been all to me; and it makes me kinder anxious. It's a week since they started from the mine, and you'd ha' thought they'd be here now. But it's nothing unusual, I s'pose; nothing at all. Just my darned folly."

"What's to harm them?" repeated George Hutton again, arguing to convince himself rather than his comrade. "It's a straight road from the diggin's to Rathurst, and then through the hills past Bluemansdyke, and over the Wawirra by the ford, and so down to Trafalgar by the bush track. There's nothin' deadly in all that, is there? My son Allan's as dear to me as Maurice can be to you, mate," he continued; "but they know the ford well, and there's no other bad place. They'll be here to-morrow night, certain."

"Please God they may!" said Broadhurst; and the two men lapsed into silence for some time, moodily staring into the glow of the fire, and pulling at their short clays.

It was indeed, as Hutton had said, a dirty night. The wind was howling down through the gorges of the western mountains, and

whirling and eddying among the streets of Trafalgar; whistling through the chinks in the rough wood cabins, and tearing away the frail shingles which formed the roofs. The streets were deserted, save for one or two stragglers from the drinking shanties, who wrapped their cloaks around them and staggered home through the wind and rain towards their own cabins.

The silence was broken by Broadhurst, who was evidently still ill at ease.

"Say, George," he said, "what's become of Josiah Mapleton?"

"Went to the diggin's."

"Ay; but he sent word he was coming back."

"But he never came."

"An' what's become of Jos Humphrey?" he resumed, after a pause.

"He went diggin', too."

"Well, did he come back?"

"Drop it, Broadhurst; drop it, I say," said Hutton, springing to his feet and pacing up and down the narrow room. "You're trying to make a coward of me! You know the men must have gone up country prospectin' or farmin', maybe. What is it to us where they went? You don't think I have a register of every man in the colony, as Inspector Burton has of the lags."

"Sit down, George, and listen," said old Tom. "There's something queer about that road; something I don't understand, and don't like. Maybe you remember how Maloney, the one-eyed scoundrel, made his money in the early mining days. He'd

a half-way drinking shanty on the main road up on a kind of bluff, where the Lena comes down from the hills. You've heard, George, how they found a sort of wooden slide from his little back room down to the river; an' how it came out that man after man had had his drink doctored, and been shot down that into eternity, like a bale of goods. No one will ever know how many were done away with there. *They* were all supposed to be farmin' and prospectin', and the like, till their bodies were picked out of the rapids. It's no use mincing matters, George; we'll have the troopers along to the diggin's if those lads don't turn up by to-morrow night."

"As you like, Tom," said Hutton.

"By the way, talking of Maloney – it's a strange thing," said Broadhurst, "that Jack Haldane swears he saw a man as like Maloney with ten years added to him as could be. It was in the bush on Monday morning. Chance, I suppose; but you'd hardly think there could be two pair of shoulders in the world carrying such villainous mugs on the top of them."

"Jack Haldane's a fool," growled Hutton, throwing open the door and peering anxiously out into the darkness, while the wind played with his long grizzled beard, and sent a train of glowing sparks from his pipe down the street.

"A terrible night!" he said, as he turned back towards the fire.

Yes, a wild, tempestuous night; a night for birds of darkness and for beasts of prey. A strange night for seven men to lie out in the gully at Bluemansdyke, with revolvers in their hands, and

the devil in their hearts.

The sun was rising after the storm. A thick, heavy steam reeked up from the saturated ground, and hung like a pall over the flourishing little town of Trafalgar. A bluish mist lay in wreaths over the wide track of bushland around, out of which the western mountains loomed like great islands in a sea of vapour.

Something was wrong in the town. The most casual glance would have detected that. There was a shouting and a hurrying of feet. Doors were slammed and rude windows thrown open. A trooper of police came clattering down with his carbine unslung. It was past the time for Joe Buchan's saw-mill to commence work, but the great wheel was motionless, for the hands had not appeared.

There was a surging, pushing crowd in the main street before old Tom Broadhurst's house, and a mighty clattering of tongues. "What was it?" demanded the new-comers, panting and breathless. "Broadhurst has shot his mate." "He has cut his own throat." "He has struck gold in the clay floor of his kitchen." "No; it was his son Maurice who had come home rich." "Who had not come back at all." "Whose horse had come back without him." At last the truth had come out; and there was the old sorrel horse in question whinnying and rubbing his neck against the familiar door of the stable, as if entreating entrance; while two haggard, grey-haired men held him by either bridle, and gazed blankly at his reeking sides.

"God help me," said old Tom Broadhurst; "it is as I feared!"

"Cheer up, mate," said Hutton, drawing his rough straw hat down over his brow. "There's hope yet."

A sympathetic and encouraging murmur ran through the crowd.

"Horse ran away, likely."

"Or been stolen."

"Or he's swum the Wawirra an' been washed off," suggested one Job's comforter.

"He ain't got no marks of bruising," said another, more hopeful.

"Rider fallen off drunk, maybe," said a bluff old sheep-farmer. "I kin remember," he continued, "coming into town 'bout this hour myself, with my head in my holster, an' thinking I was a six-chambered revolver – mighty drunk I was."

"Maurice had a good seat; he'd never be washed off."

"Not he."

"The horse has a weal on its off fore-quarter," remarked another, more observant than the rest.

"A blow from a whip, maybe."

"It would be a darned hard one."

"Where's Chicago Bill?" said someone; "he'll know."

Thus invoked, a strange, gaunt figure stepped out in front of the crowd. He was an extremely tall and powerful man, with the red shirt and high boots of a miner. The shirt was thrown open, showing the sinewy throat and massive chest. His face was seamed and scarred with many a conflict, both with Nature

and his brother man; yet beneath his ruffianly exterior there lay something of the quiet dignity of the gentleman. This man was a veteran gold-hunter; a real old Californian 'forty-niner, who had left the fields in disgust when private enterprise began to dwindle before the formation of huge incorporated companies with their ponderous machinery. But the red clay with the little shining points had become to him as the very breath of his nostrils, and he had come half-way round the world to seek it once again.

"Here's Chicago Bill," he said; "what is it?"

Bill was naturally regarded as an oracle, in virtue of his prowess and varied experience. Every eye was turned on him as Braxton, the young Irish trooper of constabulary, said, "What do you make of the horse, Bill?"

The Yankee was in no hurry to commit himself. He surveyed the animal for some time with his shrewd little grey eye. He bent and examined the girths; then he felt the mane carefully. He stooped once more and examined the hoofs and then the quarters. His eye rested on the blue wheal already mentioned. This seemed to put him on a scent, for he gave a long, low whistle, and proceeded at once to examine the hair on either side of the saddle. He saw something conclusive apparently, for, with a sidelong glance under his shaggy eyebrows at the two old men beside him, he turned and fell back among the crowd.

"Well, what d'ye think?" cried a dozen voices.

"A job for you," said Bill, looking up at the young Irish trooper.

"Why, what is it? What's become of young Broadhurst?"

"He's done what better men has done afore. He has sunk a shaft for gold and panned out a coffin."

"Speak out, man! what have you seen?" cried a husky voice.

"I've seen the graze of a bushranger's bullet on the horse's quarter, an' I've seen a drop of the rider's blood on the edge of the saddle – Here, hold the old man up, boys; don't let him drop. Give him a swig of brandy an' lead him inside. Say," he continued, in a whisper, gripping the trooper by the wrist, "mind, I'm in it. You an' I play this hand together. I'm dead on sich varmin. We'll do as they do in Nevada, strike while the iron is hot. Get any men you can together. I s'pose you're game to come yourself?"

"Yes, I'll come," said young Braxton, with a quiet smile.

The American looked at him approvingly. He had learned in his wanderings that an Irishman who grows quieter when deeply stirred is a very dangerous specimen of the genus *homo*.

"Good lad!" he muttered; and the two went down the street together towards the station-house, followed by half-a-dozen of the more resolute of the crowd.

One word before we proceed with our story, or our chronicle rather, as every word of it is based upon fact. The colonial trooper of fifteen or twenty years ago was a very different man from his representative of to-day. Not that I would imply any slur upon the courage of the latter; but for reckless dare-devilry and knight-errantry the old constabulary has never been equalled. The reason is a simple one. Men of gentle blood, younger sons and wild rakes

who had outrun the constable, were sent off to Australia with some wild idea of making their fortunes. On arriving they found Melbourne by no means the El Dorado they expected; they were unfit for any employment, their money was soon dissipated, and they unerringly gravitated into the mounted police. Thus a sort of colonial "Maison Rouge" became formed, where the lowest private had as much pride of birth and education as his officers. They were men who might have swayed the fate of empires, yet who squandered away their lives in many a lone wild fight with native and bushranger, where nothing but a mouldering blue-ragged skeleton was left to tell the tale.

It was a glorious sunset. The whole western sky was a blaze of flame, throwing a purple tint upon the mountains, and gilding the sombre edges of the great forest which spreads between Trafalgar and the river Wawirra. It stretched out, a primeval, unbroken wilderness, save at the one point where a rough track had been formed by the miners and their numerous camp-followers. This wound amid the great trunks in a zigzag direction, occasionally making a long detour to avoid some marshy hollow or especially dense clump of vegetation. Often it could be hardly discerned from the ground around save by the scattered hoof-marks and an occasional rut.

About fifteen miles from Trafalgar there stands a little knoll, well sheltered and overlooking the road. On this knoll a man was lying as the sun went down that Friday evening. He appeared to shun observation, for he had chosen that part in which the foliage

was thickest; yet he seemed decidedly at his ease, as he lolled upon his back with his pipe between his teeth, and a broad hat down over his face. It was a face that it was well to cover in the presence of so peaceful a scene – a face pitted with the scars of an immaterial smallpox. The forehead was broad and low; one eye had apparently been gouged out, leaving a ghastly cavity; the other was deep-set, cunning, and vindictive. The mouth was hard and cruel; a rough beard covered the chin. It was the cut of face which, seen in a lonely street, would instinctively make one shift the grasp of one's stick from the knob end to the ferrule – the face of a bold and unscrupulous man.

Some unpleasing thought seemed to occur to him, for he rose with a curse and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "A darned fine thing," he muttered, "that I should have to lie out like this! It was Barrett's fault the job wasn't a clean one, an' now he picks me out to get the swamp-fever. If he'd shot the horse as I did the man, we wouldn't need a watch on this side of the Wawirra. He always was a poor white-livered cuss. Well," he continued, picking up a gun which lay in the grass behind him, "there's no use my waiting longer; they wouldn't start during the night. Maybe the horse never got home, maybe they gave them up as drowned; anyhow it's another man's turn to-morrow, so I'll just give them five minutes and then make tracks." He sat down on the stump of a tree as he spoke and hummed the verse of a song. A sudden thought seemed to strike him, for he plunged his hand into his pocket, and after some searching extracted a pack of

playing cards wrapped in a piece of dirty brown paper. He gazed earnestly at their greasy faces for some time. Then he took a pin from his sleeve and pricked a small hole in the corner of each ace and knave. He chuckled as he shuffled them up, and replaced them in his pocket. "I'll have my share of the swag," he growled. "They're sharp, but they'll not spot that when the liquor is in them. By the Lord, here they are!"

He had sprung to his feet and was bending to the ground, holding his breath as he listened. To the unpractised ear all was as still as before – the hum of a passing insect, the chirp of a bird, the rustle of the leaves; but the bushranger rose with the air of a man who has satisfied himself. "Good-bye to Bluemansdyke," said he; "I reckon it will be too hot to hold us for a time. That thundering idiot! he's spoilt as nice a lay as ever was, an' risked our necks into the bargain. I'll see their number an' who they are, though," he continued; and, choosing a point where a rough thicket formed an effectual screen, he coiled himself up, and lay like some venomous snake, occasionally raising his head and peering between the trunks at the reddish streak which marked the Trafalgar Road.

There could be no question now as to the approach of a body of horsemen. By the time our friend was fairly ensconced in his hiding-place the sound of voices and the clatter of hoofs was distinctly audible, and in another moment a troop of mounted men came sweeping round the curve of the road. They were eleven all told, armed to the teeth, and evidently well on the

alert. Two rode in front with rifles unslung, leisurely scanning every bush which might shelter an enemy. The main body kept about fifty yards behind them, while a solitary horseman brought up the rear. The ranger scanned them narrowly as they passed. He seemed to recognise most of them. Some were his natural enemies the troopers; the majority were miners who had volunteered to get rid of an evil which affected their interests so closely. They were a fine bronzed set of men, with a deliberate air about them, as if they had come for a purpose and meant to attain it. As the last rider passed before his hiding-place the solitary watcher started and growled a curse in his beard. "I know his darned face," he said; "it's Bill Hanker, the man who got the drop on Long Nat Smeaton in Silver City in '53; what the thunder brought him here? I must be off by the back track, though, an' let the boys know." So saying, he picked up his gun, and with a scowl after the distant party, he crouched down and passed rapidly and silently out of sight into the very thickest part of the bush.

The expedition had started from Trafalgar on the afternoon of the same day that Maurice Broadhurst's horse, foam-flecked and frightened, had galloped up to the old stable-door. Burton, the inspector of constabulary, an energetic and able man, as all who knew him can testify, was in command. He had detached Braxton, the young Irishman, and Thompson, another trooper, as a vanguard. He himself rode with the main body, grey-whiskered and lean, but as straight in the back as when he and I built a shanty in '39 in what is now Burke Street, Melbourne. With him were

McGillivray, Foley, and Anson of the Trafalgar force, Hartley the sheep-farmer, Murdoch and Summerville, who had made their pile at the mines, and Dan Murphy, who was cleaned out when the clay of the "Orient" turned to gravel, and had been yearning for a solid square fight ever since. Chicago Bill formed the rear-guard, and the whole party presented an appearance which, though far from military, was decidedly warlike.

They camped out that night seventeen miles from Trafalgar, and next day pushed on as far as where the Stirling Road runs across. The third morning brought them to the northern bank of the Wawirra, which they forded. Here a council of war was held, for they were entering what they regarded as enemy's country. The bush track, though wild, was occasionally traversed both by shepherds and sportsmen. It would hardly be the home of a gang of desperate bushrangers. But beyond the Wawirra the great rugged range of the Tápu mountains towered up to the clouds, and across a wild spur of these the mining track passed up to Bluemansdyke. It was here they decided at the council that the scene of the late drama lay. The question now was what means were to be taken to attack the murderers; for that murder had been done no man doubted.

All were of one mind as to what the main line of action should be. To go for them straight, shoot as many as possible on sight, and hang the balance in Trafalgar: that was plain sailing. But how to get at them was the subject of much debate. The troopers were for pushing on at once, and trusting to Fortune to put the

rangers in their way. The miners proposed rather to gain some neighbouring peak, from which a good view of the country could be obtained, and some idea gained of their whereabouts. Chicago Bill took rather a gloomy view of things. "Nary one will we see," said he; "they've dusted out of the district 'fore this. They'd know the horse would go home, and likely as not they've had a watch on the road to warn them. I guess, boys, we'd best move on an' do our best." There was some discussion, but Chicago's opinion carried the day, and the expedition pushed on in a body.

After passing the second upland station the scenery becomes more and more grand and rugged. Great peaks two and three thousand feet high rose sheer up at each side of the narrow track. The heavy wind and rain of the storm had brought down much *débris*, and the road was almost impassable in places. They were frequently compelled to dismount and to lead the horses. "We haven't far now, boys," said the inspector cheerily, as they struggled on; and he pointed to a great dark cleft which yawned in front of them between two almost perpendicular cliffs. "They are there," he said, "or nowhere." A little higher the road became better and their progress was more rapid. A halt was called, guns were unslung, and their pistols loosened in their belts, for the great gully of Bluemansdyke – the wildest part of the whole Tápu range – was gaping before them. But not a thing was to be seen; all was as still as the grave. The horses were picketed in a quiet little ravine, and the whole party crept on on foot. The Southern sun glared down hot and clear on the yellow bracken and banks

of fern which lined the narrow winding track. Still not a sign of life. Then came a clear low whistle from the two advanced troopers, announcing that something had been discovered, and the main body hurried up. It was a spot for deeds of blood. On one side of the road there lowered a black gnarled precipice, on the other was the sullen mouth of the rugged gully. The road took a sharp turn at this spot. Just at the angle several large boulders were scattered, lining and overlooking the track. It was at this angle that a little bed of mud and trampled red clay betokened a recent struggle. There could be no question that they were at the scene of the murder of the two young miners. The outline of a horse could still be seen in the soft ground, and the prints of its hoofs as it kicked out in its death-agony were plainly marked. Behind one of the rocks were the tracks of several feet, and some pistol wadding was found in a tuft of ferns. The whole tragedy lay unclosed before them. Two men, careless in the pride of their youth and their strength, had swept round that fatal curve. Then a crash, a groan, a brutal laugh, the galloping of a frightened horse, and all was over.

What was to be done now? The rocks around were explored, but nothing fresh discovered. Some six days had elapsed, and the birds were apparently flown. The party separated and hunted about among the boulders. Then the American, who could follow a trail like a bloodhound, found tracks leading towards a rugged pile of rocks on the north side of the gully. In a crevice here the remains of three horses were found. Close to them the rim

of an old straw hat projected through the loose loam. Hartley, the sheep-farmer, sprang over to pick it up; he started back in the act of stooping, and said in an awe-struck whisper to his friend Murphy, "There's a head under it, Dan!" A few strokes of a spade disclosed a face familiar to most of the group – that of a poor travelling photographer well known in the colony by the *sobriquet* of "Stooping Johnny," who had disappeared some time before. It was now in an advanced stage of putrefaction. Close to him another body was discovered, and another beside that. In all, thirteen victims of these English Thugs were lying under the shadow of the great north wall of the Bluemansdyke gully. It was there, standing in silent awe round the remains of these poor fellows, hurried into eternity and buried like dogs, that the search-party registered a vow to sacrifice all interests and comforts for the space of one month to the single consideration of revenge. The inspector uncovered his grizzled head as he solemnly swore it, and his comrades followed his example. The bodies were then, with a brief prayer, consigned to a deeper grave, a rough cairn was erected over them, and the eleven men set forth upon their mission of stern justice.

Three weeks had passed – three weeks and two days. The sun was sinking over the great waste of bushland, unexplored and unknown, which stretches away from the eastern slope of the Tápu mountains. Save some eccentric sportsman or bold prospector, no colonist had ever ventured into that desolate land; yet on this autumn evening two men were standing in a little

glade in the very heart of it. They were engaged tying up their horses, and apparently making preparations for camping out for the night. Though haggard, unkempt, and worn, one still might recognise two of our former acquaintances – the young Irish trooper and the American Chicago Bill.

This was the last effort of the avenging party. They had traversed the mountain gorges, they had explored every gully and ravine, and now they had split into several small bands, and, having named a trysting-place, they were scouring the country in the hope of hitting upon some trace of the murderers. Foley and Anson had remained among the hills, Murdoch and Dan Murphy were exploring towards Rathurst, Summerville and the inspector had ascended along the Wawirra, while the others in three parties were wandering through the eastern bushland.

Both the trooper and the miner seemed dejected and weary. The one had set out with visions of glory, and hopes of a short cut to the coveted stripes which would put him above his fellows; the other had obeyed a rough wild sense of justice; and each was alike disappointed. The horses were picketed, and the men threw themselves heavily upon the ground. There was no need to light a fire; a few dampers and some rusty bacon were their whole provisions. Braxton produced them, and handed his share to his comrade. They ate their rough meal without a word. Braxton was the first to break the silence.

"We're playing our last card," he said.

"And a darned poor one at that," replied his comrade.

"Why, mate," he continued, "if we did knock up agin these all-fired varmin, ye don't suppose you and I would go for them? I guess I'd up an' shove for Trafalgar first."

Braxton smiled. Chicago's reckless courage was too well known in the colony for any words of his to throw a doubt upon it. Miners still tell how, during the first great rush in '52, a blustering ruffian, relying upon some similar remark of the pioneer's, had tried to establish a reputation by an unprovoked assault upon him; and the narrators then glide imperceptibly into an account of Bill's handsome conduct towards the widow – how he had given her his week's clean-up to start her in a drinking shanty. Braxton thought of this as he smiled at Chicago's remarks, and glanced at the massive limbs and weather-beaten face.

"We'd best see where we are before it grows darker," he said; and rising, he stacked his gun against the trunk of a blue gum-tree, and seizing some of the creepers which hung down from it, began rapidly and silently to ascend it.

"His soul's too big for his body," growled the American, as he watched the dark lithe figure standing out against the pale-blue evening sky.

"What d'ye see, Jack?" he shouted; for the trooper had reached the topmost branch by this time, and was taking a survey of the country.

"Bush, bush; nothing but bush," said the voice among the leaves. "Wait a bit, though; there's a kind of hill about three miles off away to the nor'-east. I see it above the trees right over there.

Not much good to us, though," he continued, after a pause, "for it seems a barren, stony sort of place."

Chicago paced about at the bottom of the tree.

"He seems an almighty long time prospectin' it," he muttered, after ten minutes had elapsed. "Ah, here he is!" and the trooper came swinging down and landed panting just in front of him.

"Why, what's come over him? What's the matter, Jack?"

Something was the matter. That was very evident. There was a light in Braxton's blue eyes, and a flush on the pale cheek.

"Bill," he said, putting his hand on his comrade's shoulder, "it's about time you made tracks for the settlements."

"What d'ye mean?" said Chicago.

"Why, I mean that the murderers are within a league of us, and that I intend going for them. There, don't be huffed, old man," he added; "of course I knew you were only joking. But they are there, Bill; I saw smoke on the top of that hill, and it wasn't good, honest smoke, mind you; it was dry-wood smoke, and meant to be hid. I thought it was mist at first; but no, it was smoke. I'll swear it. It could only be them: who else would camp on the summit of a desolate hill? We've got them, Bill; we have them as sure as Fate."

"Or they've got us," growled the American. "But here, lad, here's my glass; run up and have a look at them."

"It's too dark now," said Braxton; "we'll camp out to-night. No fear of them stirring. They're lying by there until the whole thing blows over, depend upon it; so we'll make sure of them in

the morning."

The miner looked plaintively up at the tree, and then down at his fourteen stone of solid muscle.

"I guess I must take your word for it," he grumbled; "but you are bushman enough to tell smoke from mist, and a dry-wood fire from an open one. We can't do anything to-night till we feel our way, so I allow we'd best water the horses an' have a good night's rest."

Braxton seemed to be of the same mind; so after a few minutes' preparation the two men wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and lay, two little dark spots, on the great green carpet of the primeval bush.

With the first grey light of dawn Chicago sat up and roused his comrade. A heavy mist bung over the bushland. They could hardly see the loom of the trees across the little glade. Their clothes glistened with the little shining beads of moisture. They brushed each other down, and squatted in bush fashion over their rough breakfast. The haze seemed to be lifting a little now; they could see fifty yards in every direction. The miner paced up and down in silence, ruminating over a plug of "Barrett's twist." Braxton sat on a fallen tree sponging and oiling his revolver. Suddenly a single beam of sunshine played over the great blue gum. It widened and spread, and then in a moment the mist melted away, and the yellow leaves glowed like flakes of copper in the glare of the morning sun. Braxton cheerily snapped the lock of the pistol, loaded it, and replaced it in his belt. Chicago

began to whistle, and stopped in the middle of his walk.

"Now, young un," he said, "here's the glass."

Braxton slung it round his neck, and ascended the tree as he had done the night before. It was child's-play to the trooper – a splendid climber, as I can testify; for I saw him two years later swarming up the topmost backstay of the *Hector* frigate in a gale of wind for a bet of a bottle of wine. He soon reached the summit, and shuffling along a naked branch two hundred feet from the ground, he gained a point where no leaves could obstruct his view. Here he sat straddle-legged; and, unslinging the glass, he proceeded to examine the hill, bush by bush and stone by stone.

An hour passed without his moving. Another had almost elapsed before he descended. His face was grave and thoughtful.

"Are they there?" was the eager query.

"Yes; they are there."

"How many?"

"I've only seen five; but there may be more. Wait till I think it out, Bill."

The miner gazed at him with all the reverence matter has towards mind. Thinking things out was not his strong point.

"Blamed if I can help you," he said apologetically. "It kinder don't come nat'ral to me to be plottin' and plannin'. Want o' eddication, likely. My father was allowed to be the hardest-headed man in the States. Judge Jeffers let on as how the old man wanted to hand in his checks; so he down an' put his head on the line when the first engine as ran from Vermont was

comin' up. They fined him a hundred dollars for upsettin' that 'ere locomotive; an' the old man got the cussedest headache as ever was."

Braxton hardly seemed to hear this family anecdote; he was deep in thought.

"Look here, old man," said he; "sit down by me on the trunk and listen to what I say. Remember that you are here as a volunteer, Bill – you've no call to come; now, I am here in the course of duty. Your name is known through the settlement; you were a marked man when I was in the nursery. Now, Bill, it's a big thing I am going to ask you. If you and I go in and take these men, it will be another feather in your cap, and in yours only. What do men know of Jack Braxton, the private of police? He'd hardly be mentioned in the matter. Now, I want to make my name this day. We'll have to secure these men by a surprise after dusk, and it will be as easy for one resolute man to do it as for two; perhaps easier, for there is less chance of detection. Bill, I want you to stay with the horses, and let me go alone."

Chicago sprang to his feet with a snarl of indignation, and paced up and down in front of the fallen trees. Then he seemed to master himself, for he sat down again.

"They'd chaw you up, lad," he said, putting his hand on Braxton's shoulder. "It wouldn't wash."

"Not they," said the trooper. "I'd take your pistol as well as my own, and I'd need a deal of chawing."

"My character would be ruined," said Bill.

"It's beyond the reach of calumny. You can afford to give me one fair chance."

Bill buried his face in his hands, and thought a little.

"Well, lad," he said, looking up, "I'll look after the horses."

Braxton wrung him by the hand. "There are few men would have done it, Bill; you are a friend worth having. Now, we'll spend our day as best we can, old man, and lie close till evening; for I won't start till an hour after dusk; so we have plenty of time on our hands."

The day passed slowly. The trooper lay among the mosses below the great blue gum in earnest thought. Once or twice he imagined he heard the subterranean chuckle and slap of the thigh which usually denoted amusement on the part of the miner; but on glancing up at that individual, the expression of his face was so solemn, not to say funereal, that it was evidently an illusion. They partook of their scanty dinner and supper cheerfully and with hearty appetites. The former listlessness had given place to briskness and activity, now that their object was in view. Chicago blossomed out into many strange experiences and racy reminiscences of Western life. The hours passed rapidly and cheerily. The trooper produced a venerable pack of cards from his holster and proposed euchre; but their gregariousness, and the general difficulty of distinguishing the king of clubs from the ace of hearts, exercised a depressing influence upon the players. Gradually the sun went down on the great wilderness. The shadow fell on the little glade, while the distant hill was still

tipped with gold; then that too became purplish, a star twinkled over the Tápu range, and night crept over the scene.

"Good-bye, old man," said Braxton. "I won't take my carbine; it would only be in the way. I can't thank you enough for letting me have this chance. If they wipe me out, Bill, you'll not lose sight of them, I know; and you'll say I died like a man. I've got no friends and no message, and nothing in the world but this pack of cards. Keep them, Bill; they were a fine pack in '51. If you see a smoke on the hill in the morning you'll know all's well, and you'll bring up the horses at once. If you don't, you'll ride to Fallen Pine, where we were to meet, – ride day and night, Bill, – tell Inspector Burton that you know where the rangers are, that Private Braxton is dead, and that he said he was to bring up his men, else he'd come back from the grave and lead them up himself. Do that, Bill. Good-bye."

A great quiet rested over the heart of that desolate woodland. The croak of a frog, the gurgle of a little streamlet half hidden in the long grass – no other sound. Then a wakeful jay gave a shrill chatter, another joined, and another; a bluefinch screamed; a wombat rushed past to gain its burrow. Something had disturbed them; yet all was apparently as peaceful as before. Had you been by the jay's nest, however, and peered downwards, you would have seen something gliding like a serpent through the brushwood, and caught a glimpse, perhaps, of a pale, resolute face, and the glint of a pocket-compass pointing north-by-east.

It was a long and weary night for Trooper Braxton. Any

moment he might come on an outpost of the rangers, so every step had to be taken slowly and with care. But he was an experienced woodman, and hardly a twig snapped as he crawled along. A morass barred his progress, and he was compelled to make a long detour. Then he found himself in thick brushwood, and once more had to go out of his way. It was very dark here in the depth of the forest. There was a heavy smell, and a dense steam laden with miasma rose from the ground. In the dim light he saw strange creeping things around him. A bushmaster writhed across the path in front of him, a cold, dank lizard crawled over his hand as he crouched down; but the trooper thought only of the human reptiles in front, and made steadily for his goal. Once he seemed to be pursued by some animal; he heard a creaking behind him, but it ceased when he stopped and listened, so he continued his way.

It was when he reached the base of the hill which he had seen from the distance that the real difficulty of his undertaking began. It was almost conical in shape, and very steep. The sides were covered with loose stones and an occasional large boulder. One false step here would send a shower of these tell-tale fragments clattering down the hill. The trooper stripped off his high leather boots and turned up his trousers; then he began cautiously to climb, cowering down behind every boulder.

There was a little patch of light far away on the horizon, a very little grey patch, but it caused the figure of a man who was moving upon the crest of the hill to loom out dim and

large. He was a sentry apparently, for he carried a gun under his arm. The top of the hill was formed by a little plateau about a hundred yards in circumference. Along the edge of this the man was pacing, occasionally stopping to peer down into the great dusky sea beneath him. From this raised edge the plateau curved down from every side, so as to form a crater-like depression. In the centre of this hollow stood a large white tent. Several horses were picketed around it, and the ground was littered with bundles of dried grass and harness. You could see these details now from the edge of the plateau, for the grey patch in the east had become white, and was getting longer and wider. You could see the sentry's face, too, as he paced round and round. A handsome, weak-minded face, with more of the fool than the devil impressed on it. He seemed cheerful, for the birds were beginning to sing, and their thousand voices rose from the bush below. He forgot the forged note, I think, and the dreary voyage, and the wild escape, and the dark gully away beyond the Tápu range; for his eye glistened, and he hummed a quaint little Yorkshire country air. He was back again in the West Riding village, and the rough boulder in front shaped itself into the hill behind which Nelly lived before he broke her heart, and he saw the ivied church that crowned it. He would have seen something else had he looked again – something which was not in his picture: a white passionless face which glared at him over the boulder, as he turned upon his heel, still singing, and unconscious that the bloodhounds of justice were close at his heels.

The trooper's time for action had come. He had reached the last boulder; nothing lay between the plateau and himself but a few loose stones. He could hear the song of the sentry dying away in the distance; he drew his regulation sword, and, with his Adams in his left, he rose and sprang like a tiger over the ridge and down into the hollow.

The sentry was startled from his dream of the past by a clatter and a rattling of stones. He sprang round and cocked his gun. No wonder that he gasped, and that a change passed over his bronzed face. A painter would need a dash of ultramarine in his flesh-tints to represent it now. No wonder, I say; for that dark active figure with the bare feet and the brass buttons meant disgrace and the gallows to him. He saw him spring across to the tent; he saw the gleam of a sword, and heard a crash as the tent-pole was severed, and the canvas came down with a run upon the heads of the sleepers. And then above oaths and shouts he heard a mellow Irish voice – "I've twelve shots in my hands. I have ye, every mother's son. Up with your arms! up, I say, before there is blood upon my soul. One move, and ye stand before the throne." Braxton had stooped and parted the doorway of the fallen tent, and was now standing over six ruffians who occupied it. They lay as they had wakened, but with their hands above their heads, for there was no resisting that quiet voice, backed up by the two black muzzles. They imagined they were surrounded and hopelessly outmatched. Not one of them dreamed that the whole attacking force stood before them. It was the sentry who first began to

realise the true state of the case. There was no sound or sign of any reinforcement. He looked to see that the cap was pressed well down on the nipple, and crept towards the tent. He was a good shot, as many a keeper on Braidagarth and the Yorkshire fells could testify. He raised his gun to his shoulder. Braxton heard the click, but dared not remove his eye or his weapon from his six prisoners. The sentry looked along the sights. He knew his life depended upon that shot. There was more of the devil than the fool in his face now. He paused a moment to make sure of his aim, and then came a crash and the thud of a falling body. Braxton was still standing over the prisoners, but the sentry's gun was unfired, and he himself was writhing on the ground with a bullet through his lungs. "Ye see," said Chicago, as he rose from behind a rock with his gun still smoking in his hand, "it seemed a powerful mean thing to leave you, Jack; so I thought as I'd kinder drop around promiscus, and wade in if needed, which I was, as you can't deny. No, ye don't," he added, as the sentry stretched out his hand to grasp his fallen gun; "leave the wepin alone, young man; it ain't in your way as it lies there."

"I'm a dead man!" groaned the ranger.

"Then lie quiet like a respectable corpse," said the miner, "an' don't go a-squirmin' towards yer gun. That's ornary uneddicated conduct."

"Come here, Bill," cried Braxton, "and bring the ropes those horses are picketed with. Now," he continued, as the American, having abstracted the sentry's gun, appeared with an armful of

ropes, "you tie these fellows up, and I'll kill any man who moves."

"A pleasant division of labour, eh, old Blatherskite," said Chicago, playfully tapping the one-eyed villain Maloney on the head. "Come on; the ugliest first!" So saying, he began upon him and fastened him securely.

One after another the rangers were tied up; all except the wounded man, who was too helpless to need securing. Then Chicago went down and brought up the horses, while Braxton remained on guard; and by mid-day the cavalcade was in full march through the forest *en route* for Fallen Pine, the rendezvous of the search-party. The wounded man was tied on to a horse in front, the other rangers followed on foot for safety, while the trooper and Chicago brought up the rear.

There was a sad assemblage at Fallen Pine. One by one they had dropped in, tanned with the sun, torn by briers, weakened by the poisonous miasma of the marshlands, all with the same tale of privation and failure. Summerville and the inspector had fallen in with blacks above the upper ford, and had barely escaped with their lives. Troopers Foley and Anson were well, though somewhat gaunt from privation. Hartley had lost his horse from the bite of a bushmaster. Murdoch and Murphy had scoured the bush as far as Rathurst, but without success. All were dejected and weary. They only waited the arrival of two of their number to set out on their return to Trafalgar.

It was mid-day, and the sun was beating down with a pitiless glare on the little clearing. The men were lying about on the

shady side of the trunks, some smoking, some with their hats over their faces and half asleep. The horses were tethered here and there, looking as listless as their masters. Only the inspector's old charger seemed superior to the weather – a shrewd, *blasé* old horse, that had seen the world, and was nearly as deeply versed in woodcraft as his master. As Chicago said, "Short of climbin' a tree, there weren't nothin' that horse couldn't do; an' it would make a darned good try at that if it was pushed." Old "Sawback" seemed ill at ease this afternoon. Twice he had pricked up his ears, and once he had raised his head as if to neigh, but paused before committing himself. The inspector looked at him curiously and put his meerschaum back into its case. Meerschaums were always a weakness of poor Jim Burton's. "Demme it, sir," I have heard him say, "a gentleman is known by his pipe. When he comes down in the world his pipe has most vitality." He put the case inside his uniform and went over to the horse. The ears were still twitching.

"He hears something," said the inspector. "By Jove, so do I! Here, boys, jump up; there's a body of men coming!" Every man sprang to his horse's head. "I hear hoofs, and I hear the tramp of men on foot. They must be a large party. They're heading straight for us. Get under cover, boys, and have your guns loose." The men wheeled right and left, and in a very few moments the glade was deserted. Only the brown barrel of a gun here and there among the long grass and the ferns showed where they were crouching. "Steady, boys!" said Burton; "if they are

enemies, don't fire till I give the word. Then one by one aim low, and let the smoke clear. Rangers, by Jove!" he added, as a horseman broke into the clearing some way down, with his head hanging down over his horse's neck. "More," he growled, as several men emerged from the bush at the same point. "By the living powers, they are taken! I see the ropes. Hurrah!" And next moment Braxton and Chicago were mobbed by nine shouting, dancing men, who pulled them and tugged at them, and slapped them on the back, and dragged them about in such a way, that Maloney whispered with a scowl —

"If we'd had the grit to do as much, we'd have been free men this day!"

And now our story is nearly done. We have chronicled a fact which we think is worthy of a wider circulation than the colonial drinking-bar and the sheep-farmer's fireside, for Trooper Braxton and his capture of the Bluemansdyke murderers have long been household words among our brothers in the England of the Southern seas.

We need not detail that joyful ride to Trafalgar, nor the welcome, nor the attempt at lynching; nor how Maloney, the arch criminal, turned Queen's evidence, and so writhed away from the gallows. All that may be read in the colonial press more graphically than I can tell it. My friend Jack Braxton is an officer now, as his father was before him, and still in the Trafalgar force. Bill I saw last in '61, when he came over to London in charge of the barque of the *Wellingtonia* for the International Exhibition.

He is laying on flesh, I fear, since he took to sheep-farming; for he was barely brought up by seventeen stone, and his fighting weight used to be fourteen; but he looks well and hearty. Maloney was lynched in Placerville – at least so I heard. I had a letter last mail from the old inspector; he has left the police, and has a farm at Rathurst. I think, stout-hearted as he is, he must give a little bit of a shudder when he rides down to Trafalgar for the Thursday market, and comes round that sharp turn of the road where the boulders lie, and the furze looks so yellow against the red clay.

THE PARSON OF JACKMAN'S GULCH

He was known in the Gulch as the Reverend Elias B. Hopkins, but it was generally understood that the title was an honorary one, extorted by his many eminent qualities, and not borne out by any legal claim which he could adduce. "The Parson" was another of his *sobriquets*, which was sufficiently distinctive in a land where the flock was scattered and the shepherds few. To do him justice, he never pretended to have received any preliminary training for the ministry or any orthodox qualification to practise it. "We're all working in the claim of the Lord," he remarked one day, "and it don't matter a cent whether we're hired for the job or whether we waltzes in on our own account," a piece of rough imagery which appealed directly to the instincts of Jackman's Gulch. It is quite certain that during the first few months his presence had a marked effect in diminishing the excessive use both of strong drinks and of stronger adjectives which had been characteristic of the little mining settlement. Under his tuition, men began to understand that the resources of their native language were less limited than they had supposed, and that it was possible to convey their impressions with accuracy without the aid of a gaudy halo of profanity.

We were certainly in need of a regenerator at Jackman's Gulch

about the beginning of '53. Times were flush then over the whole colony, but nowhere flusher than there. Our material prosperity had had a bad effect upon our morals. The camp was a small one, lying rather better than a hundred and twenty miles to the south of Ballarat, at a spot where a mountain torrent finds its way down a rugged ravine on its way to join the Arrowsmith River. History does not relate who the original Jackman may have been, but at the time I speak of the camp it contained a hundred or so adults, many of whom were men who had sought an asylum there after making more civilised mining centres too hot to hold them. They were a rough, murderous crew, hardly leavened by the few respectable members of society who were scattered among them.

Communication between Jackman's Gulch and the outside world was difficult and uncertain. A portion of the bush between it and Ballarat was infested by a redoubtable outlaw named Conky Jim, who, with a small gang as desperate as himself, made travelling a dangerous matter. It was customary, therefore, at the Gulch, to store up the dust and nuggets obtained from the mines in a special store, each man's share being placed in a separate bag on which his name was marked. A trusty man, named Woburn, was deputed to watch over this primitive bank. When the amount deposited became considerable, a waggon was hired, and the whole treasure was conveyed to Ballarat, guarded by the police and by a certain number of miners, who took it in turn to perform the office. Once in Ballarat, it was forwarded on to Melbourne by the regular gold waggons. By this plan, the gold was often

kept for months in the Gulch before being despatched, but Conky Jim was effectually checkmated, as the escort party were far too strong for him and his gang. He appeared, at the time of which I write, to have forsaken his haunts in disgust, and the road could be traversed by small parties with impunity.

Comparative order used to reign during the daytime at Jackman's Gulch, for the majority of the inhabitants were out with crowbar and pick among the quartz ledges, or washing clay and sand in their cradles by the banks of the little stream. As the sun sank down, however, the claims were gradually deserted, and their unkempt owners, clay-bespattered and shaggy, came lounging into camp, ripe for any form of mischief. Their first visit was to Woburn's gold store, where their clean-up of the day was duly deposited, the amount being entered in the store-keeper's book, and each miner retaining enough to cover his evening's expenses. After that all restraint was at an end, and each set to work to get rid of his surplus dust with the greatest rapidity possible. The focus of dissipation was the rough bar, formed by a couple of hogsheads spanned by planks, which was dignified by the name of the "Britannia drinking saloon." Here, Nat Adams, the burly bar-keeper, dispensed bad whisky at the rate of two shillings a noggin, or a guinea a bottle, while his brother Ben acted as croupier in a rude wooden shanty behind, which had been converted into a gambling hell, and was crowded every night. There had been a third brother, but an unfortunate misunderstanding with a customer had shortened his existence.

"He was too soft to live long," his brother Nathaniel feelingly observed on the occasion of his funeral. "Many's the time I've said to him, 'If you're arguin' a pint with a stranger, you should always draw first, then argue, and then shoot, if you judge that he's on the shoot.' Bill was too purlite. He must needs argue first and draw after, when he might just as well have kivered his man before talkin' it over with him." This amiable weakness of the deceased Bill was a blow to the firm of Adams, which became so short-handed that the concern could hardly be worked without the admission of a partner, which would mean a considerable decrease in the profits.

Nat Adams had had a roadside shanty in the Gulch before the discovery of gold, and might, therefore, claim to be the oldest inhabitant. These keepers of shanties were a peculiar race, and, at the cost of a digression, it may be interesting to explain how they managed to amass considerable sums of money in a land where travellers were few and far between. It was the custom of the "bushmen," *i. e.* bullock drivers, sheep tenders, and the other white hands who worked on the sheep-runs up country, to sign articles by which they agreed to serve their master for one, two, or three years at so much per year and certain daily rations. Liquor was never included in this agreement, and the men remained, per force, total abstainers during the whole time. The money was paid in a lump sum at the end of the engagement. When that day came round, Jimmy, the stockman, would come slouching into his master's office, cabbage-tree hat in hand.

"Morning, master!" Jimmy would say. "My time's up. I guess I'll draw my cheque and ride down to town."

"You'll come back, Jimmy."

"Yes, I'll come back. Maybe I'll be away three weeks, maybe a month. I want some clothes, master, and my bloomin' boots are well-nigh off my feet."

"How much, Jimmy?" asks his master, taking up his pen.

"There's sixty pound screw," Jimmy answers thoughtfully; "and you mind, master, last March, when the brindled bull broke out o' the paddock. Two pound you promised me then. And a pound at the dipping. And a pound when Millar's sheep got mixed with ourn;" and so he goes on, for bushmen can seldom write, but they have memories which nothing escapes.

His master writes the cheque and hands it across the table. "Don't get on the drink, Jimmy," he says.

"No fear of that, master," and the stockman slips the cheque into his leather pouch, and within an hour he is ambling off upon his long-limbed horse on his hundred mile journey to town.

Now Jimmy has to pass some six or eight of the above-mentioned roadside shanties in his day's ride, and experience has taught him that if he once breaks his accustomed total abstinence, the unwonted stimulant has an overpowering effect upon his brain. Jimmy shakes his head warily as he determines that no earthly consideration will induce him to partake of any liquor until his business is over. His only chance is to avoid temptation; so, knowing that there is the first of these houses some half mile

ahead, he plunges into a by-path through the bush which will lead him out at the other side.

Jimmy is riding resolutely along this narrow path, congratulating himself upon a danger escaped, when he becomes aware of a sunburned, black-bearded man who is leaning unconcernedly against a tree beside the track. This is none other than the shanty-keeper, who, having observed Jimmy's manœuvre in the distance, has taken a short cut through the bush in order to intercept him.

"Morning, Jimmy!" he cries, as the horseman comes up to him.

"Morning, mate; morning!"

"Where are ye off to to-day then?"

"Off to town," says Jimmy sturdily.

"No, now – are you though? You'll have bully times down there for a bit. Come round and have a drink at my place. Just by way of luck."

"No," says Jimmy, "I don't want a drink."

"Just a little damp."

"I tell ye I don't want one," says the stockman angrily.

"Well, ye needn't be so darned short about it. It's nothin' to me whether you drinks or not. Good mornin'."

"Good mornin'," says Jimmy, and has ridden on about twenty yards when he hears the other calling on him to stop.

"See here, Jimmy!" he says, overtaking him again. "If you'll do me a kindness when you're up in town I'd be obliged."

"What is it?"

"It's a letter, Jim, as I wants posted. It's an important one too, an' I wouldn't trust it with every one; but I knows you, and if you'll take charge on it it'll be a powerful weight off my mind."

"Give it here," Jimmy says laconically.

"I hain't got it here. It's round in my caboose. Come round for it with me. It ain't more'n quarter of a mile."

Jimmy consents reluctantly. When they reach the tumble-down hut the keeper asks him cheerily to dismount and to come in.

"Give me the letter," says Jimmy.

"It ain't altogether wrote yet, but you sit down here for a minute and it'll be right," and so the stockman is beguiled into the shanty.

At last the letter is ready and handed over. "Now, Jimmy," says the keeper, "one drink at my expense before you go."

"Not a taste," says Jimmy.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" the other says in an aggrieved tone. "You're too damned proud to drink with a poor cove like me. Here – give us back that letter. I'm cursed if I'll accept a favour from a man whose too almighty big to have a drink with me."

"Well, well, mate, don't turn rusty," says Jim. "Give us one drink an' I'm off."

The keeper pours out about half a pannikin of raw rum and hands it to the bushman. The moment he smells the old familiar smell his longing for it returns, and he swigs it off at a gulp.

His eyes shine more brightly, and his face becomes flushed. The keeper watches him narrowly. "You can go now, Jim," he says.

"Steady, mate, steady," says the bushman. "I'm as good a man as you. If you stand a drink, I can stand one too, I suppose." So the pannikin is replenished, and Jimmy's eyes shine brighter still.

"Now, Jimmy, one last drink for the good of the house," says the keeper, "and then it's time you were off." The stockman has a third gulp from the pannikin, and with it all his scruples and good resolutions vanish for ever.

"Look here," he says somewhat huskily, taking his cheque out of his pouch. "You take this, mate. Whoever comes along this road, ask 'em what they'll have, and tell them it's my shout. Let me know when the money's done."

So Jimmy abandons the idea of ever getting to town, and for three weeks or a month he lies about the shanty in a state of extreme drunkenness, and reduces every wayfarer upon the road to the same condition. At last one fine morning the keeper comes to him. "The coin's done, Jimmy," he says; "it's about time you made some more." So Jimmy has a good wash to sober him, straps his blanket and his billy to his back, and rides off through the bush to the sheep-run, where he has another year of sobriety, terminating in another month of intoxication.

All this, though typical of the happy-go-lucky manners of the inhabitants, has no direct bearing upon Jackman's Gulch, so we must return to that Arcadian settlement. Additions to the population there were not numerous, and such as came about

the time of which I speak were even rougher and fiercer than the original inhabitants. In particular, there came a brace of ruffians named Phillips and Maule, who rode into camp one day and started a claim upon the other side of the stream. They outgulched the Gulch in the virulence and fluency of their blasphemy, in the truculence of their speech and manner, and in their reckless disregard of all social laws. They claimed to have come from Bendigo, and there were some amongst us who wished that the redoubted Conky Jim was on the track once more, as long as he would close it to such visitors as these. After their arrival the nightly proceedings at the "Britannia Bar" and at the gambling hell behind became more riotous than ever. Violent quarrels, frequently ending in bloodshed, were of constant occurrence. The more peaceable frequenters of the bar began to talk seriously of lynching the two strangers who were the principal promoters of disorder. Things were in this unsatisfactory condition when our evangelist, Elias B. Hopkins, came limping into the camp, travel-stained and footsore, with his spade strapped across his back and his Bible in the pocket of his moleskin jacket.

His presence was hardly noticed at first, so insignificant was the man. His manner was quiet and unobtrusive, his face pale, and his figure fragile. On better acquaintance, however, there was a squareness and firmness about his clean-shaven lower jaw, and an intelligence in his widely-opened blue eyes, which marked him as a man of character. He erected a small hut for himself,

and started a claim close to that occupied by the two strangers who had preceded him. This claim was chosen with a ludicrous disregard for all practical laws of mining, and at once stamped the new-comer as being a green hand at his work. It was piteous to observe him every morning as we passed to our work, digging and delving with the greatest industry, but, as we knew well, without the smallest possibility of any result. He would pause for a moment as we went by, wipe his pale face with his bandanna handkerchief, and shout out to us a cordial morning greeting, and then fall to again with redoubled energy. By degrees we got into the way of making a half-pitying, half-contemptuous inquiry as to how he got on. "I hain't struck it yet, boys," he would answer cheerily, leaning on his spade, "but the bed-rock lies deep just hereabouts, and I reckon we'll get among the pay gravel to-day." Day after day he returned the same reply with unvarying confidence and cheerfulness.

It was not long before he began to show us the stuff that was in him. One night the proceedings were unusually violent at the drinking saloon. A rich pocket had been struck during the day, and the striker was standing treat in a lavish and promiscuous fashion, which had reduced three parts of the settlement to a state of wild intoxication. A crowd of drunken idlers stood or lay about the bar, cursing, swearing, shouting, dancing, and here and there firing their pistols into the air out of pure wantonness. From the interior of the shanty behind there came a similar chorus. Maule, Phillips, and the roughs who followed them were in the

ascendant, and all order and decency was swept away.

Suddenly, amid this tumult of oaths and drunken cries, men became conscious of a quiet monotone which underlay all other sounds and obtruded itself at every pause in the uproar. Gradually first one man and then another paused to listen, until there was a general cessation of the hubbub, and every eye was turned in the direction whence this quiet stream of words flowed. There, mounted upon a barrel, was Elias B. Hopkins, the newest of the inhabitants of Jackman's Gulch, with a good-humoured smile upon his resolute face. He held an open Bible in his hand, and was reading aloud a passage taken at random – an extract from the Apocalypse, if I remember right. The words were entirely irrelevant, and without the smallest bearing upon the scene before him; but he plodded on with great unction, waving his left hand slowly to the cadence of his words.

There was a general shout of laughter and applause at this apparition, and Jackman's Gulch gathered round the barrel approvingly, under the impression that this was some ornate joke, and that they were about to be treated to some mock sermon or parody of the chapter read. When, however, the reader, having finished the chapter, placidly commenced another, and having finished that rippled on into another one, the revellers came to the conclusion that the joke was somewhat too long-winded. The commencement of yet another chapter confirmed this opinion, and an angry chorus of shouts and cries, with suggestions as to gagging the reader, or knocking him off the

barrel, rose from every side. In spite of roars and hoots, however, Elias B. Hopkins plodded away at the Apocalypse with the same serene countenance, looking as ineffably contented as though the babel around him were the most gratifying applause. Before long an occasional boot pattered against the barrel, or whistled past our parson's head; but here some of the more orderly of the inhabitants interfered in favour of peace and order, aided curiously enough by the afore-mentioned Maule and Phillips, who warmly espoused the cause of the little Scripture-reader. "The little cuss has got grit in him," the latter explained, rearing his bulky red-shirted form between the crowd and the object of its anger. "His ways ain't our ways, and we're all welcome to our opinions, and to sling them round from barrels or otherwise, if so minded. What I says, and Bill says, is, that when it comes to slingin' boots instead o' words it's too steep by half; an' if this man's wronged we'll chip in an' see him righted." This oratorical effort had the effect of checking the more active signs of disapproval, and the party of disorder attempted to settle down once more to their carouse, and to ignore the shower of Scripture which was poured upon them. The attempt was hopeless. The drunken portion fell asleep under the drowsy refrain, and the others, with many a sullen glance at the imperturbable reader, slouched off to their huts, leaving him still perched upon the barrel. Finding himself alone with the more orderly of the spectators, the little man rose, closed his book, after methodically marking with a lead pencil the

exact spot at which he stopped, and descended from his perch. "To-morrow night, boys," he remarked in his quiet voice, "the reading will commence at the 9th verse of the 15th chapter of the Apocalypse," with which piece of information, disregarding our congratulations, he walked away with the air of a man who has performed an obvious duty.

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