THE SILENT SIN

By
WALLACE ANDERSON

"BEVERLY LIE AS STILL AS DEATH"

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A STORY OF A WOMAN'S FIDELITY.

"Though the flesh had erred,
the Soul retained its purity."

By
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SYNOPSIS

SYNOPSIS—Continued.

THE SILENT SIN.

I.

THE PASTORAL KING.

It was a perfect May morning in Sydney, the Queen city of the land of the Southern Cross, the London of Australia, that is to be. The time was the early business hours of the morning. A smart equippage consisting of a well-appointed dog-cart and perfectly stepping horse, rounded the corner of Pitt and O'Connell Streets, and driving half way up the latter street, pulled sharply up in front of a building bearing the inscription in gold lettering, "The Pastoral Agency of Australia."

The occupants of the trap comprised the driver, a typical stamp of gentleman's groom, wearing the characteristic side whiskers; the other, his master, one of the best known figures in the Pastoral world of the vast continent of Australia, Richard Berverly, the Pastoral King. The latter stepped down from the trap, threw a critical eye over the horse, passed a friendly word to his man, accompanied with a pleasant smile. A kindly wave of the hand indicated the groom's dismissal; the latter, giving the horse his head, drove quickly up the street and was soon out of sight.

Richard Beverley passed through the glass doors leading into his offices. He opened a door on which was written "Richard Beverly—Private," and walked into the office. Having divested himself of his hat, gloves and coat, he passed back into the general office.

The most casual glance at the appointments of the place, the well dressed air and appearance of the men engaged in their respective duties, the costly fittings, the general look of comfort the place presented, would tell the observer that money had not been spared, much thought exercised so that those connected with the business would have every comfort and convenience. This was ever the policy that the Pastoral King had always followed—the kindly care of those who worked with him. Friendly greetings passed between Beverly and those who were associated with him in the conduct of his business. He addressed a word to each, his manner full of pleasant civility and kindly familiarity, an attitude that endeared him to them all. He spoke in quiet tones to one of the staff, asking after the health of a crippled sister. By accident Beverly had heard of this man and his crippled sister, of his struggle to keep her in comfort on an underpaid salary. Inquiry proved him to be a decent steady fellow, denying himself, so that the crippled girl should enjoy

some little luxury. He sent for him and offered him a position in his own office. He and the suffering girl were now able to live in decency and comfort. Many were the good deeds the magnanimous character of this had on record, performed quietly, without ostentation or display. One of the greatest pleasures of this good man's life was to do a kindly turn to those in need. It was deeds such as he did for the clerk with the crippled relation, that won Beverly such esteem and respect. There was not a man in the country more universally loved and esteemed than Richard Beverly. Millionaire Beverly, as some called him, others the Pastoral King, for there was not a part of the Continent in which he had not stations.

By his intimate friends he was often referred to as "Good Old Dick Beverly." He passed along to his private office, where a heap of unopened correspondence awaited his attention. The same ease and comfort that marked the general office, was to be observed here. Seating himself, he turned the letters over. Selecting one, edged with black, he placed the others aside, and rang the bell. To the clerk who answered the ring he said, "I will be engaged for half an hour, unless the matter is of urgent importance."

He knew the contents of the letter carrying the emblem of death. It was concerning the death of his aged mother, who had passed away in England, and of which sad event he had been notified by cable. He opened the letter and found enclosed an epistle addressed to himself in his Mother's handwriting. It ran as follows:—

My dearest Son,—

> My medical adviser tells me I am on the point of death, my hours are actually numbered. I am told I must attend to any arrangements there are in this world requiring my attention without delay. In these my last hours upon Earth, my thoughts are constantly of you. A Mother's love, of which the faintest spark only lingered in my breast, has burst forth into a bright flame, and once again I feel the love for you I felt when you, a wee bairn, lay nestling on my breast. Ah, Richard, this is my hour of repentance. The sudden death of your father two years ago left him no opportunity to express his sorrow for his lack of filial love for you. On his behalf and my own, in this my last hour, I crave your forgiveness. Always a good son, sharing generously your prosperity with parents who had showed you little love or kindness, little thanks for all your goodness, is it any wonder, now that I am on the brink of the grave, that my conscience pricks me? With your great wealth we were selfish enough to think you should have returned home and restored the old name to some of its former grandeur. I fully realise at this moment the wisdom of your attitude, deciding to live your life as

you have done, walking the path of honour and principle, away from the shams and mockeries that surrounded your early days. Once again I crave your forgiveness for the unmotherly neglect you suffered. I thank God you have trodden the path of rectitude. Good bye, may God bless you, your good wife, and handsome son. Once more good bye.

From your now loving

MOTHER.

Beverly sat deeply affected by the contents of this letter. He read the other from his man of busines in London, confirming the cabled news of a couple of months ago, and telling him his instructions for burial, etc., had been carried out. He sat in sad reflection, his mind dwelling on the dead Mother as he first remembered her. He thought of the great love he bore her and of its indifferent reciprocation. His reflections drifted to the days of his childhood, lonely unhappy days, passed without companionship or pleasure; rarely seeing the foolish mother whose life at this period was passed in empty and foolish gaiety; seeing less rarely the profligate father, who lived for the day only, and allowed the existence of a son to become a forgotten memory with him. He remembered leaving the comfortable house they had lived in, for a much smaller one, and as time passed on, moving from one place to another, each place being of poorer class and standard than its predecessor. His school days were not happy, for he suffered the degradation of having empty pockets, humiliation of poor and ill-fitting clothes, the pain of hearing, unintentional on the part of those who uttered them, disparaging remarks about his parents. He was sensitive to these inferiorities under which he lived, and consequently he became reserved, rarely mixing with the other boys. At sixteen he came home, and at this stage his parents were in their most reduced circumstances.

The father, the last of a profligate thriftless race of baronets, had by this time squandered everything that it was possible to squander, and had it not been for a small annuity his mother enjoyed, and which had been left to her by her father's sister, and tied up in such a way that only the interest payable quarterly was available, the fate of the two thriftless people would have been a very hard one.

When Richard was eighteen years of age his future looked absolutely hopeless. It was at this period of his life that he received a letter from his mother's uncle, asking him to come and see him. Uncle Joe was an old chap of very limited means. He was a kindly natured old fellow, and thought he saw a lot of goodness in Richard, and had a proposal to make to him. Out of his small and meagre allowance he would advance Richard £100 to go to either Canada or Australia.

"Strike out, lad, strike out, and you will come out on top," he had said. Stormy scenes ensued when he communicated his

intentions to his parents. The father, in a fury, told him, "Go and be damned to you. I never want to set eyes on you again."

When he went to bid his mother good-bye, "No," she said, "It's no use coming near me. I will not have anything to say to you."

Beverly sailed for Australia, and immediately after he arrived he got a position on one of the outback stations.

Work came naturally to him, and in a few years he rose to the position of overseer. A gold rush in the vicinity of the station on which he was engaged gave him a lift along. He was one of the first on the field, and he met with enough success to enable him to take up a piece of country and put on it a little stock. He was noted in the district as a great worker, and at the age of twenty-six he had a fairly decent property, his flocks were increasing, and his last clip had put him on his feet. He had increased his property and looked forward with confidence to a prosperous future.

II.

RICHARD BEVERLY'S NEIGHBOUR.

Adjoining Beverly's property was a large holding, one of the most extensive in the State, owned by a canny old Scotchman, Sandy Cuthbertson. It was said of Sandy that he never ate his own mutton if he could get his neighbours, and the same with beef. He was in a big way as a squatter.

Beverly purchased a flock of sheep from him and went over to take delivery. He had just arrived at the station and was inquiring for Mr. Cuthbertson. The old man heard him and walked out of the house.

"Are you asking for me?" asked Sandy.

"If you are Mr. Cuthbertson, you are the man I am asking for."

"Yes, I'm Cuthbertson," he replied.

"My name is Beverly." Richard said.

"I heard of you," said the Scotchman. "You sent me word once or twice about some sheep of mine you had last shearing."

Sandy took a keen look from under his shaggy eyebrows at this well-set-up young man who sent word around to his neighbours when he had their sheep. "You will stop to-night, Mr. Beverly. We cannot give you delivery for a couple of days."

Beverly looked disappointed, but there was no help for it.

"Come and have a whisky," and Beverly followed the old man in. "This is my daughter Jean, Mr. Beverly."

Beverly looked surprised to see a smiling face beaming upon him.. and in his straightforward manner advanced with outstretched hand. "Good day, Miss Cuthbertson."

He was struck with the refined manner of Jean Cuthbertson, who was twenty-three years of age, and was known as the daughter of the rich Sandy Cuthbertson. Jean did not spend much time on the station, annual Carnival time and Christmas being her visiting periods. The rest of her time was spent in Melbourne and Sydney.

When Beverly was leaving again, Jean asked, "Will I see you at the Annual Show?"

"Up to the present," Beverly smiled, "I never had time to visit one." and so it had been with him—work all the time.

"The seasons have been good, Mr. Beverly. You had better come to this one."

"I cannot promise," replied Beverly.

There was something about this good-looking Englishman that Sandy liked, and Jean thought the same. "I wonder if he will be there," she said to herself.

Many men had wanted Jean for old Sandy's wealth, but none had succeeded in getting her.

When the time came for the Show, Richard Beverly paid it a visit. He met the smiling Jean and saw a good deal of her. This Show, like all previous ones, came to a conclusion, and Jean went back to her Melbourne friends. When Christmas came around again Jean was back at the station.

One day Richard Beverly found a letter awaiting him inviting him over to Sandy Cuthbertsons for Christmas. Richard went and spent some very happy days, but when Christmas passed away Jean once more went back to Melbourne. The next Annual Show arrived, and with it Jean's semi-annual visit to her well-loved Dad. The annual function had concluded some six or seven weeks, and still Jean lingered on at the station with her Dad. Old Sandy, ever delighted to have his only chid about him, said nothing. Sandy was a shrewd old man and had already formed his own conclusions for the reason of Jean's prolonged stay. He had said to himself, "I hope it is as I think. He is a decent man."

Richard heard she was still on the station and one morning mounted his horse and rode off to the homestead. Old Sandy had noted his arrival, and came out to meet him. A pair of eyes in the garden had also observed Beverly as he rode up. After the usual greetings were exchanged, Sandy said. "Hang your horse up and came inside. And when they had entered the dining-room the old Scot, always a thoughtful host, asked:

"Have a whisky, Beverly?"

"One minute, Mr. Cuthbertson," answered Beverly, "I want to ask you a question."

"Well, what is it?" asked Sandy.

"I came over with the intention of asking your daughter to be my wife. Have I your permission to do so?"

"Certainly, Beverly. She is in the garden."

Beverly left the room, and walked in the direction of the garden.

Sandy smiled and put a bottle of champagne in the water bag. "I think this will be wanted," he muttered to himself.

Richard Beverly, hat in hand, entered the garden. At the sound of approaching footsteps Jean looked up.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Beverly," she said, "where did you spring from?"

"How are you, Miss Cuthbertson," he responded. "Long ere this, I expected to hear you had rejoined the gaieties of City life."

I was bred in the bush, Mr. Beverly. It still holds charms for me. And I realise the longer I say, the more pleasure I give my old Dad."

Richard Beverly had retained the hand that Jean had offered. His voice and looks assumed a serious expression. "Jean," he said, "I came over this afternoon on a special mission. That mission is to ask you if you will be my wife?" She still allowed him to retain her hand. He continued, "I love you very dearly. Will your answer be 'Yes?'" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, Richard," she replied. My answer will be 'Yes.' As you love me I also love you." She hid her head upon his breast. He folded her in his arms, and lifted the blushing face from his breast and kissed her. He lead her to a seat where they sat and conversed for a few minutes, and then escorted her back to the house. Old Sandy had watched the love-making from the window, chuckling to himself. "Ah," he muttered, "I knew I'd want that bottle of wine."

By-and-bye Richard and Jean entered, he with his arm around her. Beverly spoke, "Mr. Cuthbertson, I am indeed a fortunate man. Jean has promised to become my wife."

Old Sandy put out his hand, which Beverly grasped, saying to him, "There is no one I would sooner give her to than you."

They were married shortly after, and Beverly took his wife over to his homestead. In twelve months Jean had a beautiful boy.

"What am I to call him, Richard?" the mother asked.

"Call him Alexander Richard," said Beverly, and Jean threw a grateful glance at her husband. Alexander was her Father's name.

. . . .

The little man was two years old. It was a summer evening, and Beverly and Jean had just dined when a horseman rode up. He threw himself off the horse and hurried to where Beverly and Jean awaited him. He handed Beverly a letter addressd to him and marked "Urgent." The animal he had ridden stood for a moment with legs outststretched, eyes staring, dilated nostrils, and suddenly dropped. One spasmodic struggle, the limbs stiffened, the eyes glazed, well performed had been his work.

"What is it Richard? Has anything happened to Dad?" his wife anxiously asked.

"My dear Jean, he has met with an accident. We must go to him at once." They had relays of fresh horses every ten miles. He and Jean rode the sixty-five miles side by side. Beverly's continual thought was, "will we be in time? I pray God we will."

Sandy had been gored by a steer, and, the letter said, if they wished to see him alive, not a moment was to be lost.

Side by side they rode through the silent night. In places the bush roads were very rough, and great care had to be exercised. Fortunately Jean was an accomplished horsewoman.

The wild old Scotchman's time had come. He had been badly ripped. Ever a fearless man in the yard, he had been a second too late, and was now lying at the point of death.

The doctor was visiting a neighbouring place twenty miles away, and was now at his side.

Sandy was speaking with difficulty. His ear was ever turned for the sound of galloping horses.

It was 1 o'clock, and Sandy said they would be here any time. He addressed the doctor. "You know, Doc, I'm no cocktail. My time has come and I am going like a man, but I am going to hang out till Jean and Richard get here. He was fighting the grim monster off, as he had said, till Jean and Dick reached his side.

His ear caught the clatter of hoofs, the sound of voices and hurried footsteps, and Jean rushed into the room, crying in a grief stricken voice, "Dad! Dad." Richard followed quickly in her wake. She pillowed the well beloved father's head on her arms, and took his hand in her own. She gazed down into the almost lifeless eyes, plending, "Dad, Dad, you must not leave me."

A smile flitted across the old man's face as soon as he heard her voice. His son-in-law clasped his other hand. Almost immediately death claimed him. As he had said, he was no cocktail; he had held death at bay until his child arrived.

When the old man's affairs were investigated, he was found to be a rich man. He had left a quarter of a million, mostly in city properties in which he had been a keen investor.

The text of his will was as follows:

"To my dear daughter, Jean, and my well-respected son-in-law, Richard Beverly, I bequeath my wealth in equal parts."

From that time Richard Beverly prospered. His good fortune was phenomenal. If he bought a drought stricken area with starving stock, the transfer would hardly be effected, before rain would fall; and thus, at the opening of this story, we find him a rich wealthy man, the Pastoral King of Australia.

III.

THE BOSS OF BANDOMILE.

Far away, in the North West of New South Wales, many miles from the Railway head, stood the station of Bandomile. The first thing that caught the eye of the traveller as he approached was a substantial homestead, erected on an ironstone ridge.

Just below the homestead, leaning on a gate and quietly smoking, was the Boss of Bandomile. From the verandah of the homestead he had seen, rising above the tops of the trees in the distance, the dust of the approaching pack horses, and was now awaiting their arrival at the stock-yard gate.

He had not waited long when a horseman swung round the bend of the timber, coming along at a canter.

He was the Boss's only son, named like himself, Tom Wells. The younger Wells was a noted horseman, and as he rode along, he sat the horse as thought he and the animal were one.

The Boss of Bandomile was a big man, standing well over six foot, and built in perfect proportion. He was up in years, but was still well preserved, and regarded as a fine stamp of colonial. The horseman pulled up at the gate. Father and son exchanged greetings.

The younger man's first enquiry was of his mother. A smile passed over the face of the Boss. Nothing pleased him greater than to hear the son's affectionate enquiry after his Mother.

"Right as rain, lad," the Father answered. Have you had a good muster?" he continued.

"Yes," the young man replied, "and we have enough grass and water left to last until the end of the year."

"That means a lot of work saved," the other answered.

"Before we walk up to the house, I will have a quiet word or two with you, Dad," the son said.

"God enough, boy, good enough. Fire away! What's the trouble?"

"No trouble," replied the son. "At least I hope not. I hear Joyce Hilson is leaving for the North of Queensland to pay a visit to Uncle's place."

"Yes, lad," the older man replied, with a touch of sadness in his voice, "and I am sorry she is going. Your Mother thinks the trip will help to broaden her views, and that she will come back more reconciled to the present state of affairs. I am sure I hope so. If she was my own daughter, I could not think deeper of her. She is indeed a grand girl, and the best rider in New

South. I don't care from where they bring the next."

"Well, Dad,' 'the younger man said, "I'll ride through to the railway head. I will stay the night at Hilson's. I have always thought a great lot of Joyce. We were almost reared together. It is my intention whilst there to ask her to be my wife. Who can tell? If she says yes, she may change her mind and remain with us." Well done, my boy," exclaimed the Boss, outstretching his hand. Which the other gripped cordially. The best of luck to you, and if everything goes well with you, I will give you a good start. You have been a great lad. I remember when I sent you to King's School, people said I had ruined you for a station career, but I knew differently."

"I will get away early, and will send back word that everything is all right," answered the son.

The younger man thought everything would be all right; he knew naught of women and their ways.

Father and son walked up to the homestead. The good Mother came out to embrace her only Son. Mother and son walked into the house arm in arm, and the son told his Mother of his intentions to ask Joyce Hilson to become his wife. The Boss followed in their wake, gazing upon them admiringly.

"I have always loved her as one of my own," the Mother said in looking up fondly into the face of her son. If you win her Tom, you will indeed be a lucky fellow. I will never forget the time you had that bad fall and she helped me to nurse you. Just before you returned to consciousness, walking into the room softly, I discovered her at your bedside praying for your recovery. Your father was arranging relays of horses to get the doctor to your side with all possible speed. I remember her words as well as if the incident took place yesterday. "Oh, God on high," she prayed, "Do not take their only son away." At the very thought my heart bleeds for them. They love him as dearly as I loved my Mother. Spare them the dreadful anguish his loss would create in their bosoms." Joyce has one of the best and noblest natures. The man who wins her will win a life long love. I hope, Tom, that man will be you."

"Thank you, Mother," the son replied. "I am sure I sincerely hope so. The Boss, sitting down, quietly smoking, listened to the conversation passing between the Mother and son, and like his good wife, trusted his son would be fortunate enough to win the hand of the girl he was about to ask to be his wife.

He knew, as did the whole district, her sterling worth, and had she given her numerous suitors any encouragement she could have married the best in the land.

Tom Wells the elder was known far and wide. Only a stranger would ever think of addressing him by any other title, excepting the Boss. By this name he was known far and near. Even his good wife always spoke of him as the Boss. His son rarely used any other name. At the time we write he was a wealthy squatter. He was a self-made man, but if you told him

so he would not have it. He maintained his wife had made him, and it could truly be said, there was much in his contention.

In his younger days the Boss was a rowdy bullock driver, fond of rum, gambling, and ever ready to have a scrap with all comers. In his district in those days he was regarded as the best rough and tumble fighter they had. He had fought a good few battles, and had always come out a winner. He was known as the champion of the weak.

"The good wife made me," he would say in reply to some remark regarding his prosperity, "but," he would add, "I took the greatest hiding over her that one man ever took from another." If the old man was pressed for details of the encounter and he was in the humour, he would tell the story of the great hiding he took.

"I landed at the railway head with Richard Beverly's wool. I had three teams at the time, and we had just finished a fairly long trip. I decided to turn out for a couple of months' spell. I fixed up with the men, had the waggons covered up, the bullocks out on grass, and said, "Here's off to Sydney for a few weeks." When I arrived there I put up at a hotel in Castlereagh Street. I found the people who were running this place to be very decent, especially with people from the bush. I had been in the City for a couple of days. I didn't know anyone excepting Richard Beverly. I met him in Pitt Street. We had a few minutes' talk and parted. That was Saturday morning. On the same night I got into a mix-up with a fighting man. Close to the hotel where I was staying there was a dancing hall belonging to the hotelkeeper. Every Saturday night a bit of dancing went on. McLaughlin, the publican, always kept this very respectable. I had a couple of rums and strolled into the hall. In fact, the Missus of the pub had said to me, "Go inside, Mr. Wells, and have a dance with the girls. She was a great woman for emigrants, and had been one herself, and possessed a very good name for looking after her girls decently. She always had a very good type of servant, and they had to behave, otherwise she would be down upon them very quick. There was a quiet nice new chum girl waiting at the end of the table where I sat. Her name was Jenny, and I noticed how well she looked after everybody. I spoke to the Missus one day. I said, "That's a good, decent sort of a girl waits up at our end of the table."

"Yes, Mr. Wells," she replied. "She is indeed. A girl that will make a good wife, but I must see she gets a good man. What about you, Mr. Wells?" she asked, looking at me with a merry twinkle in her eye.

"Me!" I said. "Not on your life. I'd make a fine husband for any decent girl." I was quite satisfied a decent girl would not have much to do with me, what with my drinking and fighting and diceing."

"Oh," she answered, "worse things than that might happen you." However, the very first girl I saw in the room was Jenny. I went over to where she sat and dropped into a seat beside her. I asked her if she would have a dance with me. She refused, saying she didn't intend to dance that night. This was quite all right. I still sat alongside of her. Bye-and-bye a flash-looking chap comes along and asks her to get up.

"Come on," he says, as if he owned her. "Get up and have this one with me."

"No, thank you," she answered, "I am not dancing to-night."

"Come on," he persisted, stretching out his hand as if to drag her up.

"No," she answered in firm tones, "I do not intend to dance to-night. Besides, I have just refused this man," motioning to me."

"Ho," he said, "don't take any notice of him. He's only a bushwhacker."

I had felt a bit irritated with him. I didn't like his flash style or his manner to the girl. At the word bush-whacker I jumped up saying:

"Here, who the flaming Hell are you calling a bush-whacker?"

"You," he answered, "why a man can smell the gum-leaves on you."

I let fly quick and hard, but missed him. He had stepped back quickly as if he really knew I was going to land him.

"Look here," he said, quite business-like, "if you want to spar I'll give you all the sparring you're looking for, but not here. These people have come here to dance, to make fun, not to look at fighting."

"Good enough," I said heatedly. "I'll meet you where and when you like, for ten or twenty pounds."

He looked at me for a minute, and said in the same quiet business-like manner, "Come into the bar and do this thing properly."

In the meantime the dancing had stopped. When I let out at him, the girl had got out of the hall.

We walked into the bar.

"Here, McLaughlin," my opponent said, "This man wants to fight me for twenty pounds."

The publican looked at me and said, "Is this so, Mr. Wells."

"Yes," I answered, my blood still up. "I'll fight him for anything he likes. Give me twenty pounds," I asked. He started to count the money out, very slowly, in sovereigns. I could see he did not like giving it to me.

"Here," I asked, "you're not frightened of me for twenty pounds, are you?" His Missus chipped in. "No, no.' Mr. Wells, "it's not that." The wager was staked. We were to meet at a pond, known as the Billy Goat," not far from where the big cricket ground is now, and close to where they made the Rand-

wick tram line. No appearance of either of us at 8 o'clock, stakes to be forfeited. I remained in the bar after the business was completed, and had a drink. McLaughlin called me aside.

"Here," he said, "I want to speak to you."

"What is it?" I asked.

"A nice mess you've got yourself into," he said.

"I don't see it," I answered obstinately. "I can't see any mess. I'll give him a go for his money."

"Look here," he said, "you get out of this if you can. This chap's a fighting man, and a good one at that. It is well known he could get to the top of the tree, if he would look after himself."

"I don't care," I answered stubbornly, "I'll have a go at him."

He was a decent chap, the publican, and when he saw I was determined to go on with the business, he said, "Have you got any friends in the city?"

"Not one that I know of," I replied. "Stay, though," I added. "There's Richard Beverly, if I could get hold of him."

"Do you mean the squatter?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. "I saw him in Pitt Street to-day, and he told me his address was the Union Club."

"Now, look," he said to me. "Get straight up there and get hold of him. He is bound to know some sports who will see you through this fight." He wrote something on a card. "Give this to the chap at the door," he said, "and if Beverly's in the club, he'll find him for you. Tip him a couple of bob'." He knew the ropes this chap. He had been a waiter at one of the big clubs.

I had just reached the steps of the Club when I saw Beverly with two or three swells coming out of the entrance. I spoke straight up. "Mr. Beverly," I said, "Can I speak to you for a moment?"

"Tom Wells, is it?" he said. "Certainly, Tom, certainly. He turned to his friends, saying, "Pardon me a moment."

"What is it, Tom?" he asked.

I told him of having to meet this chap in the morning, and I said, "I thought some of his sporting friends might help me to see it through. He thought for a moment and then called out to one of his friends. "Grice," he said. His friend stopped to his side. "Look, old man," he said, "here is something in your line. Then he explained the matter to him.

His friend was interested at once and lost no time.

"Come along," he said to me. "Jump into this cab." He was very keen. I found out afterwards he was a strong supporter of the game. He told the cabby to drive to a hotel in Sussex Street, and very soon we were all sitting in the small parlour of the public house. When the waiter came in Mr. Grice said. "Send the Boss to me."

A short, thick-set man with a broken nose came along; he had an eye it didn't look at you—it glinted at you.

"This is an honour," he said, "to see you gents here." How der yer do?" he said, offering his hand to Mr. Grice.

"Quite all right, Marlow," answered Mr. Grice.

It took very little time to explain to him the reason of the visit. "Stand up," he said to me, "and let's have a look at yer." He looked me up and down, felt my muscle, examined my hand. "Well," he said, "there's enough of you right enough. What sort of a chap is this you've got into holts with?"

I described the man, telling where the mix-up happened.

He whistled. "Well, lad," he said, "you're up against one of the best we've got here. He doesn't look after himself, but all that chucked in, I can't give you a possible chance."

"Chance or no chance," I said, "I'm having a go at him."

"That's the stuff to give 'em," he said, looking up at me. "That's the stuff to give 'em. Now, Gents," he said, "what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to pick him up," Mr. Grice said, "and you are on a fiver. Bring some of your friends along to see a square go."

"I'll pick him up all right. And if I'm not much mistaken," he said, "I'll be picking him up quite a lot of times. However, I guarantee him a square go, you can bet on that."

"That's all I want, gentleman," I said. "A square go."

All arrangements were left in the hands of the broken-nosed man. Cabs had to be ready at daylight at my hotel. We were all to meet there. I thanked them all and went straight back to my hotel.

McLaughlin met me as I entered the place. "Well," he said, "did you get fixed up?" "Yes," I told him. "We went to a hotelkeeper in Sussex Street, by name Marlow. He's going to second me and bring some friends to see fair play."

"Good," he said. "You've got a good man, and he'll bring good men with him."

I slept well, got up just before day broke, dressed and went downstairs, and on to the footpath. The first streaks of dawn were appearing in the East. I had not long to wait before Marlow and his friends arrived, right on time. We waited for Grice. A few overnight drunks had congregated about the front of the hotel. One hard-faced looking old chap enquired what all the fuss was about. He was told the Bushie was going out to fight Jargo Johns.

I was standing close by, talking to my second. The old man came up close, scanned me up and down and said, "You're a fine lump of a bleeding lamb to go to the fold." I allowed his words to pass unnoticed. His ridicule hurt me, though. I knew I was only a rough bush chap, but I knew also there was not a man in the country could take a greater punching than I could. I had no science, but I was no coward. I derived a lot of satisfaction from the thought that I would show them how

a whacker could take a belting. Mr. Grice arrived. He and I and my second jammed into one cab.

"Have you done much fighting Wells?" he asked me.

"Yes," I replied. "I have had a good few rough and tumble fights."

"How many of them did you win?" he said.

"I've never been beaten yet," I answered.

Neither of them replied. I knew what was passing through their minds. They were thinking "You'll be beaten this time."

"I'll not disgrace you," I said. "If I'm to take a hiding I'll take it like a man."

"I believe you are made of the right stuff old man," he said. The half dozen cabs rolled up Castlereagh Street, up along that street that runs alongside of Hyde Park, up Oxford Street, out past the Captain Cook Hotel, and it was not long before we were all getting out of the cabs at the spot agreed upon.

The other man with his supporters was there before us. I fancied they all looked a bit surprised when they saw who was accompanying me. Little time was lost in preliminaries. My second claimed the right to arrange the details of the fight. Expecting an easy win, they were not particular. It was to be a rough and tumble go with bare knuckles, no hitting below the belt, time and time about, and no hitting down. We stripped. He stripped well, would go about 13 stone, was a well-set up athletic looking chap. I always went about 15 stone. I had not many idle days in my life, and was always as hard as nails, never carrying an ounce of surplus condition. He wore a pair of flash fighting trunks, held up with a blue sash, with a small Union Jack showing at the end, light shoes, the sort professionals wear. I fought stripped to the waist, my feet bare, with my bell-bottom trousers rolled up over the calves of my legs. I tied a green handkerchief, one that I had bought when I came to town, around my waist. The Boss always told of the first rounds of the fight with a peculiar expression on his face. After the fight his friends told him they did not think it possible for a man to take the punishment he took. All was ready, time was called, and at it we went.

I had fought plenty of rough and tumble fights in my time, but I had never met a real scientific fighter, and I was not long in discovering the difference. I could not hit him. He could hit me when and where he liked. All my clouts fell on air. What made me mad was the looks of derision on the faces of his supporters as blow after blow that I aimed at him struck the air.

My second was right. He spent a lot of time putting me on my feet. I'd return to my corner staggering with the punishment he'd dealt out to me. I'd taken a terrible belting up to the ninth round, and as I got back to my corner, I noticed my second looking hopelessly at Grice.

He came over to me, Grice, saying, "Better throw the towel in old chap, he is making a butcher shop of you."

"Sling it in when I'm carried out of the ring," I answered. There is no doubt he belted me right enough. He was known to be a cruel fighter, full of flashness and conceit. No matter how superior he was to his opponent, he never spared him, delighting to see the skin coming off and the blood flowing. He tried hard to finish me in the tenth round, and as I staggered back to me corner I considered another round like it would out me. I'd be out, but I was determined to be carried out of the ring before I'd give in. I heard afterwards, when he returned to his second after the tenth round he had remarked, "It's like fighting a great blanky stallion." He had fought a blood-thirsty fight, but fair in every other way. I had always the benefit of good times, they thinking the issue was never in doubt. However, in the eleventh round, I made a discovery that put a second fighting life into me. He was still pasteing me, but I found that there was no power behind his blows. His clouts were losing their sting; he was tiring. In those days I had a chest as strong as stallions, ribs like a bullock, and a pair of bellows equal to those of a trained racehorse. The twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth rounds more than confirmed what I had discovered in the eleventh. There was no weight in his hits; he was tiring fast. He had exhausted himself trying to out me in the tenth round. I started the fifteenth round in better fighting trim than I was in at the fifth. I was getting my second wind and commencing to feel as if I still had a good punch if I could only find a place to put it in. He was going off, getting slower on his feet, and looking tired. It was towards the end of this round that I fluked my first good clout. I could lay claim to possessing one good punch, a straight left. At the right moment I could shoot it out like lightning with tons of weight behind it. It had won me more than one fight. If I could get a man fair and square on the forehead, I'd land him on his back every time, and he wouldn't get up in a hurry. All through the fight I was relying upon fluking this hit on to him. I got it on to him towards the end of the fifteenth round. He left an opening, and I shot out the left, and got him right behind the ear. It both surprised and staggered him. I was on to him as quick as a tiger, and had him in holts. In those days I never knew my own strength. Once I got him in my grip I knew he had no hope of getting away; just as good a chance of getting away from a grizzly bear. Like lightning I gave him the "Yorkshire Fling," a business I was very good at, and as he fell, I fell with him, with my forearm pressed tightly across his throat. We hit the ground, me on top. I gave him the full benefit of the 15 stone of bone and muscle I carried through life, and jammed his head well into the ground with the arm I had across his throat. You could hear him groan a hundred yards away. I knew what that groan meant. I'd hurt him. I sprang off him, requiring no assistance

from the broken nosed man to regain my feet. I walked back to my corner with a jaunty air. One of the legs of my trousers had become unrolled. I placed my foot on the small canvas stool my second had brought out for me to rest upon, and rolled it up again. I sat down and grimly watched two of his supporters assisting him back to his corner. I'd got some of my own back. I knew the fall would take a lot of the science out of him. My second stood near me, freshening me up. He said, "That was pretty work lad, don't give him any time to get over that bump. Get to him as soon as the round opens. He's yours. Don't be too hasty; see you don't give any chance to come in and counter you." He was clever in the ring. I had no chance against his superior knowledge of the game. I chased him round. It was like chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. He was sparring for a recovery. The sixteenth round passed without anything doing. I could not get near him. The seventeenth round opened. I was anxious to get him. I chased him recklessly around the ring. The warning voice of the broken-nosed man came ringing in my ears, "Cut that business out and fight." I knew what he meant. I was not fighting, only throwing away my wind and strength. I took the warning, and the round ended tamely. After he returned to his corner he was sick. I smiled; he was not the first man I had made sick with a fall. They opened a large bottle of champagne and gave him a glass. He demanded another, which, after some argument, they gave him. He then wanted the bottle, but the second clinched the argument by throwing the bottle over the heads of his supporters. I afterwards heard this bottle of wine was brought out to celebrate the expected win. I was fresh as paint, and opened the eighteenth round full of fight. The round opened. The champagne had put a false life into him. I knew the fall had taken a lot out of him. He was not as well as the champagne made him believe. He sparred up. This round he meant fight. At the very opening of the round, trying to put in some extra clever foot work, he sort of missed step and left an opening too good to be missed. I swung the right into him, putting every ounce of power behind the blow that I could muster. It got him under the heart, lifted him clean off his feet. He hit the ground with a wallop, gave a groan, and remained motionless. I stood over him ready to clout him again if he came to light, but he was well and truly out. It was five minutes before he came to. Grice clapped me on the back and shook hands. "Wells," he said, "you have the makings of a champion if you were taught this business."

Just at the moment I didn't feel like a champion, and decided from that out they could have all the fighting on their own. "I said I would not disgrace you, and what I got I'd take like a man. I think I've kept my word," I said.

"Taken it like twenty men," said Grice.

My second had some barbarous idea in his head that whisky was a good thing for all my poundings and bruises, and poured

a bottle over me, rubbing it in. I will ever remember what I suffered riding back to town in the cab. We arrived at the hotel. I got out of the vehicle with difficulty. I could see McLaughlin and his wife watching me from behind the bar. A small crowd had congregated, waiting to see the party return. I could hear their remarks as I walked with difficulty into the bar. Mr. Grice called for champagne.

"Absolutely the best fight I have ever seen," he said.

The publican's wife was boiling over with indignation.

"You," she said, looking at Grice. "Call yourself a gentleman, and you," turning her attention to my second, "call yourself a man, and you bring this decent fellow home in this condition. How could you stand by and see a man made such a mess of?"

Grice remained silent, but my second chipped in, saying, "Don't you worry about our friend, Missus, he's a winner."

"What!" said McLaughlin, who was in the act of drawing a cork and stopped in the middle of the business. "Do you tell me Wells beat him."

"Yes," Mr. Grice says, "this man is the winner of the stake. Wells outed him in the eighteenth round." Nobody had asked who had won. My appearance and the other man's reputation was enough for them without asking any questions.

"My shout, Mr. Grice," the publican claimed. "Mine this time." We drank, shook hands. I went straight to bed and never left it for a fortnight. Nobody but myself ever knew what I suffered during that fortnight. I couldn't lie, sit, or stand, without every bone and sinew and muscle aching and paining. The second or third day I was laid up the Missus of the house came up to see how I was getting along. She said, "I'm glad you won, Mr. Wells, but I feel sorry for his wife and kiddies. They'll go short."

"Has the man got a wife and kiddies?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "and a good little woman, too."

I told her to tell her Boss I wanted to see him, that I wanted to speak with him.

By-and-bye he came along to my room. "Do you want me, Wells?"

"Yes, Mac," I answered. "Look here, has this chap I fought got a wife and kiddies?"

"Yes," he answers. "Why?"

"Well, I'll tell you why. I want you to get your missus to return his share of the stake. I took a good hiding from him, but I don't want to take the bread and butter out of the mouths of his kiddies."

"Right!" he said, shaking me by the hand. He stood for a minute looking at me, and said, "Wells, you are a decent man."

A couple of days afterwards the chap I'd fought called and told Mac he would like to see me. He knew his Missus had got the wager back. I told McLaughlin to tell him I wasn't

seeing anybody. I wasn't going to let him see what a mess he'd made of me. At the end of a fortnight I was able to hobble out on to the balcony. It was a change from the room. The first night I was sitting out on the balcony, Jenny the waitress came along to see if I required anything before she went to bed

"Oh," she said, "you're out here, Mr. Wells."

"Yes," I answered. "It's a change from the room."

"Mr. Wells," she said, in a kindly voice, "I wish to tell you how sorry I feel at being the cause of all your trouble."

"Not at all," I replied; "it was my own rashness. I have always been too ready to rush into quarrels. I thought it would be a long time before I rushed into another one.

We chatted away for half an hour. She told me she was an orphan, and that she had no relatives. She liked Australia better than the land of her birth.

"We have plenty of sun here," she said, "and I like to see the world bright. She said "Goodnight," and left me.

The next night she came again. I got another chair, and we sat and talked for quite a long time. After that it became quite a regular thing for her to come along after she had finished her work, and spend the evening with me. I began to appreciate her company so much that I was disappointed to find all my scars and bruises were disappearing. Once I was quite right I would not have an excuse for sitting every night with Jenny. However, I was soon properly right, and it was getting time for me to get back to my bullocks.

The morning I was leaving I carried my swag down the stairs and put it on the floor of the bar. The yardman was outside giving a cabbie the office to pull up. The Missus of the pub came into the bar, saying, "Mr. Wells, I want to see you."

I followed her out into the passage. She had another woman with her. The other woman spoke up to me.

"Mister," she said, "the Missus tells me you're leaving to-day. I wanted to tell you how thankful I am to you for what you did." I looked puzzled, and the Missus of the hotel spoke.

"This is the wife of the man you had the row with, Mr. Wells." I didn't know what to say.

"You see, Mister, when you sent that money back to me, I said to my man, 'What will I do with it?' He said, 'Do any damn think you like.' I put it down as a deposit for a horse and van, and he's working away all right. I thought I'd like to come and tell you how thankful I am to you." What could I say.

"Oh, that's all right, Missus," I said. She had some little kids with her. I shoved some silver into the hands of each kiddie. I know most of it went on to the floor. The cab drove up. I grabbed my swag and jumped in, and told the cabbie to drive like hell. I could see the publican's wife laughing and enjoying things as I drove away. After the train had left Redfern Railway Station I found I was down in the dumps. All through the long train journey I was thinking of the "Girl I'd

left behind me." I often danced to the rollicking air, but never realised how sad that same girl can make you feel. I felt as if I was leaving something behind that I could never replace. I found everything right with the stock. Riding through the bush my thoughts were ever of the good girl Jenny. I determined to write to her and tell her how fond I had grown of her, and would she marry me if I came to Sydney. I reckoned I had a good nerve to do this, only giving myself Buckley's chance of getting a favourable reply. By-and-bye her reply came to hand. I remember with what mixed felings I opened the letter. Would she write and say it's like my cheek to do such a thing.

To my joyful surprise she wrote to say she would marry me. That she had also felt very sad and lonely since I left, and she would be my wife whenever I wished.

The rest is soon told. The first train took me to Sydney, and we were quickly married.

The morning I arrived at the hotel Mrs. McLaughlin looked surprised. "What! Mr. Wells," she said, "back so soon."

"Yes, Missus," I answered. "Ive came back to follow your advice."

"My advice," she said. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you remember what you said about Jenny making a good wife?" I asked her.

"Well done,' 'she said. "There is nothing I'd like to see better."

We came straight West, where, excepting for our trips to the City, we have lived all our lives. The Boss used to add, "'I'd take the same hiding twenty times over for the same reward." As the big carrying cheques were earned they were handed to his wife. Very soon he was able to leave the ardous work of carrying, and go in for squatting. Excepting once, when grim drought nearly robbed him of all his years of labour, he had prospered and was now a rich man.

It was during the time of grim drought when he stood in danger of losing everything that Richard Beverly came to his assistance. Richard Beverly had a wonderful regard for the Boss. When his only son, a little chap of three years, was stricken down with a serious malady in the bush, diphtheria, Wells, who was loading wool at the station at the time, volunteered to ride to the township some ninety miles away for the neecssary medicine. How he rode the ninety miles and back is a matter of local history. His wonderful ride saved the little fellow's life.

Matters were looking very black for him, and he was greatly distressed to see the anxious look everlastingly on the good wife's face. The financial institutions were about to close. One day she asked the Boss, "Would Mr. Beverly help you if you asked him?"

"Well, wife, I never thought to ask him. I wonder I never thought of that before. It is a very wise thought."

He rode to town and wired Beverly the position. The reply came back prompt and urgent, "Draw on me for all requirement."

The Boss lost no time in getting back to the station. Anxious as possible to remove that worried look from his wife's face. "Good news, wife, everything is saved. Read this," he said, producing Beverly's wire. "What sort of a white man is he?" he asked.

"Yes," Jenny agreed. "He is indeed a good man. God bless him and those belonging to him."

And that was the reason that the Boss of Bandomile always spoke of Richard Beverly as the whitest man in Australia.

IV.

JOYCE HILSTON.

Early morning saw young Tom Wells on the road. As he had said, he was to camp that night fifty miles away at Bungimeggra, the property of Ralph Hilston, the father of the girl he was about to ask to marry him. Bungimeggra adjoined Bandomile, but was only a small property in comparison to Tom Wells's run. Ralph Hilston, twenty-two years ago, had arrived in this district a new chum, and bought the property and stocked it up. The world never held a more easier going man than Hilston, a good, kindly, honourable straightforward man, but the poorest sheep farmer in the country. His methods were bad, and he ran the place absolutely without system. The result was, although he had the benefit of early opportunities, he was, at the date this story opens, an unsuccessful man. He came of a good old English family. His father was the vicar of a prosperous South of England district, and his uncle, his father's brother, a baronet, and an important man in his county. Ralph had an elder brother, and for his interests the life of the younger brother was sacrificed. A weak father, a foolish indulgent mother, kept the eldest son in an expensive regiment in London, whilst the father, mother, and younger son lived on the very barest at the vicarage. Ralph had reached twenty-three, and nothing had been done for him. With gun and fishing rod in his hand he spent the whole of his time rambling around the county. One day he walked into his father's study and quietly dropped a bombshell at the old gentleman's feet.

Without any preamble he said, "Father, I am going to get married."

The book fell from the old man's hands. "Going to get what?" he exclaimed.

"Married," shortly replied the young man.

The old man picked up the book again, blinked his eyes, and looked at him carefully to see if he was all right. "Do I understand you to say that you are going to get married," he asked.

"Quite so, father," replied the son.

The old man looked at him again, as if doubting that he had heard aright.

"Married?" the father questioned again.

"Yes, father," he answered.

"Now, my boy," the father said, "let me tell you once and for all that I will not have any of this nonsense in this house."

"But, father," he insisted. "there's no nonsense. I am going to marry, and I am going to marry Ruth Megson."

"Go away, boy; go away boy," he said. "Your sense are going from you."

"No, father, they are not. I intend to marry and take my wife to Australia, and I will require some financial aid from you."

"You tell William," the vicar said, "to get the carriage ready. I will drive up to the Hall, and place your conduct before Sir James."

He took his wife along with him, to whom, during the drive, he communicated Ralph's proposal. She made pretentions of dropping off, every now and then, into swooning fits.

Sir James was in his study, and sent word to say that he would see them.

The vicar's wife was barely through the door, when she tearfully exclaimed, "Oh, Sir James, that one of ours should have brought this trouble upon the family name."

Sir James looked serious. His thoughts immediately flew to the good-for-nothing, selfish son in London.

"Well," he said, "what is the nature of the trouble?"

"Why, the vicar replied, "that perfect idiot of a son of mine, Ralph, has calmly announced his intention to marry Ruth Megson."

"Oh, ho," thought the baronet, "things are not as bad as they might have been." Aloud he said, "Well, what about it?"

"Why, what about it," said Mrs. Hilston, "it is too preposterous to consider for a second. Such a proposal could never be entertained."

"He calmly tells me," said the vicar, "that he proposes to take his wife to Australia, and wants money."

Sir James was a kindly, sensible man.

"I give him credit for the idea," he said. "The more of our nation who settle in those distant parts, the stronger the links are forged that bind those wealthy possessions to the Motherland. Look here, William," he said to his brother, "raise a thousand for him and I'll add two thousand to it." Sir James liberality surprised both the vicar and his wife.

"You will do this for him," said Mrs. Hilston, "but not one thing will you do for my eldest son."

"I do not want to hear about your eldest son," he replied. And so it was fixed, and Ralph Hilston had now been in Australia twenty-two years. One child had been born to them, a girl they called Joyce.

Ruth Hilston had died four years previous to the opening of this story. Joyce was at school at Armidale at the time, and was hurriedly brought home to the side of her dying mother. The day after her arrival, her mother passed away, commending to the care of the father, her only child, whom she had loved so dearly and so well. Joyce did not return to school. She was

a girl capable of a wonderful depth of feeling, and it was months before she could be reconciled to her irreparable loss. For her mother she had possessed a wonderful love, and equally dear was the love she bore her father.

Two years had passed since the death of her mother, when an event occurred which altered the whole tenure of her existence. Ralph Hilston decided to marry again. He was to marry the sister of a squatter friend. His second wife would bring him a little money, and what was more valuable to him, she possessed useful knowledge of how sheep runs should be managed. At the time of her father's second marriage, Joyce was eighteen. She had grown into a fine girl, beloved by the whole district. Her fame as a horsewoman had already spread near and far. At the big annual gatherings at the big township on the railway line, Joyce was always a prominent figure. Her popularity was universal. Even the city visitors agreed that you would see nothing better on horseback than Miss Hilston. Mounted, she was as perfect as possible. She possessed a bright, animated nature, with a handsome face and form, being over the average height, regular features, and a beautiful complexion inherited from her English parents, a pair of handsome grey eyes, long eyelashes, a perfect set of pearly teeth, and a mouth that was always ready to ripple into laughter. Such was Joyce Hilston the time her father decided to marry again.

One evening Ralph Hilston came into the dining room. "Joyce," he said, "I have something important to say to you."

"What is it, Dad?" she asked.

"My dear," he said, "I love you very dearly, as dearly as it is possible for a father to love a daughter. I have decided on a certain line of action, that I am sure is the right thing for me to do, for your benefit and for my own."

"Yes," she replied, "what is it, Dad?"

"Joyce," he said, as though not feeling too sure whether the information would be palatable or not, "I have decided to marry again."

"Oh, father," she cried, starting up excitedly, "You are not. You are never going to do such a dreadful thing."

"Joyce," he answered, "I am marrying a good woman, whose means will release the place from the burden of debt, and she is known to be a keen, shrewd woman in station matters."

"Dad, Dad," she cried, "you will not put any one in my mother's place. I could never bear to see that."

"You are young, Joyce, and my dear child, it will be a very short time before the full benefit of what I am doing is apparent to you."

"If I live to be a hundred," she said firmly, "it will never be apparent to me that you have done rightly."

He was wise enough to see that he should for the present allow the matter to drop.

Some few months afterwards Ralph Hilston brought his second wife home. He had arranged for Joyce to stop a few weeks with his old neighbour, the Boss of Bandomile, and it was on the breast of the good Mrs. Wells, who had known Joyce since she was a baby, that Joyce sobbed out her disappointment and trouble.

In a few weeks she returned to her father's place, and could see at a glance that, as her father's right hand, she had been supplanted. He had married a good sensible woman, and she set about straightening the business up. She knew that Hilston's daughter resented her intrusion into the family circle, but she came there determined to do well by Hilston, and if the daughter would let her, to do well by her also.

Over twelve months had passed by, and Joyce had to admit that things were better on the run than ever before. Her father was the type of man who would never do to-day what he could put off till to-morrow. If there was anything to be done his second wife saw that it was done. Joyce still nursed a resentment against the second Mrs. Hilston, to some extent unfairly Once or twice Hilston remonstrated with her.

"It's of no use, Dad. I reverenced my mother I cannot, I cannot," she repeated, "bear to see anybody else in her place."

He soon found that to remonstrate was useless. She paid long visits to Mrs. Wells, and this kindly soul reasoned with her.

"Your father, my dear, has made such a wise selection. Your step-mother is a very good, capable wife, and do, Joyce dear, try and reconcile yourself to the situation."

"No, Mrs. Wells, I cannot. I absolutely cannot. It is more than my feelings can endure, to see her going about the duties my mother so loved to perform."

Mrs. Wells wrote a kindly letter to Hilston, suggesting that he should send Joyce away for a few months for a change, and that during her absence she would see things in a different light.

Hilston read the letter carefully, and that night he wrote to a brother-in-law who had property in North Queensland, James Megson. He had visited Hilston shortly after Mrs. Hilston had died, and had taken a great fancy to Joyce. He had told her she was to come up and visit him when things were more comfortable with him. Hilston thought this was a good opportunity for her to visit her uncle, as the travelling would do her good, and he hoped to remove the unjust prejudice from her mind.

Uncle Jim wrote to say he would love to have Joyce come and stay with him, and it was decided that she should stay as long as she liked with her uncle.

When young Tom Wells heard that she was going to visit her uncle in the far north of Queensland he thought the time had arrived to ask her to be his wife, before she left.

V.

TOM WELLS PROPOSES.

The sun was setting, throwing out, Orient-like across the sky, great glaring sunbeams. From the homestead at Bungimeggri you could see for miles along the open country, through which the main road passed. On the verandah of the homstead stood Joyce Hilston. She was looking up the road and shading her eyes from the rays of the setting sun, with her hand.

"Dad," she said, "there's a horseman coming down the road. I wonder who it can be?"

"It might be young Wells," the father suggested.

"I think they are mustering," she replied.

When she looked again she recognised the figure. There was only one man in the district who could sit a horse like this rider could. It was Tom Wells. She walked as far as the stockyard to meet him.

"When did you leave, Tom?" she asked.

"Early this morning, but I came through the gorge in the mountains. It is longer than the road, but I wanted to see how the cattle were looking." Together they walked back to the homestead.

"How is the good mother, Tom?"

"Splendid," he replied, "sent her love to you."

"That is good of the dear old soul," she answered.

Joyce showed him to his room, saying, "Tea will not be long, Tom."

"Good enough, Joyce," he answered brightly.

These two had been reared together. In her girlhood days he had always taken a keen interest in her ponies, handling them and breaking them in. In the big annual shows she had always made a point of giving him the first call on her services. Now he had come to ask her to be his wife. Supper was over. It was a brilliant Australian night, the moon at her full, shining so brightly, that her luminance sent the light of the stars into the background of the firmament.

As children they had played and romped together. When paying his periodical visits to the city of Sydney, the Boss of Bandomile and his good wife always delayed their journey for a spell at Bungimeggri. At first sight Mrs. Wells had taken a great liking to the newly married English woman, and in the early days of their intimacy the Boss and his wife had never missed an opportunity of giving the young couple the benefit of

their matured colonial experience. Between these two women of the bush a strong bond of true friendship existed. The younger Wells regarded Mrs. Hilston in the light of a second mother, and Mrs. Wells loved Joyce Hilston as dearly as she would have loved a daughter of her own. Often had these two good mothers weaved their own romance around the lives of the two young people, each believing and hoping that a closer tie, at some future time, would bind the two families together. Childhood days had passed happily with Joyce, and her early playmate, equally so her girlhood. Excepting the one black cloud, that cast its gloomy atmosphere around the joy of her youth when her mother passed away, her life had been full of brightness.

Joyce and her companion passed from under the roof of the homestead and walked leisurely towards the stockyard, where Wells' horse was finishing his feed.

The full moon reflected its brightest beams upon them as they lingered at the slip-rails of the horse-paddock, watching the horse, now released, taking his sandbath. They watched him rise shake himself vigorously, and slowly walk away in his hobbles.

Turning to his companion, Wells addressed her.

"Joyce," he said, "I am glad that you have walked down with me. There is something that I especially want to say to you."

"Yes," she answered, "what is it?"

"Have you no idea," he said, "can you not guess?"

To give Joyce credit she could not. "No, Tom," she said quite seriously. "I have not the remotest idea. I am bad at guessing."

"I want you to be serious, Joyce," he said, "because I have a very serious question to ask you. The most important, as far as I am concerned, that I am ever likely to ask you."

"Look her, Tom," she said, "you are talking in riddles. Really you are."

"No," said Tom, "I was never more serious in my life, and the question I wish to ask you, Joyce, is, will you be my wife?"

Joyce looked at him in amazement. "Will you Joyce?" he asked anxiously.

"Do you really mean this seriously Tom," she asked in surprised tones.

"I was never more so in my life," he answered.

She caught him by the arm, saying, "I can hardly realise that you are in earnest. Being so, Tom, you have set me the most painful duty of my life. I never for a moment dreamt that you thought of me as a future wife, or that the question you have just put to me, would ever be asked by you. Need I tell you of the deep regard I bear you. In a hundred and one ways I have shown that. Had you been my only brother, my regard for you in that way, could not be deeper. You cannot doubt my feelings," she earnestly added, "but they are those of a sister for a brother." Tom had turned very white. She knew that she

was hurting him; how could it be otherwise? "The love I bear you, Tom, is not the love a woman bears the man she is going to marry. My woman's instinct guides me in forming that conclusion. At the moment," she continued, her face wearing a pained, perplexed look, "it seems difficult to explain or make myself clear. For my dear friend, whom I have known from my very babyhood, I cherish a very deep regard, but," and here she paused, her face assuming a grave, thoughtful expression, "as my future husband, something tells me that can never be. It would be wrong. Do you know, Tom," she proceeded in tones full of feeling sympathy for his distress, "I have often found myself wondering who you would marry. Thinking what fun it would be to visit you, how I would love your wife as if she was my sister, what romps I would have with your children." Placing her hand in a kindly manner upon his arm, "You do not realise," she continued, "how painful it has been to explain these things to you."

"God knows, Joyce," he said, his voice unsteady, "I love you very dearly. It is quite possible the affection you bear me now would ripen into a deeper feeling in time?" He gazed at her questioningly.

"The feeling a good woman should possess for the man to whom she is going to be wife, does not exist within me, Tom. I do not love as one should, who is about to enter the bonds of marriage. Without that feeling it would be wrong. You say it is possible for my sisterly regard to develop into a deeper sentiment. Do you realise what a tragedy your life and mine would be, if, after the knot was tied, some other being crossed my path for whom my soul craved? My heart tells me, he to whom I give my hand in wedlock, will possess the very essence of my soul. For the pain I have inflicted I feel a deep sympathy, but what you ask is impossible." She took both his hands in her own. "Tom," she asked, "can you forgive me?"

"Yes," he answered, "I can forgive you, Joyce, freely enough." His voice was low, the face white and set. His distress was plainly visible.

"God bless you, Tom," she said, "and may the future hold much happiness for you."

In silence they returned to the homestead. Joyce, too full of sorrow for the disappointment she had caused to say much, he, too upset to give utterance to a word. He knew his mother's regrets would be as keen as his own. In the midst of his own grief his thoughts reverted to hers.

He retired early, his excuse being he would make a daylight start.

When bidding her father good night, Joyce said to him, "Dad, Tom asked me to be his wife—to marry him."

A look of pleasure overspread her father's features. "What answer did you give him?" he asked.

"I could only answer as the promptings of my conscience dictated. My regard for him is that of a sister for a brother. It pained him deeply to learn that. I have tried to do what was right, both for his sake and my own, and one who does what is right does not commit wrong. My answer was 'No.'" she concluded.

"I am sorry, Joyce, it could not be otherwise. Tom is a fine young fellow, and I know of no one I would sooner give you to. However, my dear child," he continued in a kindly voice, "your refusal has caused pain, but he is young, and will, as time heals the scar, form new associations, and will then realise how true you were to yourself and him.

Before retiring to rest she wrote a long letter to Mrs. Wells. In it she told how much she regretted to inflict the pain and disappointment. "But your own woman's heart," she wrote, "will tell you I have done what was right and honourable." She was not long in getting a womanly reply from her almost mother. In it she told Joyce, "Dear child, if you have followed the dictates of your conscience, you have done what was right. There is no surer guide."

As the stars in the early morn were leaving the sky, Tom Wells pursued his journey to the railway head.

VI.

GEOFFERY ARMITAGE.

Two years previous to the opening of the first chapter of this book there stood just outside the large town of Dorset, on one of the main roads leading into the heart of the town, a picturesque house, that attracted the universal attention of all passers-by. Rarely was this place passed by a stranger without the question being asked, "Whose place is that?" If the question was asked any of the old residents of the town or district, the answer would invariably be, "Oh, the Harlands live there. Ever since the oldest resident can remember, they have owned and lived in that place." And such was the case. For centuries the Harlands had occupied "The Grove," as the place was named, generation after generation having passed through their various passages of life, and leaving always all that was associated with goodness, respect and honour. A glance at the well-kept hedge in front of the house, the smooth lawn and gardens, the air of comfort that was associated with the place, would at once indicate to the observer, that the inmates were people of comfortable means. Sitting on the front verandah, facing the lawn, were two persons. One was a lady of middle age, whose years would be in the vicinity of forty or forty-two. The most casual observer would at once see that she was still a handsome woman, and on more mature reflection would conclude that she had possessed, at one time, great beauty. This deduction would be quite correct, for Grace Harland, or, as she was familiarly known by her close friends, Aunt Grace, was at one time a very handsome girl. She came from a familly who were noted for their personal charm of manner, and good looks. Grace Harland had had her romance, one that was mixed with considerable suffering and sorrow, and, as we see her to-day, she was still a single woman. In the vicinity of her home she was much loved and respected. She was one of two sisters who were left orphans, Grace being only fifteen, and her sister two years younger, when their sad loss took place. An aged relative took charge of the two girls, and under her care, and the eye of their trustee, a Mr. Stevenson, the girls grew into womanhood. Isabel, the younger sister, married early. She was only ninetten when she fell deeply in love with Colonel Armitage, a man nearly twelve years her senior. Phillip Armitage was just as deeply in love with his young wife, but after twelve months of happy married life, the husband, who was away in another part of the country

on military duty, contracted a severe cold. Neglect produced serious developments, pneumonia followed, and the young wife only arrived in time to say the last good-bye. Her reason was feared for, and it was only the sound common sense of the elder sister that saved her from becoming a complete mental wreck. She told the bereaved girl, for she was little more, of the great duties she owed, her duty to God, who had entrusted her with the glorious charge of motherhood, of the duty she owed her unborn child, and of the duty she owed her dead husband, that of bringing his child well and strong into the world. The last remonstrance had the desired effect, and from the hour she realised the duty she owed him, whom she had so dearly loved, she became a different woman. She altered so, that all her friends were satisfied that she had recovered from her loss. The child was born, and proved to be a bonny boy. She gazed upon the face, noting the resemblance with a sad and sorrowful expression. She never properly recovered her health again, and though various changes were sought, and the best doctors consulted, she passed away twelve months after the child was born. She committed the care of the little one to Grace, and died with a smile on her face, full in the belief that she was going to join the husband she had loved so well. This was a dreadfully sad episode in Grace's life, but she had her duty to perform, the care of her little nephew, and to this work she devoted herself so ardently, that only at intervals would the recollection of her irreparable loss cross her mind.

Aunt Grace had given Geoffrey the devotion and love of a life time, and the boy had grown up, loving her as truly and deeply as he would have loved his mother. Between the two there was a great bond of affection. Geoffery was a failure at school, and this greatly grieved his good aunt, for all the Harlands had been noted for their ability. She was very disappointed that in this respect her nephew had failed. Poor Geoff was a failure at everything except one. In the sports field he was a champion, and he made a great name for himself as the champion boxer of the school.

Aunt Grace always pulled a wry face when Geoffery referred to the distinction he enjoyed in this direction. As we will conclude the other occupant of the verandah was Geoffery. Dressed in flannels, smoking coat and slippers, he was lazily puffing away at his pipe, looking across the lawn, and over the well-kept hedge, into space.

Geoffery was eighteen that day, and it was a very important day for him, for he had to decide on a calling, and it had to meet with the approbation of his trustee, Mr. Stevenson; who then, according to the terms of his father's will, would advance him a certain sum of money to start on the road of life.

Aunt Grace was looking serious this morning. Stopping her work, she looked up and addressed her nephew.

"Well, Geoff," she said, "we will have to drive to town and see Mr. Stevenson. He will expect us along about ten. There is one matter I would like to discuss with you, Geoff, and that is, what occupation you are going to select. This is a question Mr. Stevenson will ask of you, and you will require to reflect, and decide what your answer will be. I have often opened up the subject, with a view to obtaining from you, some hint as to what line of calling you are bent on, but I must candidly confess, that I am just as wise when the conversation is concluded, as when it commenced. Geoff, have you really considered the necessity of giving this matter some serious reflection? Mr. Stevenson has often referred to the matter, but I can only tell him that I am quite in the dark regarding your tastes. Have you really decided to select some profession, Geoff?" she asked. "We have never had an idle Harland, and I think that you love your Aunt too well to become an exception to the rule, knowing how such a line of conduct would pain me."

Geoff, who had listened to all his aunt had said, with a serious look overspreading his countenance, replied, "You have spoken quite truly, my dear Aunt Grace. I do indeed love you too dearly, to ever give you a moment's pain, and if I have not been as open as I should have been, on the subject of a future calling, it is because I love you so deeply that I am loth to wound you. I have, from day to day, postponed my declaration of what I have all my life desired to become, knowing full well that what I would say would give you great pain. Ever since I was at school one class of life has always appealed to me, so much so, that the dearest wish of my heart is to put it into execution."

"Well, Geoff, you are a strange boy to be nursing an ideal and never giving me your confidence. You do not realise with what joy I will enter into your plans, what pleasure it would be for me to discuss them with you. Everything that concerns you is of the greatest importance to me, and it seems utterly incomprehensible to me, that you never confided them to me. Geoff you have always been a candid boy. Tell me what are your wishes for the future," and Aunt Grace looked at him anxiously. Geoffred hesitated for a moment and then shortly said, "Sheep farming." Aunt Grace looked up in surprise, and said, "Well, the Harlands have had brilliant barristers, doctors, and architects who have made names for themselves, but you are the first of our people to select sheep rearing for a calling."

"I have thought much over the matter for long years, and the wish is very near and dear to my heart, Aunt Grace. I know that what I am going to say will pain you greatly, but if the following out of my plans will wound you too deeply," and here Geoff's voice grew sad, "I promise to relinquish them. I have always wished to be a sheep breeder on a large scale, like they work the business in Australia." At the word Australia Aunt Grace looked up with a sudden pain on her face. "My ambi-

tion," continued Geoff, is to go out to Australia with what capital my trustee will allow me, and commence life there on a large tract of country. I would feel the parting from you, and I fully realise what a blow it will be to you to part from me; but, dear Aunt Grace, you have no idea how keen the wish is, to put my plans into operation. I know my confession has pained you greatly, and knowing that it would be so, has prevented me from mustering sufficient courage to place the matter before you earlier. I was loth indeed to hurt the feelings of one who is so dear to me." The last words were uttered in tones of deep feeling, which told of the depths of his sincerity.

Whilst Geoffrey was making his confession Aunt Grace's face twitched a great deal, and when the last words were spoken with such feeling for her, she could not stop the tear that stole silently down her cheek, and dropped as silently on to her work. When Geoffrey observed these signs of feeling he rose and walked over to the side of his aunt, and bent down and kissed her.

He said tenderly, "I will abandon my plans, and will not leave your side."

"Geoffery, I will regain my composure in a moment, and I will think over what you have told me. Excuse me a moment, Geoff," and she passed into the privacy of her chamber.

Geoffery re-seated himself, suffering from conflicting emotions, and blaming himself for causing the good lady pain.

Aunt Grace, in her private room, sat down and reflected. She was pleased at one phase of the matter. Geoff had shown a spirit unknown to her. To wish to go to those strange and distant lands showed resource and pluck which she never thought Geoff possessed. Aunt Grace had tons of commonsense.

She rejoined Geoff, saying, "We will consult Mr. Stevenson, Geoff, and see what his opinion is."

They drove to Mr. Stevenson, who was awaiting them. He had charge of their affairs, and he looked after their interests since he was twenty-one years of age. He heard all they had to say, and at the conclusion stretched out his hand.

"Geoff," he said, "I was beginning to think that Miss Grace had spoilt you, but I ought to have known that a Harland could not be spoilt."

"Then you approve, Mr. Stevenson?" Aunt Grace asked.

"Certainly I do, and wish him tons of good fortune."

Ways and means had to be discussed. At his trustee s discretion he could get a sum of three thousand pounds, and Aunt Grace proposed to add two thousand from her own private funds.

And so it came to pass that Geoffrey, so equipped, sailed for Australia. Nothing of importance took place during the voyage except that Geoff improved himself in the boxing art. On the same boat there were some boxing champions going to Australia, and he boxed daily with them. He arrived in Sydney with a letter of introduction to Richard Beverly. He put up at Pha-

lert's, and the second morning after he arrived he presented himself at Richard Beverly's office. Geoffrey felt a bit nervous when he was ushered into the presence of the great Pastoral King of Australia.

"Sit down," requested Richard Beverly. He read the letter of introduction, and then looked keenly at Geoffery. Richard Beverly saw much good in the good-looking face and well-knit figure of Geoff.

"You have come for my advice. I understand you wish to be a squatter."

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"Well, in the first place, Mr. Armitage, settle in Queensland. The best opportunities are offering there. The country in that colony is equal to the world's best. God's good world holds no better territory. Rich in magnificent pastoral lands, of unknown mineral wealth, possessing an unlimited area of the best quality of agricultural country, climatic conditions suitable for all varieties of production. Where would you find a colony offering the opportunities for advancement for rich and poor alike. I always claim a great future for Queensland. I understand your financial position. Make a start, attend to your business, and in twenty years you should be a rich man. Australia is a great continent, Mr. Armitage, and the longer you remain here the dearer you will grow to love it. I have a client down from Queensland to whom I will introduce you. He will give you all the information you require. Come back at 1 o'clock and dine with me

Geoffery kept his appointment, and after lunch Mr. Beverly introduced him to an Englishman, by name James Megson. They took to one another on sight. Beverly left them to make their own arrangements. He knew Megson to be a very straight man who could give the young Englishman very valuable advice.

Geoffery accompanied Megson to Brisbane. The Northern pastoral man knew the way to go about the business. Alongside of Megson's run there was a good piece of country available. Megson explained he would have taken it up long ago, but the rent was high, and he had not the capital to handle the matter. Geoffery was able to arrange for the country, and left with Megson for the far North of Queensland. Between the younger and the elder man a true bond of friendship ripened.

Armitage was now a contented, happy young man. The dream of his youth was realised. Under the advice of Megson he had wisely stocked up and at the time the story opens had been settled a couple of years, and had already recovered two clips from his flock. He came into prominence in his district during the last shearing. The work was in full swing. Every night the man Geoff had over the board complained about the conduct of a certain shearer. This man, a bully, shore as he liked and ill-used the sheep. At this time Geoff was little over twenty, and in perfect health and form. The last time the shed

overseer had complained about the man and his work. Armitage had said, " The man you refer to is supposed to be the champion fighter of the district. I have not had a mill since I landed in Australia. I am going stale for the want of one. I will have to fight Mr. Burns. The lesson may prove useful to him. I feel as fit as a man could be."

In a spare room he had a punching ball hanging, and never missed the opportunity of an hour's work at it.

It is intended to commence a new chapter from here.

VII.

GEOFFERY MAKES A NAME FOR HIMSELF.

The shed overseer was down with a touch of fever, and Geoff had to take charge of the board for the afternoon. Shearing for the day was almost finished, the shed was on the last run, when Armitage caught the bully crushing the very life out of the sheep he was shearing. Geoff went up to his stand and spoke to him. "Here," he said, "you are paid to shear that sheep not destroy it." The shearer hurled a foul insult at him. Geoff let it pass unnoticed.

A shearer working alongside of the bully remarked, "That's a roughie to put over him."

Shearing was finished. The shearers, greasy and sweating, were coming out of the shed. Geoff was waiting with a smile on his face. He stepped up to the man who had used the insulting expression to him. "Here, Burns," he said, "I want you."

"Well," the shearer remarked insolently, "what do you want."

The shearers stringing out of the shed stopped on their way to the hut and gathered around.

"I want you to meet me at daylight," said Armitage, "right here. The whole of the shed will see a square go."

A contemptuous smile played around the mouth of Burns.

"What about it now," he said.

"Not to-night," answered Armitage. I'll fight you fair. You have put in a day's work. Take a night's rest. I'll fight you first thing in the morning."

"Well," answered Burns, "if you're looking for it you get it. I warn you."

"We will leave it until the morning," replied Armitage.

After tea Geoff always made up his tallies for the day. He was sitting in the small room that he used for office work, when a knock came to the door.

"Come in," he called out, and in walked two of the shearers from the shed.

"Well?" Geoff asked in his usual civil manner. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, thanks, Boss, but me and old Bill thought we'd come along and give you the office about this chap you're going to have a go with in the morning. He's a strong fighter, and I'm afraid too good for a young chap like you. We only meant to do a fair thing by you. This chap killed a man in a tourna-

ment in the township a couple of years ago. He's a strong fighter, and I'd not advise you to meet him." Geoff listened to what the two old decent chaps had to say, quietly smoking away. He realised their intentions were of the best.

"I am much obliged to you two men for what you have told me. Do not be alarmed about me. If there is one thing in this world I can do it is fight. I'll beat this man and teach him a lesson. All the same, I thank you for your kindly interest. Take a tip. If there is any betting—I know what great gamblers you chaps are—have a bit on me. I'm going to beat him. Go down to the shed and get your bets on."

The fight in the morning was the absorbing topic in the shed that night, the general impression being that the Boss would not last a round. Burns was the centre of attraction. He was talking to a mob of rouseabouts and shearers.

"Oh, I'll not knock him about," he was saying. "He don't seem a bad sort of a bloke, but a bit of a hiding 'll take some of the starch out of him."

"No," another shearer chipped in. "He's not a bad sort. I wouldn't knock him about Burns."

"I'll give him a bit of kidstakes for a start, and have a bit of fun with him," he said.

Early morn saw every shed-hand up and doing. Wool rollers, pickers up, penners up, musterers, the latter with their horses ready saddled for a start, shearers; all were eagerly waiting for the fight to commence. Standing round large buckets of tea, each with a large mug of tea in one hand and the other filled with a large piece of "brownie," discussing the coming fight. A picker up, with eyes alert in the direction of the homestead, cried out, "Here they come!"

All eyes were turned in the direction. Armitage, hatless, wearing an overcoat, accompanied by the wool-classer and the shed overseer, could be seen coming through the gate of the night paddock into the woolshed paddock. The three walked over to where the crowd of shearers and rouseabouts stood assembled. All eyes were fixed upon them as they approached.

Burns, ready for the fray, was standing back, surrounded by several of his friends. He was wearing a pair of fighting trunks, and had a pair of light shoes, with an ordinary coat thrown loosely over his shoulders. Preliminaries were arranged. The chairman of the shed, a big red-complexioned man, well-known to be as straight as a die, was selected as referee. The shed overseer, with one of Burns' friends, were to act as time-keepers. The wool-classer, a Melbournian, and not too slow with his hands, was seconding Armitage. A move was made to midway between the shearing shed and the mess huts, and a place agreed upon to conduct the fight. A ring was formed, and a couple of men appointed to keep it. "Give them plenty of room," they cried. "There's no fancy seats at this fight." It was agreed that Marquis of Queensberry rules were to be observed. Armit-

age threw a pair of light fighting gloves into the ring, but Burns said, "There no good to me. The bare mauleys for me."

"Good enough," answered Armitage, and picked them up and tossed them out of the ring.

Geoffrey threw off his overcoat. He was wearing a pair of tennis trousers, the bottoms tucked into the tops of his socks. A light pair of shoes completed his fighting rig.

Burns threw a critical eye over his opponent. It was impossible to fault him. The eye never rested on a better specimen of maturing manhood. Broad shouldered, possessing a pair of powerful looking arms, strong chested, standing well over a good average height, in sound robust health, he was going to take some beating, and Burns quickly realised it. All eyes were turned upon him. Stripped, he was an eye-opener. Added to his perfect condition, he had the advantage of thorough scientific training.

He had fought right through the college an unbeaten champion. In the last fight before he left the college, he had created such a favourable impression, that one of the principals, a very keen supporter of the game, and an ardent admirer of Geoffery, arranged a meeting between his young fancy and a clever professional. The weights were even, and the bout was of a private character. There was half a hundred of sports present, followers of the game, and some gentlemen friends of the principals.

Geoffery had the professional thoroughly extended from the word go. At the conclusion of the bout, Geoffery's opponent was generous enough to admit "That the young chap had given him the go of his life." To a confidential friend he had said, "That beggar was not right out. If he liked to use them he has a pair of cruel hands." Geoffery, in all his fights, had never allowed himself to go his hardest. As a matter of fact he had never really been fully extended. With the professional he had more than held his own; with that he was satisfied, without putting up his best effort. The hard work of station life had hardened his sinews and muscles, and as he stood facing Burns, ready for the word go, he was as fit to fight as any man in the country.

Burns was a heavier man than Armitage. Strong and powerfully built. He was admittedly the champion of the district. His knowledge of scientific fighting was rudimentary. Aided by his strength, he knew just sufficient to beat all who came along of the rough and tumble variety. He was a rushing type of fighter, and whilst moving after his opponent, straight from the shoulder he would keep powerful lefts and rights shooting out. He smothered the inexperienced fighter, and had won all his fights with ease.

"Is everything ready?" asked Burns.

"Yes," answered the referee.

He stepped into the middle of the ring, saying, "Look here, Armitage, you've got two friends here, and I want them and all

these men here to understand that this fight is not of my making, that Armitage brought this on himself," he continued, looking around. "Whatever happens he's only got himself to blame."

Silence reigned. Nobody spoke. Armitage stood with his arms folded, a quiet smile playing around his mouth. He was thinking of the surprise in store for Burns.

"Time," rang out from the referee's lips.

Both men advanced, the eye of each fixed in deadly earnest on his opponent.

The early part of the first round was spent in feeling. Each man attempting to get some measure of the other. Burns very soon grew impatient. It was not his style of fighting. He had been in the habit of mixing things, wading in and having his man in trouble before the first round had ended.

Over-confident, he started to let those long, sinewy, powerful arms, with a fist on the end of each the size of horse's hoofs, fly about.

Armitage had no trouble in evading his first rush. A couple of heavy sledge-hammer lefts and rights passed harmlessly by. Either of them, had their reached their mark, would have rattled a giant. He quickly realised his opponent was not a scientific fighter. The next rush Burns tried was disastrous for him. It was the middle of the round. Armitage's left shot out like a flash, the weight of the shoulders following the force of the blow. It landed under the left eye, and opened the flesh off the bone. The left had barely done its work, when rip, half hook, half swing, the right went into Burns' ribs. As the blow caught him in the ribs, he lowered his defence. Like a flash again the left shot out, landing once more on the bruised flesh underneath the eye. The last blow knocked Burns off his feet into a half sitting position on the ground. He stopped there, supporting himself with one hand, palm downwards, resting on the ground. The blood slowly trickled down his cheek from the cut under the eye, which was already half closed. A deadly silence had fallen on the crowd, who divided their wondering attention between the man taking the count, and Armitage, standing cool and unconcerned.

Every shearing shed has its spieler or forty. Men who come from the cities, engage to shear, but who really come to take the shed hands and shearers down in the gambling schools at night time. Such a type of man had been backing Burns to beat Armitage. The silence of the ring was broken by this man's voice yelling out: "Here, I'll lay six to one on the squatter. Six to one on the squatter."

"Write your own price about him," he continued to yell. His offers passed unchallenged. The man on the ground took the count to eight. At the word he sprang to his feet. Armitage made no attempt to follow. He allowed him to get away clear. The rest of the round Burns fought with greater caution. Just before the round concluded Armitage rattled a smashing left into

the ribs, following it up with a lightning like right on to the ear. The latter blow was a cruel one, tearing the lower part of the ear, which bled profusely. The blow staggered him, and the word "Time" saved him from further punishment.

He walked back slowly to his corner, wearing the only serious look that had ever adorned his face. Sitting on the jam case that had been brought from the rouseabouts' mess shed to act as seat, he looked a comical picture. The eye was almost closed, the left ear stood out like a prickly pear leaf from the stem, the ribs showed the signs of Armitage's powerful blows.

Every shed possesses a wag, a humourist. Graceville was no exception. The eye of the wag was fixed upon Burns with a humorous expression on the face. "Jerry," he cried out, "Tell him who you are."

The bruised man turned his gaze in the direction of the speaker and threw a black scowling glance at him. It was well for the wag that Burns was otherwise engaged. A quiet smile passed over the face of Armitage. The wag's remark produced a derisive laugh, adding to the discomforture of the fighter.

"Time," rang out again from the lips of the big shearer, and again the two men faced one another, each wearing the same look of grim earnestness. After the first round, Burns knew he was a beaten man. He recognised he was outclassed. To give the man his due he was no coward. He realised his chance of winning was hopeless, but had made up his mind to stick to the busines as long as he could stand up.

The second round opened. One man fighting a winning fight, the other fighting a losing one. The round had not progressed far, when Armitage found the ribs with a heavy left and right. Smack, the blows sounded, leaving an ugly red scar in each spot. He followed Burns around the ring, found an opening, and smashed the right on to the damaged ear. A howl of rage burst from Burns. Losing control over himself, and giving a cry like a wild beast, he hurled himself upon Armitage. Crash! Full in the mouth Armitage's left met him. The blow was hard, straight, and accurate. It took Burns off his feet, and landed him on the ground. It had knocked out two front teeth and had broken a third, which was hanging by a piece of loose gum. He took the count up to nine. Whilst on the ground he occupied himself getting rid of the hanging tooth. He rose at the word "nine." Armitage after him, landing on the body when and where he liked. "Time," rang out again, and Burns staggered back to the jam case. They mopped him with the wet towel. He looked a dreadful mess, but there was not a man around the ringside who had an ounce of sympathy for him. Many a time had they stood around and watched him hammer some unfortunate half-drunken wretch, until he had to be carried away. So far, the only damage that Armitage had suffered was to his hands. Both knuckles were bleeding.

"Time!" again rang out. For the third round they faced one another. The round had not gone very far when Armitage laned fair and square on the bridge of the nose. Burns went down, and again rose at the "nine." He had taken a very severe thrashing, but had stood up to it like a man. Whatever his faults were, he was not a cur. For the remainder of the third round Armitage did what he liked with him. Three times during the remainder of the round Armitage sent him down. The last time he staggered to his feet, wobbly at the knees. Before Armitage conld administer the final blow "Time" was again called.

His seconds freshened him up, but it was apparent to all, he could not last another round.

"Time," called out the referee., and Burns, a beaten man, rose from the jam case to get the knock out. He knew it had to come. They had barely sparred up when "Crack!" The blow caught the bully accurately on the point. It made a noise like a new cricket ball meeting the full face of the bat. Burns' head went back, his feet left the ground and fell at full stretch and lay as silent as death. It was the knock-out, administered as only a true, scientific fighter can.

As unconcerned as ever, Armitage walked to where there was a bucket of water, washed his hands, dried them on a towel, took his coat from the shed overseer, put it on, and prepared to walk away. "Spronge his head with the towel and water. He will come around in a few minutes," he told them, and slowly walkd away, followed by the wondering gaze of the crowd.

"Well" said the spieler "He's the coolest joker I've ever seen, and what sort of a blooming snag to strike. Look here," he continued, "I've seen some of the best fights in Sydney, but ycu take it from me, that squatter chap is some fighter."

Next day Burns took tucker from the shearer's mess and shifted down to the creek and camped for a fortnight. He sent up for his cheque, got his horses, and rode out of the district. The mighty had fallen!

All were pleased at the bully's downfall. Secretly they had all cherished a dislike for him. They hated his domineering, blustering ways. In the shed, at the mess table, in the gambling school, he was always the same, an unapproachable bully, travelling on the reputation of having killed a man. Men travelling from shed to shed gave vivid accounts of the fight, and Geoffery's skill. Geoffery's consideration in postponing the fight until the morning assisted to win universal popularity for him. All the men admitted Armitage had played a square game, and respected him for it. After this incident, there was not a shed in Queensland where the wool came off closer to the hide than Graceville, the name he had given the place in remembrance of his aunt.

There was another occasion when he did a charitable action that was well known to the road travellers of the district. He was out on the run, and came across an old swaggie in the grip of malaria fever. The old chap was very bad. He had intermittent attacks of hot and cold fever. In the early morn, before the fever reached any height, he would crawl down to the creek. Here he would fill two billies of water and place one in the shade of a tree, the other in the sun. He would lie under the shade of the tree until he got the shivers. As soon as he commenced to shake, he would crawl out to the billy of water standing out in the sun. As soon as his temperature started to rise he would again crawl under the friendly shade of the big river gum. Geoffery brought him to his homestead on horseback, kept him for a couple of weeks, and then gave him a couple of pounds to go on the road with. Scotty promptly knocked it down at Connolly's shanty, but he told up and down the road, that the new chum was a white man.

There was never a gate on Graceville left open. Swaggies always shut the gates carefully, and were particular to see the billy fire was well extinguished. These rough men of the far west respected a kindly turn, and remembered the man who did it.

VIII.

BUSH TRAGEDY.

Armitage had only been settled six months alongside of Megson, when an incident occurred that left a lasting, painful impression upon his mind.

His neighbour, a decent, hard-working Scotchman, had sent word over to the effect that he had some of Armitage's sheep.

It was the early morn when Geoff. rode away to Bonnie Doon, the name of his neighbour's place. When he arrived at the station a dreadful tragedy was in progress. McCallum, the owner of the place, had built a fine house. Old pastoral people, with experience, had advised him to put the money into a dam at the back of the run. He had answered "No. My Scotch lassie is coming out to join me, and I will have a decent home ready for her."

The house was built up from the ground on blocks. In this comfortable homestead he and his wife and his two rosy-cheeked bairns had passed many happy days. When Geoff arrived at the homestead these two beautiful children, a boy and a girl, were in the agonising throes of a terrible death. The father was under the big house boring holes with a large auger, into the blocks. These holes he filled up with arsenic and treacle, and then hammered a wooden plug into the hole. This precaution was to destroy the white ants, a building's greatest enemy in those parts. He was at this work when a valuable stud ram got tangled up in the wire of the fence. For the moment, forgetting everything else, he hastily proceeded to release the ram from danger.

When he returned to continue the work of white ant destruction, he became dreadfully agitated; here were the two bairns sitting around the pot, dipping their finger into, and sucking them. With an agonised cry he snatched them up, and rushed into the mother's presence. The dreadful nature of their danger and suffering soon became a horrible revelation to the parents. Emetics were administered, but the greatest skill in the world would not have preserved their lives.

It was a most awful sight to watch these two children convulsed with the agony of their sufferings, to hear their cries beseeching their mother for relief.

She had been a hospital matron, well skilled in her business in Scotland, and her experience told her that the chances for their lives was absolutely hopeless.

Her grief unbalanced her mind. She wandered about the house crying out there was no God, that in the future she would never again look at her Bible. She argued that no God would allow these two innocent bairns to wend their footsteps to where such dreadful danger stood, to be destroyed in agony. "No," she maintained, "there is no God. I will not believe there is."

The scene of the dying children left a painful impression on Geoff's mind. He was much affected and much cut-up. Everything that was possible for him to do under these sad circumstances he did, but the tragedy of these children's lives penetrated deeply into his mind.

The father of the children was never the same again after their loss, and became a frequent visitor at Connolly's shanty at the Mail Change. Some six months after the chronicle of the last sad events, Mrs. McCallum had sent word over that she wanted to see Geoff. She wanted him to buy their property. Mac, as she called her husband, now spent most of his time at the shanty, and she was anxious to sell the place and get away from the district.

Whilst they were talking, McCallum's horse arrived riderless, and Geoff observed at once that one stirrup leather was missing. Thinking McCallum had too much of the bottle, and had fallen off his horse, he volunteered to go up the track and seek for him. Mrs. McCallum, at the sight of the riderless horse, had turned pale. She knew that the loss of his children had affected his mind. Knowing that he was drinking heavily, she shuddered to think what his fate may have been.

Geoffery found him in a billabong off the road, dead, and hanging by the missing stirrup leather.

McCallum was heavily in debt to the bank. They sold the place to James Megson, who, when he bought McCallum's place, sold his own to Geoffery Armitage.

The bank owned a small iron house in a lonely spot in the township at the railway head. This they gave to Mrs. McCallum rent free, with a small annual sum settled on her as long as she existed there. At the time the story opens she was living in this place a life of absolute seclusion.

Old friends tried to reason with her to win her back from the soulless track she trod.

"No," she argued, "there is no God. Often in the drought-stricken times, have I watched stock perish in agony for the want of water. Do you want me to believe, if there was One who could preserve them from agony, would He allow those dumb innocent things to suffer? Would he have not directed the footsteps of my innocent bairns from the deadly danger into which they walked." She refused all friendly advances now, lived a life of solitude and seclusion, and was known as the "Queer Woman."

IX.

THE PASTORAL KING'S SON.

Richard Beverly, at the time we introduced him, was still a well-preserved man of fifty-three, although he looked ten years younger. His son had grown into a fine specimen of vigorous manhood. As a child, the mother had abbreviated his name to Lex, and at the present time he was well known right throughout the city as Lex Beverly. He possessed his father's fine looks and good figure, and was a well-known man about town. He had been educated at the King's School, and leaving his studies behind him at the age of eighteen, until he reached his majority, had spent most of his time on his father's pastoral properties. At twenty-one he was doing all the managerial relieving on the stations. He had travelled with an old friend of his father's throughout England and the Continent, and other places, and on his return to Sydney he had just reached his twenty-fourth year. Lex Beverly, at the time the story commences, was twenty-six years of age, and had been engaged for the last two years to his mother's ward, Ann Gordon. It was now generally understood that Lex would relieve his father of the management of the pastoral business as soon as he had married and settled down. The elder Beverly had been a great husband and generous father, and had left no stone unturned to make an upright, honourable, man of his son, and he was convinced that his son was all that could be desired of him in this respect. Lex Beverly deserved his father's good opinion. He was gifted with a great charm of manner, as generous in disposition as his father, and it was generally admitted amongst the city folk, that no young man of the time enjoyed such universal popularity as the younger Beverly. Even the newsboy from whom he bought a newspaper, knew Lex Beverly. He possessed his father's kindly nature to its fullest extent. Like the father he derived his greatest pleasure in giving pleasure to others. He would buy a paper and tell the boy to keep the change, and then watch the boy's face glow with the satisfaction he felt. He would walk away with a smile on his own features. In big deeds as in small ones, to do good if possible was the pleasure of his life.

At the time we write Lex Beverly, with some other friends, lived in Macquarie Street in a house they had named "The Quarters." They kept one man-servant.

Beverly's dearest friend was a man some six or seven years older than himself, by name Jim McMaster. McMaster was not

a man of large means in comparison with the wealth of Beverly, but he was a man of sterling character and good principle. At the time the story opens he would be about thirty-two years of age. The other two friends who made the rest of the party at "The Quarters" were Irish men of good means, but neither play a very important part in this book.

McMaster had had a brilliant scholastic career, and was studying for the bar, with every prospect of a brilliant future, but when he was twenty-one his Aunt, his only relative, died. He inherited about six hundred a year, dropped all his legal aspirations, and drifted into a quiet, easy going man about town. Beverly held him in deep esteem which was reciprocated by his friend. They were much together, and so we find them on this particular evening, in their smoking jackets by the fireside, puffing away at their pipes.

"Jim, have you been round to the Royal lately," Beverly asked.

"No," answered McMaster, "not for the last few days."

"Jim, old man," Beverly continued, "I think those good-looking eyes of Margery are getting hold of you."

"She's a fine girl," the other man replied, "and the makings of a good woman if the wolves do not send her to Hell."

"Margery has plenty of common-sense, which is a valuable asset, Jim. Would you marry her if she would have you?" asked Beverly.

"Yes, Lex," the other replied, "I would do so to-morrow, and reckon I was a lucky man to get her." McMaster knocked the ashes out of his pipe on to the tray, and Beverly smoked on.

"You see, Lex," he continued, "I have a desire to get into legal harness again, only I have no incentive. 'Tis strange, no thought of marriage came into my head, until I met Margery."

Margery was a good-looking girl in the Royal bar. She was a girl of good education, and in direct opposition to her old father and mother, she had taken a position at the Royal. When old Dawson, who was a very respectable packer in one of the big warehouses, saw that Margery was going to have her own way, he spoke to one of the travellers, who got her a position in the best house in the city. The Royal was much frequented by Beverly and McMaster. Margery had been there for five months, and was a general favourite. Beverly liked the bright good-looking girl, with her ready wit and smiling manner. He had become interested in her, and he and McMaster often called in with other men. Much sound advice had Beverly tendered the girl, who was shrewd, and easily saw the wisdom of it. McMaster had grown to like her so much, that, in a half-heatred way he had asked her to marry him. Margery laughed it off, and when Beverly asked her if old Jim, as he affectionately spoke of his pal, had proposed, she said something about not wanting to marry her grandfather. This annoyed Baverly, who felt it was unlike

Margery, and her explanation of the matter displeased him. He was at a loss to account for her caprice.

"Your own marriage is not far off," said Jim, "and when you leave here, I intend to leave also. Hammond and Cameron are both good friends, but they are not like you and I. Yes, Lex, I believe if Margery would marry me, I could buckle to the game of law with great vigor."

Beverly still thoughtfully smoked on. "Have you an engagement?" he asked McMaster.

"Yes," the other man answered, "That is the reason I am in full harness. Cameron and Hammond are going to the opera, and are taking some of the leading girls out to supper after."

"Lucky dogs," said Beverly. "See what fun you miss when you are engaged, Jim."

"Well, it was a variety of fun that never appealed to me."

The Sydney Cup was just over, and the conversation turned on to racing. "I was hit hard over the Cup," said Beverly. "The heaviest losses I have had; but I'll get it back on the Melbourne Cup."

Beverly rose to go out. "I am going to spend an hour with Albert Teece," he said. He changed his coat, and took his hat and stick.

McMaster looked up at him. "There's no doubt, Lex, you have a wonderfully generous disposition. Where are his friends who sponged on him when he was squandering his fortune? Lavishing it upon them."

"Like his fortune," Beverly said, "melted away."

"Good night, Jim." They parted. Jim to go to his evening, and Beverly to visit the sick friend.

Beverly went to a private hospital facing Wynyard Park, in York Street, and was shown up to the room of his sick friend. A glance would tell even the inexperienced, that the young man would soon be crossing the divide. His face lit up when he saw who his visitor was. He spoke with difficulty, and every few minutes was seized with a dreadful fit of coughing, which threatened to terminate his existence on the moment.

"This is good of you, Lex, to come and see me," he murmured with difficulty.

He was quite a young man, twenty-two or twenty-three, and had inherited a fair sum of money on attaining his majority. Slow horses, fast women, false friends, and loaded dice had left him in the gutter. Beverly coming home late one night passed this figure clinging to a post, nearly suffocated by a dreadful fit of coughing. Beverly's heart would never allow him to pass a sufferer. "God help him, poor wretch," he murmured. He accosted him. "Old chap, can I do anything for you?"

The sufferer turned at the sound of the voice, and said, "Good night, Beverly." Beverly turned him with his face to the light. "Good God, Teece, is it you?"

"Yes, Beverly, in the gutter well and truly. Absolutely penniless. Beverly," he continued, "I have been to the wharf half a dozen times to bring my miserable life to a conclusion, but I cannot face the business in that way."

Beverly took him home to "The Quarters," and the next day had him removed to the private hospital. A few weeks at the outside before the hand of death will fall upon him.

Beverly sat late with him. He could not resist the craving pleading look in the other's eyes, to stay as long as possible, and he lingered on till the clock struck eleven.

"Old man," he said, "I must be going. Are you sure that you have everything that you require."

"Yes, I thank you," replied the other. "I think of you during the day, of your kindly, generous heart, and wonder why all men are not like you. Beverly, you are so well balanced. It is no trouble for you to do what is right."

"I knock through the world as decently as possible," replied Beverly. "Perhaps my hour of temptation will come, and who can tell what strength I will show."

He said good-night, promising to call again the next day.

The grateful eyes of the sick man followed the retreating form of Beverly, as he passed through the door. He turned before finally closing it, giving a kindly wave of the hand to his friend.

Poor Teece, within a week his troubles were over. Jim and Beverly were the only mourners.

Beverly walked down Wynyard Street, up George Street, turning down King Street he went up Pitt Street.

"I'll put in half an hour at the club," he said, "and then go home."

X.

A MOONLIGHT DRIVE.

The Opera at the Royal Theatre wa sover. A packed house had greeted the night's performance. The theatre was emptying itself, and the huge crowds were pushing, surging and struggling to get to the fresh air. From the passage of the artists' private entrance, the merry ripple of women's laughter floated on the breeze. Presently a party of men and women emerged from it. The women were good-looking and bright. All carried the atmosphere of the spirit of joy. Sparkling eyes, flushed cheeks, excited looks, all told that the night had been a great success. They stood at the door of the passage for a brief space, the men assisting them with their wraps. They were a party going off to supper. They paired off, walked up the passage, and turned into King Street. The night was one of Australia's most beautiful, the moon at the full, and not a cloud visible. The English girls were in ecstacies with Australia.

"I already love this beautiful land of yours, with its everlasting sunshine," remarked one of the girls.

They tripped along merrily, clever wit flowing, living in an atmosphere of jocularity and bright spirits.

The world was theirs, these single men and women. Single women without responsibilities, single men with plenty of means.

Hammond and Cameron were of the party. Hammond's partner exclaimed, "Mr. Hammond, do you know a gentleman by the name of Mr. Lex Beverly?" He turned his head, and looking over his shoulder, addressed his pal Cameron. "Miss Mordant wishes to know am I acquainted with Lex Beverly." To his lady friend he answered, "Why, he is a pal of ours. We all live together. Why do you ask?"

"I have strict instructions from Milsie Blackhurst to meet him and to convey to him her very best remembrances."

"I remember her. She made a great hit here a couple of years ago. There was a good deal of talk in the city regarding she and Lex at the time of her visit. People said that she was going to land the Pastoral King's son, but there was "nothing doing" as far as he was concerned.

"I am dying to meet him." Milsie told us all. "He was the very nicest man she had ever met."

"Beverly is a good fellow, a very popular man, and deservingly so. All men and women like him."

He had just finished speaking, when, looking up, he said: "This is indeed strange, Miss Mordant. This is Beverly coming towards us, there under the light."

"She never over-estimated his appearance. He is indeed a handsome man, and what a kindly face," she remarked.

There was no time to say more. They were face to face with Beverly. Raising his hat, he was in the act of passing, when Hammond accosted him.

"Beverly," he said, "we were just speaking of you. This lady was expressing a wish to meet you. Miss Mordant—Mr. Beverly."

Beverly bowed, saying, "I thank you for the compliment you have paid me." In turn the others were introduced.

"I am indeed glad to you know, Mr. Beverly." He acknowledged their civility.

"A pal of ours in England insisted on our meeting you, and we were asked to convey to you her brightest remembrances. Miss Milsie Backhurst. Do you remember her?"

At the name a pleasant smile passed over the face of Beverly. Would he ever forget the bright creature, in whose society he had passed some of the pleasantest hours of his existence.

"Need I assure you," he said, "the pleasure I experience in accepting your message, a pleasure that is enhanced by receiving it, through such a charming channel."

"Thank you, Mr. Beverly," she said. "That is indeed nice of you."

All now had had plenty of time to observe the new arrival.

"We are going to a jolly supper, Lex," said Hammond. "Come along, old chap, and make one."

The voices of the girls chorussed, "Oh, Mr. Beverly, do come. Just for old time's sake. We have much to tell you of Milsie."

His entreaties to be excused were unavailing. They took his arm. There was no resisting them. He was only a man, with the hot blood of perfect manhood running through his veins. Is it any wonder that the thoughts of the sick man were dispelled. He joined in the mirth, mingling his own wit with theirs, and like an ordinary mortal, became contaminated with the gay spirit of the party. They sat around the supper table, cracking bon-bons, each wearing a grotesque cap.

"This has been a glorious evening," remarked one of the girls. "I wouldn't have missed it for all the applause in the theatre. I have not told you that Milsie is married to a very good man. Plenty of tin, too," she added, addressing Beverly.

"I am indeed glad to hear it. She was a very dear friend of mine. When you return, you will not forget to convey my best remembrances to her, my best wishes for her and her husband's future welfare."

"Lex, old man," (it was Cameron who spoke), "what about giving the party a run in the drag as far as the old Toll Bar."

"What?" Beverly answered. "At this time of the night? It is just twelve o'clock."

"Oh, Mr. Beverly, that will make the end of a perfect evening," the girls chorussed, all surrounding him. "And you owe us something for the message from Milsie."

"Get on the 'phone, Hammond, and see if the night groom will yoke up," said Cameron.

Hammond returned and said, "Everything is in order. This is a perfect climax to a perfect evening. Fancy a drag ride by moonlight."

It was only a step around to Castlereagh Street, where Beverly kept his horses when in town, and that was only on special occasions, such as Cup time.

Lex had the box to himself. He drove a fine team of bays. Through the silence of the night they passed up Oxford Street, past the Zoological Gardens, and through the old Toll Bar, past the Racecourse, through Randwick, and then down to the Bay. Beverly never experienced greater pleasure than, when seated behind a good team of horses. No position exercised greater fascination over him. He was recognised as a great whip. There were very few better than Beverly behind four good horses. Getting near the Bay, Beverly made a discovery. One of the front wheels was running hot, a common mistake. A careless groom, between beer and carelessness, had forgotten this wheel.

"I shall have to run up to the Baden Baden," he said. "One of the front wheels is running hot." He was angry, but it was of no use showing it. His excitement had cooled, and he was reflecting on the serious fact that he was an engaged man, and of all the men there he was the only one who had no right to be of the party. He drove up through the trees and pulled up. Men and women trouped in. It was a common thing in this secluded spot, to see visitors arrive at all hours. It took very little time to rectify the hot wheel. Beverly had occasion to pass through the passage leading to the rear of the place. The place was full of private sitting-rooms. In passing one of the rooms, he saw a door swaying, and a woman's arm to the elbow hanging on to it in very desperation. A struggle was in progress. Apparently, the owner of the arm was struggling to get out of the room. Some one else was struggling as desperately to keep the owner of it in. He was man of the world enough to know the situation was not his business, and was passing through, when his footsteps were heard by the woman in the room. She gave one quick glance through the half-open door and cried out: "Mr. Beverly, help me, help me!"

This was enough for Lex Beverly. He gave the door one kick, grasping the arm of the woman as he did so.

The sudden kick forced the door back with a bang, that sent the other occupant of the room sprawling on to a settee. Lex gave one painful look of surprise at the face of the woman who had called upon him for help.

"Margery," he said, "this is a painful surprise to me. Are you here of your own free will?"

"No, indeed, I am not, Mr. Beverly. Mr. Clarkson is forcibly detaining me here."

Clarkson had recovered himself.

"Look here, Beverly," he said, "you have no right to interfere in a matter of this kind."

"I have the right to interfere when called upon." He turned again to Margery: "Gather your wraps and wait for me at the end of the passage."

"Damn it, Beverly, you are a man of the world like myself. This is no affair of yours."

"A man of the world perhaps, but, thank God, not like you, Clarkson. The narrow path for girls in her position is not easy to follow. I have always made an effort to help them walk it, you, on the other hand, never lose an opportunity to push them off it. However, the little episode, as far as you are concerned, is over. I'll take charge of the girl."

"Oh, will you?" replied Clarkson sarcastically. "It's damn nice of you but look here, Beverly, what's the use of your interference? What is she! Just a barmaid, and if not me to-night, somebody else some other night. You have wasted your time."

"Good night," said Beverly.

"Good night, and be damned to you?" said Clarkson. "Hang it," he said to himself, disappointedly, "if I could have got that glass of wine into her, she was mine."

This was one of the wolves of whom good old Jim McMaster had spoken of to Beverly, men who claimed the title of gentlemen, who hunted women for the satisfaction of their lust, possessing the weapon of wealth, and well versed in its application against woman's most vulnerable point, her vanity.

Beverly rejoined Margery.

"One of the very set I warned you against, Margery. I could never have believed it of you."

Woman like, Margery found her only consolation in tears. Then, between her sobs, and to the surprise of Beverly, she blamed him for everything. "You have hardly spoken to me for a fortnight. He proposed a drive down to the Bay and back. 'Home before ten,' he said. In very desperation I accepted. I intended to tell you the next time I saw you. I knew it would annoy you." "What?" said Beverly in amazement, "I to blame for your presence here?" Then all at once a light dawned on Beverly's mind. "If that is so, my girl, I am sorry. Had you been my sister I would not have taken greater interest in you."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Margery, in an injured voice. Beverly had not the slightest idea how this girl had treasured up every little thing he had given her. The box that had contained the sweets had been saved. The small lots of flowers were all pressed and carefully preserved. Th first time her eye had ever rested upon him, she had been attracted towards him. She

had enquired who he was, and the other girls had told her. "Oh, that is Lex Beverly. No chance there, Margery. He's well and truly locked up; engaged to his cousin or somebody."

Still for Beverly love had stolen into the girl's heart. Other women had felt the same influence, and good for all was it that Beverly was not a woman hunter. It was generally admitted, even among men of the Clarkson type, that with the opposite sex, he played the game. He took Margery back on the box, escorted her to the hotel, and tipped the night porter in a princely manner, to indicate silence must be observed.

XI.

LEX BEVERLY'S FIANCEE.

Built within a stone's throw of the waters of Sydney's most beautiful harbour, commanding one of the most magnificent views of this historical land-locked basin, surrounded by grassy lawns, in places sloping right down to the water's edge, stood Richard Beverly's home. It was noted at one of the most picturesque spots that Sydney possessed. He had called it "Harbour View," and no more fitting name could have been bestowed upon the place. From almost any part of this large and well-appointed house, a perfect view of the harbour waters could be obtained Spotted here and there on the sloping lawns, were beds of rare and beautiful flowers, some in glorious bloom. Magnolia trees decorated the lawns, their handsome large white flowers sending forth a rich perfume. Reclining on a garden chair, under the spreading boughs of a large magnolia tree, gazing dreamily across the glistening waters of the harbour, book lying neglected on her lap, was the figure of a young woman. There was something about the expression of the face that attracts the eye of the observer. She could not be described as beautiful, not even handsome, but her face bore a refinemnt of character, that told of artistic temperament. After a closer scrutiny, you would designate it a clever face. The forehead was high, the skin clear; a dreamy pair of brown eyes and eyebrows as perfect as if pencilled, the nose straight, a well shaped mouth, and a figure inclined to be a little under the average height. Such was Ann Gordon, who was betrothed to Lex Beverly. Two years had passed since Lex Beverly had arrived home from his travels. The very night he had arrived he had dined at Harbour View. After dinner he had taken her out into the glorious moonlight, and on this very seat where she was now reclining, he had asked her to be his wife.

"Ann," he had said, "I have brought you out here, the first night of being home, to ask you to become my wife. If your answer is yes, you will indeed make me a very happy man," he concluded. His voice contained no emotion. The proposal was made to Ann in calm, measured tones. They were seated together. He had taken possession of her hand.

"Yes, Lex," she had answered, just as unemotional as he had asked for her hand. If you think I will make you a suitable wife, I will indeed be happy to be yours." She had spoken quite simply. He drew her head down upon his shoulder and kissed

her tenderly. Instinct told Beverly the dearest wish of his parents' hearts was to see Ann and he united. He knew a ray of joy would shoot through the heart of each when he announced that they were to be married. Once more he drew Ann's head upon his breast, and told her he would give her a life's devotion. He assisted her to rise, and, putting his arm protectingly around her, walked slowly to the house and into the presence of his parents.

"Mother," he said, "Ann has promised to become my wife."

Mrs. Beverly rose hastily, saying, "Ann, Ann, my more than daughter," and folded her in his arms. "This," she whispered, "is the happiest moment of my life." The younger Beverly looked on, heard, and smiled complacently.

Richard Beverly advanced to his son, saying, "Lex, my very best congratulations. You are indeed a lucky young man." He went to Ann, and kissed her in a paternal manner, saying, "Welcome Ann, Welcome indeed as a daughter."

The engagement was announced in all the Sydney papers, and Mothers remarked that Ann was indeed a lucky girl."

She now sat reflecting upon the two years that had passed since Beverly had asked her to be his wife. Neither she nor Beverly were in any violent hurry to marry, or to rush into the bonds of matrimony. Their respective friends were now expecting the social event to materialise any day of the month.

XII.

MARGERY MARRIES.

Some three or four days after the episode at Coogee, Beverly dropped in to see Margery.

"Mr. McMaster was here not twenty minutes ago," she told Beverly.

"Old Jim? Was he? I am sorry I missed him. I think Margery, I know what brings him around to the Royal so frequently."

"Perhaps you do, Mr. Beverly; perhaps you do not," she replied.

"Margery, you have no idea what a sterling fellow he is," he said. Margery looked up slyly, and smiled.

"How do you know I do not?" she answered.

"I was annoyed with your manner the other day, when you spoke of him as your grandfather," Beverly said.

"Am I forgiven, Mr. Beverly? If you say 'Yes,' I will tell you a secret."

"Quite all right, Margery. What is the secret?"

"Your pal proposed again, more earnestly than last time," she said.

"Well, that being so, Margery, allow me to give you some advice." Margery was ready to pout at this suggestion.

"I told you he is a very genuine man. Marry him, and Heaven is yours. Continue on here, who can tell where it will end, possibly the opposite—Hell. What did you say, what answer did you give him?"

"I am not pleased with your remarks, Mr. Beverly," she said.

"I know the city better than you, my girl. Be guided by my advice. Will you accept him? I know he thinks greatly of you."

"I told him I would give him an answer at five o'clock," she said.

"Bravo! Bravo! Margery!" and he held out his hand.

Margery took it but slowly. She had grown very fond of this man. It stung her to see his pleasure at the prospect of her marriage with another man. She suppressed the retort that rose to her lips and said. "But that does not say I am going to accept him."

"Margery," Beverly said, "if you have had your romance, the companionship of this good man will help you to forget it.

One thing, be candid with him if you decide to become his wife." She looked up questioningly at him.

"Tell him of your escapade with Clarkson, omitting to tell him who came to your assistance. I never told him. I spared his feelings. I realised, liking you as he does, he would have been greatly pained at your foolishness, for that was all you were guilty of." He left her, feeling sure that she would accept his friend.

McMaster arrived punctual to time. Margery came straight to him saying, "Jim, my answer is 'Yes!'"

He seized both her hands in his own and said, "You have indeed made me very happy. Margery, God bless you. I will do my best to make your future life a pleasant one." Margery looked up into the straight honest face, and knew he was sincere, that he would leave no stone unturned to make her a happy woman.

"I must go out and buy a present," he said.

He returned in a few minutes with a beautiful jewel, which he placed on her finger. "What about leaving your occupation?" he said.

"I must let them have a fair notice," she replied. "They have been very good to me."

"As you wish, Margery," he answered.

"This is my night off, and I would like you to come and meet my old father and mother," she said, looking up at him.

"Right O! Margery!" he said, "I will bring a cab round at 7.30, and we will drive out to see them."

"Thank you, Jim," she replied. "Good-bye for the present."

Already she was realising the wisdom of her choice. He was there to time, and placed her in the vehicle. As they rolled along in the cab down George Street, she turned to him and said, "My father and mother are the best in the world. They are only plain people, but they are the very best."

It pleased him to hear her speak well of her parents. She told him of her narrow escape with Clarkson, of her foolishness in accepting the invitation to drive with him, of Lex Beverly's timely interference.

"I'd like to wring the animal's neck," he told her savagely. "Beverly never told me of it—just like him. He knew that it would hurt me. He suppressed it to save me annoyance. Had I known of it, and met Clarkson, I would have pulled his nose without any doubt." More than ever was this girl realising the full value of Beverly's advice. She placed her hand tenderly upon his own by way of appreciation for his championship.

They pulled up at a small neat cottage in Riley Street. The good mother was sitting with the husband in the sitting room of the place. She was expecting her daughter, knowing it was her night to come home. She was talking to her husband, "This is Margery's night to come home, Dad," she said. After a pause she added: "I wonder," and her voice faltered, "Will the other

ever come home?" A tear slowly rolled down her cheek. The father put a kindly hand on her arm, saying, "Let us hope so, wife, let us hope so." The other was a black curly headed boy who had years ago met with trouble and run away from home. The wheels of a cab stopped in front of the cottage. A look of grave concern passed over her face. "Margery has surely not come home in a cab?" She went to the door and opened it, in time to see a well-dressed elderly man helping Margery out of the hansom. A lump rose in her throat. As Margery stepped out of the cab, the jewel on her finger flashed under its lamp. "My poor girl," she muttered. "My only one." Ever since Margery, in her self-will, had taken up her position at the Royal, her fate was a continual nightmare to the fond mother. Margery knew this, and her face wore a mischievous expression as she and her friend approached her mother.

"Meet a friend of mine, Mother! Mr. McMaster!" she said. "Come in Jim," she said familiarly, enjoying the look upon the mother's face. "Dad," she said, addressing her father, "This is Mr. McMaster, a great pal of mine."

Jim had shaken hands heartily with her mother, and now expressed his pleasure in meeting Margery's father. The old man, who knew something of the world, rose and shook hands in a quiet manner with Jim. Margery knew that her parents did not approve of her action, arriving home in a cab, and was quietly enjoying the situation. Jim expressed his pleasure at knowing them both. McMaster came straight to the object of their visit. "Mr. Dawson," he said, "I have asked Margery to be my wife, and she has said 'Yes.' I presume that I have your permission."

It was a picture as McMaster spoke, to see the burden of doubt lifting from the shoulders of the mother. Margery has been displaying the jewel on her finger in such a way that the mother could not help seeing it.

The father jumped up with out-stretched hand, "God bless you, McMaster. Permission? Certainly!" A load also was lifted from the mind of the good father. Margery clasped the fond old mother in her arms, "Oh, Margery, why didn't you tell me," the old woman said.

Jim and the old people sat down to talk, and Margery did a wise thing. She went to her room. Carefully locked away were all the trifles Beverly had given her—faded flowers and boxes which had contained sweets. She put them all in the kitchen fire.

They didn't bother about a long engagement. Jim had lived for years at Randwick with his aunt, but at her death had leased the house, and as the lease had now expired, he had it renovated for his bride.

They were married quietly at St. Jude's, Beverly being the best man, and took the Union Company's steamer on honeymoon to New Zealand.

Six weeks afterwards Ann Gordon, who had met Margery at the time of her marriage, received a letter from her. "Tell Mr. Beverly I have discovered what a sterling man my husband is, and tell him, dear Miss Gordon, that I have found my Heaven."

And so she had, for each day of her life she was learning to love this good, kindly husband of hers more and more.

For the present we will leave them in New Zealand, wandering through one of the world's greatest picture shows.

XIII.

JOYCE ARRIVES AT HER UNCLE'S STATION.

Three weeks after Joyce Hilston refused Tom Wells' offer she was saying good-bye to her father at the railway station. He was standing by her side, giving her final instructions. "When the Brisbane express reaches its destination, Mrs. McCormack will be there to meet you. From there you take the steamer to Townsville, where Uncle Jim will meet you. Wire him at the Sea View Hotel when you are leaving Brisbane. From Townsville you will have his company right on to the station."

A score of girl friends were standing round, waiting to see her off, and wish her bon voyage. In the district, Joyce was a great favourite. Her handsome appearance, affable manner, her great skill as a rider, all assisting to win her a universal popularity. The bell rang, the cry "Take your seats, please!" resounded along the platform. She bade her father an affectionate farewell, endured hugs, embraces and kisses from her girl friends, took her seat, and amidst the bustle of the station, the banging of doors, the train moved away, carrying Joyce Hilston on her way to her uncle in the far North of Queensland. And thus the future of the being, wrapped in impenetrable darkness, revolves on the wheels of Destiny. She caught the last sally from her girl friends, "Joyce, don't let them marry you to a rich Queensland squatter." She leaned out of the carriage window and smiled her reply to their remarks. A bend in the railway road cut the view off. She sat back in the carriage and dried the tears that could no longer be restrained. She felt the parting with her father very keenly. She bore him a great love, and now she was fairly started on the long journey, felt some qualms of conscience regarding her action in leaving him. Also, she reflected, was her attitude in the past a just one?

Driving along the road the previous day he had said to her, "My dear girl, you will soon realise what a great benefit the change will be to you. There is no better education in the world than that derived from travel."

"I hope so, Dad, for all our sakes," she had answered. "I trust the visit will remove that prejudice that up to the present, try as I will, I cannot eliminate from my mind."

"The night before we left the homestead," she continued, "I visited my mother's grave and prayed I might be directed to do what was right."

Without incident worth recording Joyce arrived in Brisbane, and was met by her friend, Mrs. McCormack. She made a short stay in the Northern City, and then took the boat for Townsville. Like all visitors to the capital of Queensland, she was impressed with the beauty of the Brisbane River and its picturesque surroundings. The passenger list on the Northern steamer contained many western pastoralists. It was Joyce's first sea voyage. The weather was perfect, and a most enjoyable time was being spent by those aboard. Possessing a bright and handsome personality, animated spirits, she soon became a great favourite aboard the boat. Many pleasantries were exchanged by the passengers, at the expense of a young Englishman. He had just arrived from England. Was on his way to join his brother, who was managing a pastoral property in the West. He was keen to acquire all the knowledge he could of the new country he had just arrived in, but possessed an unhappy habit of allowing his zeal to commit him to foolish suggestions. Hardly a ripple stirred the ocean's surface as the big steamer ploughed her way through the mighty deep. The moon was at the full, rendering the night almost as bright as day. Passengers were seated on deck, enjoying the sublime conditions of the evening. The conversation flowed into pastoral channels, stock, shows, droughts, wet seasons—all were discussed in turn.

An elderly lady, wife of a pioneer pastoralist, was speaking of the wonderful feeling of contentment experienced at the break up of a drought.

"I really believe," she said, "there is not a more heavenly feeling than that you experience, lying in bed, listening to the first rain pelting down on the iron roofs at the break-up of a drought.

"The knowledge that the dried, parched up country will, within a week, don Nature's most beautiful garb, become within a few days a veritable paradise of beauty, that the sufferings of the starving stock are over, is such a knowledge not sufficient to produce a heavenly feeling?" Continuing, she added, "Have you observed, after the first storm, what a welcome the frogs give the rain?"

"Just below our homestead," said Joyce, "there is a shallow swamp. After the first shower their welcome is so noisy, it would really keep you awake."

"Good gracious," exclaimed the young Englishman, "Could you not get a lantern and take a stick and go down and kill the brutes." He offered the suggestion in annoyed surprised tones.

An outburst of hilarity greeted the remarks. The idea of any person getting out of a warm bed on a wet night, to look for frogs in the dark, with a lantern and stick, was too richly absurd. Peels of merry laughter broke the stillness of the glorious tropical moonlight.

The young chap's face turned crimson. He had been very attentive to Joyce, and no doubt felt indignant with the frogs for disturbing her rest.

Joyce was in raptures over the beauty of Whitsunday Passage. A perfect panorama of coast and land beauty. How interesting, she reflected, when I return, to tell old Dad about all the wonderful sights I looked at and admired.

When she arrived at Townsville her uncle, James Megson, was there to meet her. He was the same man whom Richard Beverly had introduced to Geoffrey Armitage. After the tragic death of McCallum, he had bought Bonnie Doon, the name of the place the ill-fated people had resided upon and owned. Of this property he had only been in possession some twelve months.

After resting a few days in Townsville they took the train to the end of the line. There they took the coach. After a long, tedious journey, they reached a mail change, known as Connolly's Mail Change. Here the station trap was waiting for them to drive to Megson's homestead.

Towards sundown Joyce reached the end of her long journey. McCallum, the previous owner of the run, had built a commodious homestead. Joyce was surprised to find a better class of place than what they had on Bungimeggri.

The travelling had already broadened her mind, and it was now apparent to her she had not acted rightly or justly to her good step-mother. That very night she wrote to them both. To each she wrote a long letter. In her letter to her step-mother she expressed her sorrow for the past inconsiderate conduct. She told her how pleased she was that she had undertaken the trip. It had opened her mind. She looked forward to coming home in a few months, and when she returned she would endeavour in the future to make up for her failure in the past. She concluded "I love my Dad very dearly, and realising how good you are to him, it would be wrong if I did not love you."

Hilston and his wife were greatly relieved to get Joyce's letter, and the old man was more contented in his mind than he had been since his second marriage. A week had passed since Joyce had arrived at her Uncle's place. It was coach day at the Mail Change. Mounted on a fine, upstanding bay horse, Joyce had ridden over to Connolly's to get the weekly mail bag.

Megson had just come in from the run when Geoffery Armitage rode up.

"Good day, Geoffery,"

"Good day, Mr. Megson."

"Where did you get to last week?"

"I was up the river. Was there any mail?"

"Yes, some letters on the mantle shelf for you."

Uncle Jim followed him into the room. "I have a niece staying with me, Geoffery. The one I told you of—a great horsewoman."

"Oh, indeed! Where is she now?"

"Gone for the mail, and should be back any time now."

Geoffery finished reading his letters, and walked outside with Uncle Jim.

"This is her coming now."

"Will I ride down and open the gate for her?" said Geoffery.

"Don't bother, Geoffery. She'll show you how to get over a gate."

And so she did. Coming within taking off distance of the gate, she lifted her horse over, and horse and rider landed beautifully on the other side. Geoffery looked on in admiration.

"That was a beautiful jump," he said.

Joyce cantered to where they stood. Uncle Jim helped her down. Geoffery admired her jumping. It was impossible for him to conceal his admiration for her beauty.

Uncle Jim said, "Joyce, this is my neighbour, Geoffery Armitage. Geoff, this is my niece, Miss Joyce Hilston."

She was drawing off her gloves and looked her best.

"Mr. Armitage," she said, "I am very glad to meet you. I have heard much of you from my uncle. I understand you have not been out long. The coach was behind time, Uncle, a little later than usual."

Geoffery had mumbled out some inarticulate words.

"The country is looking well, Mr. Armitage."

"Yes," Geoffery said, "it was looking well.

"You will stay and have tea?" she asked.

Geoffery wanted to excuse himself, but Uncle Jim said, "What nonsense, Geoffery. My niece is station bred. She realises that you do not carry coats and white shirts about with you."

"You are quite all right, Mr. Armitage," said Joyce.

With this bright, dazzling creature flitting about the tea table, Geoffery did not quite know where he was. He sugared his tea, and when he stirred it, he forgot to take the spoon out; then his shirt sleeve caught in it, and upset it. Uncle laughed. Geoffery apologised, and Joyce got a clean serviette, and placed it where the tea had soiled the cloth, and everything passed off happily. After tea they played cribbage. After the games were concluded the conversation drifted into various channels. Joyce, a tactful, bright conversationalist, soon had Geoffery telling of his English home and of his good Aunt Grace. He told her of his boyish ambitions years ago to become a squatter, of the sad parting between his Aunt and himself. As he spoke of the sad look upon his Aunt's face when the big liner drew away, his eyes were moist. She felt a great sympathy for the soft, kindly-hearted young fellow. She gazed into the face of the Englishman and realised there was much that was good in him. He spoke of his love for the land of his adoption.

"After the sombreness of the English climate," he explained, "everything appears so bright in Australia."

"Yes, Mr. Armitage," Joyce agreed enthusiastically. "I think ours the grandest country in the world."

The conversation turned on to the previous owners. In a low voice Armitage told of the sad and tragic end of the two small children, of the father's worry and dreadful end. He told of the unhappy, unbalanced state of the mother's mind, of her belief in the non-existence of the Almighty. He spoke of the secluded and morose life she followed; the low sympathetic tones of the voice told how sincerely sorry he felt for the suffering woman.

Uncle Jim spoke: "I would not be surprised to hear that she wishes to visit us here. If she finds you are staying with me she will want to come out for a few days."

"What dreadful misfortune to suffer," said Joyce.

As Geoffery rode along the dark lonely track to his homestead, his mind was full of the bright, animated, handsome girl he passed the evening with. How anxious he was for the next mail-day to come around. Joyce was the first Australian girl he had ever closely encountered. "Like their country," he soliloquised, "All brightness and sunshine."

He allowed his thoughts to dwell on the jumping feat. "How beautifully she lifted her horse over that gate. In England I have seen good horsewomen, but I doubt if they could excel Miss Hilson."

After Armitage had left Joyce remarked to her uncle, "I found Mr. Armitage quite up to expectations, uncle. He is indeed a sterling young fellow."

"Yes," he answered, "he is one of the best. He will make his mark in the pastoral world of Australia. When he reaches his majority he inherits a large sum of money. He is very ambitious of becoming a great squatter, and I feel certain will succeed." Uncle Jim, realising Joyce's unhappy situation with her step-mother, was already weaving a romance around her life and Geoffery's. He trusted his anticipations regarding the matter would be realised. It would be a suitable match in every way for his niece and a happy settlement of the present unpleasant state of affairs.

When Joyce retired to her room, her thoughts turned to the story she had heard from Geoffery regarding the sufferings of the unfortunate Mrs. McCallum. By comparison she reflected upon her own imaginary troubles, and now felt thoroughly ashamed of the capricious conduct she had been guilty of. The sad story struck her as a grave object lesson, and she retired to rest happier in mind and heart than she had been since the matter of her father's second marriage was mentioned.

XIV.

LEX BEVERLY LEAVES FOR QUEENSLAND.

The Melbourne Cup was over, and visitors to it were flocking back to Sydney. Hammond and Cameron were up at "The Quarters."

"When will Lex be back?" Cameron asked.

"He should return to-night."

"Is it true that he plunged on the favourite?" Cameron queried.

"I quite believe it," the other answered, "with disastrous results. But that does not matter to Beverly, he draws on his father's account."

"Still, I do not think that the Pastoral King will stand too much of that." The conversation turned on to other matters. A few minutes afterwards Beverly arrived. It was quite true that he had been plunging, and had suffered very heavy losses. Always a game bettor, about his only failing, he had gone for a recovery, and had met with the usual result—non-success. His total losses for the meeting ran into thousands of pounds. He knew this was beyond the limit of what his father would tolerate, and the knowledge that he had been guilty of a deed that was not right nor honourable, worried and annoyed him greatly. There were letters waiting for him, one from the elder Beverly, making an appointment for 10.30 the next morning. For the first time in his life Beverly realised that his father was displeased with him. The son knew what a wonderful parent he had been, and to think that any action of his should wound him, cut him deeply. At the appointed time Lex Beverly arrived at the office. The clerk had instructions to admit him on arrival. Father tand son shook hands.

"Sit down, Alexander." It was rarely the father addressed the son by the full name. Ever candid, the elder Beverly tackled the subject straight away. "Well, my boy," he said, "the great hour of my regret is this morning." The son was silent.

"I have my doubts, Lex, as to whether you are playing the game of life in the honourable manner that a man in your position should play it. Two incidents hurt me greatly. One was your visit with the opera people to the Baden Baden, which is about the last place and last class of enjoyment that should have appealed to you. The other your heavy losses in Melbourne."

"Referring to the drag incident, I must plead guilty to a foolish indiscretion, but, Sir," he continued, "I cannot honestly express any regrets over the matter."

The elder man looked up questioningly. "On that occasion fate dealt kindly with me. My presence there saved a friend from villainous peril. For my indiscretion I was rewarded. The girl in a moment of foolish weakness, influenced by misrepresentation, had been induced to accept the offer of a drive to Coogee and back. My presence there frustrated the scoundrel's ends. The lady I refer to is now Jim McMaster's wife."

"I am indeed pleased you performed so well, as I would have you do. We will now consider that subject closed" said the father. "Regarding your losses, whatever they are, draw for them."

The young man's hand went out spontaneously to the elder.

"I know that I have wounded you," said the son, and the knowledge has made me suffer fifty times keener than you."

This remark was made with deep feeling and sincerity. The elderly Beverly realised that his son was feeling the position as keenly, if not more keenly, than himself. "So far as I am concerned, Lex," the father said, "both incidents are buried. However," continued the elder man, "there is the future to consider, and my object in making this appointment this morning with you, was to discuss two alternative suggestions that I have to make to you. First, is that you marry straight away, spend a year or two travelling, and when you return, relieve me of some of the managerial responsibility here. If you do not desire to enter into the bonds of matrimony at present—although your engagement has now run two years—I suggest that you spend twelve months on some of the far Northern Queensland properties. It is the only colony in which you have not had experience. Take time for reflection, and do not decide hastily."

"I require no time for reflection," Lex answered, "I'll do Queensland for twelve months, and after that the world with Ann for a couple of years." And so it was decided that Lex was to get away as soon as possible. "The Quarters" were broken up, and in a few weeks' time Lex Beverly, with his father, mother, and Ann, was standing on the Redfern Railway Station, waiting for the last whistle to sound, so that the last good-bye could be said at the last minute.

His journey was uneventful. From Brisbane he took the steamer to Townsville, spent a day or two at the Queen's, and took the train to the railway head; there the station buggy met him. This was his own wish, as it enabled him to travel at his own leisure, view the country, and put up at the different stations en route. He preferred this mode of travelling to flying through the country on top of a coach.

XV.

BEVERLY MEETS JOYCE HILSTON.

At the end of a week he was within twenty-five miles of his destination. They had travelled along slowly, he and the man with him, relays of horses having been left at different stations for them. It was the middle of the day, and Beverly had just finished lunch at Connolly's mail change. The mail coach was standing in front of the shanty. The room was small, with galvanised iron sides, and was insufferably hot. Picking up his hat he walked to the door, and stood on the front of the verandah, gazing over the open downs before him. He had travelled through a lot of good country. The famous open downs of the far North struck him from a pastoral point of view, and he saw wonderful possibilities ahead of a colony possessing such glorious lands. He was looking straight ahead, when some unknown instinct prompted him to turn his head. He came right under the fire of a pair of handsome grey eyes, which were instantly dropped when his own looked into them. A slight blush suffused the cheeks of their owner, as though she felt some slight shame at having been caught in the act of staring. She was seated on a fine bay horse, and horse and rider looked a very perfect picture. Connolly, of the Mail Change, was standing by the horse, tying a small mail bag on the saddle. Beverly found himself with his gaze fixed upon the young lady perhaps a little longer than good manners permitted. As he withdrew his gaze she swung her horse around—

"Thank you, Mr. Connolly. Good day," she said.

"Good bye, Miss Hilston," Connolly replied.

She trotted down the road in the same direction that Beverly was looking when he first swung round and caught her gaze fixed upon him. Beverly had every opportunity to note the perfect figure, the ease and grace with which she sat her mount. A hundred yards from the shanty she swung her horse into a canter, and further along, coming to a low gate, she lifted the horse over it with such elegance and style that an exclamation of praise sprung from Beverly's lips. She was soon lost to sight by a dip in the road.

The coach driver turned to Beverly, remarking, "Mr. Beverly, could you show us anything better than that in your big Sydney Shows?"

"To be candid with you," replied Beverly, "I have never seen a more perfect seat or more graceful horsewoman in any

Show in Australia, and her riding is only equalled by her handsome figure and face. Who is the young lady?" he queried. He applied the question to Connolly.

"Miss Joyce Hilston. She is up from New South Wales, staying with her uncle for a month or two. He has a big selection down the river. His homstead is about fifteen miles from here."

"I was surprised at her complexion and appearance for a far Northern girl; but you say she comes from New South Wales. I wonder what part? I know the colony very well."

"From somewhere in the North of the State. Her father has a property there."

The horses were by this time yoked up. Beverly got into the trap, bidding all good-bye, and drove away. He was now twenty-five miles from the head station, and many times during that twenty-five miles the handsome form and figure of the rider of the bay horse appeared before him. Driving along, looking over the horse's heads, he could see her sailing over the gate again. The pair of handsome grey eyes as he caught them fixed upon him, were plain to his mind's eye. At last he became disgusted with himself, coming to the conclusion that it was such a long time since he had seen a pretty girl that the first one to cross his path had bewitched him. Towards sundown he reached a big homestead, looking like a small township with its numerous buildings. The manager and his wife were waiting for him. To these people he was a veritable lion. The only son of the Pastoral King, they had to entertain him for some time, and they wondered what sort of a man he was. All knew of the good name of the father, but in these distant parts little was known of the son.

Hand-shaking over, Lex, throwing his rug over his shoulder, and securing his portmanteau, was ready to be shown to his room. These the manager wished to relieve him of.

"Not at all, Mr. Wilson, not at all. I am sure your work to-day has been harder than mine," he said.

Very soon, like all who came in contact with him, these good station people fell easy victims to his personal charm of manner, and voted him one of the best they had ever met.

Settled for the present, daily appreciating the suggestion that had sent him into such congenial surroundings, we will leave him.

XVI.

JOYCE'S DREAM.

As Joyce trotted away from the Mail Change she knew the eyes of the stranger were upon her. She wore an annoyed expression. The reflection that she had been guilty of positive gaping, to place her own construction upon her action, was intensely aggravating to her. "What in the name of Heaven possessed me to lose my self control to such an extent I cannot realise, and I am sure I never felt so embarrassed in all my life, when it dawned upon me that he had caught me staring so broadly at him."

Ah, Joyce, dear girl, do not worry. You are not the first woman who had taken more than one look at Lex Beverly. Men, as well as women, turned in the street and often threw a second glance of admiration at the good looking face and fine figure. Joyce was angry. Se gave the big bay a sharp cut with her slogger. This chap was not used to that. He gave a snort and bound, reminding his rider of her action. "Never mind, old boy," she said soothingly, "That was unkind of me. You didn't deserve it."

Surely he must have thought that I was some way back. Possibly he will drive away with a smile on his face for the "way-back's" curiosity. I wonder who he is, she thought. Quite the best looking man that I have ever seen. Possibly going up the river to manage one of the big stations."

Continuing her reflections, she thought, I do not know why such a trifling indiscretion should annoy me so much. Come along Bobs, she said, addressing her mount, "We'll have a good rattling gallop and forget all aobut it."

Geoffery Armitage was waiting at the house. He never missed mail day, and there was a good reason for the visit; but it must be admitted that Geoffery of late was making many visits that he had little reason to make. As Tom, the old cook, summed the matter up, "The new chum's gone a million on the girl," he told Joe, the horse boy.

Geoffery was head over heels in love. He came of a race of people who were capable of much deep feeling, and Geoffery's love for Joyce was his first romance. Each hour of his life he was learning to love her more ardently.

He took her horse, unsaddled it, and led it down to the stock-yard. Geoffery delighted in looking after Bobs. He rubbed him down well. Joyce, after divesting herself of her hat and gloves,

generally walked down to the yard, and when Bobs was let go she and Geoffery strolled back together. These were always moments of unalloyed happiness for Geoffery. To-day, for some reason Joyce could not explain, the inclination to walk to the yard was missing. Geoffery returned disappointed at her non-appearance. She heard his footsteps approaching, and met him at the gate and thanked him.

"You will wait and have tea, Mr. Armitage."

"Thank you, if I may," replied Geoffery. He spoke of her horse, knowing it was a favourite theme, "Bobs is in great life."

"Yes," she replied, "in wonderful fettle."

Together they opened the mail bag, and there was some English mail for Geoff.

"Prizes for you, Mr. Armitage," she said, handing him the letters. She knew how dearly Geoff loved his English letters. When she had finished reading her own letters, she returned to her uncle and Geoff. Both were engaged reading their mail.

"I have a letter from Mrs. McCallum, Joyce," her uncle said.

"Do you mean that woman who had such a dreadful misfortune?"

"Yes Joyce, the same. She has written to ask me if I will allow her to spend a few days here. She is thinking of returning to Scotland, and would like to visit the graves of her bairns before leaving. She says she had heard I had a niece staying with me, and would be as little trouble as possible. I have known of this wish of hers for a long time, and now that you are with me, it is a good opportunity for her to carry it out."

"Yes, Uncle, bid her welcome, and whatever I can do to lighten the burden of her great sorrow, I will try to do."

Geoffery cast a look of admiration at the girl. His nature was like her own, soft, and filled to the brim with kindness.

They all sat down to tea, and Geoffery's heaven was to receive his cup of tea from her hands.

After tea she pleaded a headache and retired early.

Love's instinct told Geoffery there was a change in Joyce. He could not determine in his mind what was wrong, but in some incomprehensible manner the same instinct told him, a barrier had raised itself between his life and hers.

The instinct of true and ardent love is rarely in error, and an insurmountable barrier had truly reared itself between their lives as far as love was concerned. Although she knew it not, Joyce Hilston had met her soul's affinity. Geoffery got his horse and left early. Uncle Jim accompanied him to the yard.

Joyce's sleep that night was restless. Usually a perfect sleeper, she twisted and turned, and then fell into a restless slumber. Then she had a dream and woke from it with a dreadful start. She dreamt that she was hanging over a precipice, under which she could see a gaping chasm, from which jagged ends of rocks protruded. Huge rolls of black smoke and great tongues of vicious flames were issuing forth. Each second she

expected to drop, to be mangled on the jagged rocks and swallowed up in the mass of flames. Above her, and in a position as dreadfully precarious as her own, was the stranger she had seen at the mail change. He was creeping to where she was clinging, and was gradually getting closer to her, making signs to hold on. Just as he was in the act of catching her hand, she felt herself go. As she fell, she felt his arms winding about her, and knew they were dropping, locked in each other's arms, into the black abyss below. Then she awoke, breathless with fear. The dream had been so vivid that she was indeed thankful that it was but a dream. With a stronger force than ever, the memory of the previous day and the meeting came to her mind.

Next morning her Uncle remarked that she was not looking well. "I am quite well, thank you, Uncle, excepting for a touch of nightmare last night," and the thoughts of it made her shudder.

XVII.

A SOUL RECLAIMED.

In a few days Mrs. McCallum arrived. She lived in the iron township at the railway head, and was known as the "Queer Scotchwoman." All the district knew of her distress and sorrow, and many good people would have loved to have softened it, but she met all their advances with such stony coldness that one after another they concluded that her sorrow had unbalanced her mind and left her to her life of seclusion. At the time we write she lived in a small iron house on the far side of the river which ran past the township, the only house on that side. She had come out to marry her now dead husband after he had improved the country that Jim Megson had now. She had been a matron in one of the largest maternity homes in Scotland. The local doctor knew of her great skill, and had occasionally persuaded her to take a special patient. This she did, but only after much persuasion. Her troubles had left her a soulless woman of stone. In build, she was tall and gaunt, with high cheek-bones, eyes that were hard and cynical, with a general expression of face callous and cold. Uncle Jim sent the buckboard over for her, and she arrived in time for tea. Joyce went to where the trap stopped and asked: "Do you feel tired after your journey, Mrs. McCallum?"

She looked up sharply at the sound of the voice and answered "No."

"Let me help you to take some of your things," Joyce requested.

"I can manage everything. If you will show me where I am to sleep, I will manage everything."

"Yes, certainly, Mrs. McCallum," she answered.

In the meantime, despite the cold, stony eye that was fixed upon her, Joyce was gathering up odds and ends, and saying cheerily,

"Come along, Mrs. McCallum, I think we have everything," and showed her to a clean comfortable room. "Tea will be ready in twenty minutes. If everything is not here let me know." She helped her to take her hat off. "I will leave you to rest for a few minutes."

As Joyce went from the room the stony eye of the visitor followed her form. She could remember a day when she was almost as bright.

Tea was over. At the table Mrs. McCallum had maintained her cold and impenetrable manner. Ever since her husband had been found dead on the run, she had been the same. Both Joyce and her uncle were thinking that the surroundings had stirred up painful reminiscences of the past, and thought it best to say as little as possible.

After tea Joyce spoke to her. "Will you walk down to the creek with me, Mrs. McCallum?"

She was about to refuse, but changed her mind and signified her acquiescence. Together they walked side by side. Joyce's heart bled for the silent sufferer. Her woman's instinct told her that tragic events of the past were once more passing through her mind. She linked her arm with this cold woman's, and detected a movement to draw away. They were not long before they reached the graves of the two bairns, these two wee ones who had died struggling in a dreadful agony.

When Joyce had first arrived at the station, the graves were in a very neglected state. After she had heard their history, she had set to work to keep them in order. She had new wood palings fixed and painted, and flowers planted; when the mother's eye rested upon them, she knew whose hand had been at work. Joyce always felt sad when visiting the grave, and she rarely came there without offering up a prayer. She knelt now beside the graves, and in a low audible voice she prayed to God. She prayed that the little ones of the soul stricken mother were in Heaven, and that He had taken them unto Himself. She prayed God that the great burden of sorrow might lift from the shoulders of the sufferer.

When she had finished and looked around the soulless woman had recovered her soul. She was down on her knees, her face resting upon her hands, and her frame shaking with sobs that were almost choking her.

Joyce knelt by her side, a radiant joy upon her face. She knew the mother was won back to the world. She lifted the woman's head and placed it unresistingly upon her lap, and tenderly stroked the hair with its streaks of grey.

These were the first tears that she had shed since she had stood by helpless and watched her bairns perish in anguish.

The long summer evening was closing in before Joyce disturbed her. She raised her gently, and drew her to her bosom, and with her arm around the waist of the elder woman they slowly returned to the house. She led her to her room and carefully helped her to a seat. With her arm around her neck, she kissed her good-night.

As Joyce was leaving the room, she caught her hand, and, standing up, put her arms around her, saying, in a broken voice, "God bless you, God bless you, Miss Hilston," and together they knelt down and prayed.

Mrs. McCallum stayed at the station a week, and once more returned to her life of seclusion.

Uncle Jim remarked on what a wonderful change the visit had effected in her. Geoffery had come over, and once more met his old neighbour. To him Mrs. McCallum told the story of the prayers at the graveside, how she had heard this good pure girl praying that her sorrow might be lifted from her shoulders, and it had seemed as though God had answered her prayers. She was seized with a fit of uncontrollable emotion. Once more she felt as if she belonged to the world, her tears flowed freely, and the knowledge came to her that she had regained her soul, filling her being full of thankfulness.

Geoffery sat in deep reflection, thinking of his deep love for this good girl, wondering would he ever win her? Would he ever have sufficient courage to tell her of his love?

XVIII.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

Beverly had been quartered at Merthon Station about three weeks. It was Sunday morning, always a very quiet day about the homestead. Breakfast was over, and he and Mr. Wilson, the manager, sitting on the verandah, were talking over pastoral matters. The manager had taken a wonderful liking to the Pastoral King's son. His natural unaffected manner, and his consideration for others, endeared him to these good station people. From where they sat they could see the dust rising from the stockyard.

"The overseer came in last night with a fresh mob of horses. Most of them are young stock by the last horse Mr. Beverly, sent up from Melbourne. Would you care to have a look at them?" asked Wilson.

"A pleasure, Mr.. Wilson, a pleasure," replied Beverly.

Together they walked down and inspected the mob.

Begg, the overseer, spoke to Lex, "Will you have a change to-morrow, Mr. Beverly?"

"Thank you, Mr. Begg, I think I will."

"Anything in the mob catch your eye?" asked Begg.

"Yes," Beverly replied, "that big upstanding black horse. That chap is up to my weight."

The overseer looked at the manager.

The manager spoke, "I know you are a good horseman, Mr. Beverly, but he is a treacherous brute."

"What is wrong with him," asked Lex.

"Well, he got away with a couple of stockmen. He raced through a scrub with one man. It is a miracle he wasn't killed."

"I'll chance him," Beverly replied.

The manager addressed one of the stockmen. "That is the horse than ran away with you, Thompson?"

"Yes, Boss," the stockman replied, "I wouldn't ride him again for all the rice in China."

"Better pick something else, Mr. Beverly," replied Mr. Wilson.

"I'll give him a trial," answered Beverly.

He was known to be a good horseman, and had never yet seen the horse that he was afraid of. On all stations that he had managed and visited, he had the reputation of never asking a man to ride a horse that he would not ride himself.

"I would advise you to leave him," said Mr. Wilson. "There are plenty of others."

"I will let you know what I think of him after to-morrow," Beverly replied.

Upon such slender threads the destinies of people hang. Would it have been otherwise with the lives of Joyce and Beverly had the black horse not been in the yard that day?

Like ships that pass in the night, affinity souls cross the path of one another, each craving silently for the possession of the other. The trifling circumstances that contracts them, will, in the same unaccountable way, place an unbridgable chasm between them.

It was Monday morning, and breakfast was over. Station hours are early hours. The city with its hundred and one attractions and fascinations was almost forgotten now by Beverly. He was settling down in proper form to pastoral work, and learning to love the North of Queensland more every day. It was a big holding, and he was becoming acquainted with the run; but there was still much of it for him to see. He and the overseer that day were riding out to a dry pocket under the mountain, nearly twenty miles away from the homestead. When about half-way on their journey the overseer spotted ominous signs, in the opposite direction to the one in which they were going. They were the signs of rising smoke. In the Downs country, it is impossible to tell the distance of smoke, for it might be five miles, ten miles, or thirty miles. Begg, the overseer, said, "I think that fire must be on our run. Would you mind, Mr. Beverly riding up to the pocket, and see if there are any sheep there. It is right under the nose of the mountain. When you get up to that patch of timber on the left, turn into it, and you will find the fence not far through it. Follow it up, and it will take you right into the pocket."

"Yes, I certainly shall. Thank you," replied Beverly.

The other was off before he replied.

Beverly continued on until he was well up to the mountain. He knew the boundary fence was not far through the gidyea scrub, and turned his horse into it, to hit the fence and follow it up to the pocket.

During the past few weeks, not once, but often, the good looking face of Joyce Hilston had been in his mind. Riding along surrounded by the silence of the far Northern Downs, his mind reverted to the handsome figure in the dark green habit and hat. He almost felt tempted to ride down to the Change on mail days, to get a glimpse of the good-looking girl who rode as he had rarely seen a woman ride. Then, in disgust, he would dismiss such thoughts, and ask himself what had become of his commonsense. He would turn his thoughts to his people, his fiancee, and the future. Beverly was a careful horseman. When he was almost through the timber, without a second's warning, and with a mad snort and plunge forward, Beverly and the

black horse were travelling to what looked certain death. The black horse had bolted with him. He got down as low as possible on the horse's neck, knowing that he must leave his chance of preservation to the animal's instinct to go straight through the timber. By a miracle trees and overhanging boughs had been missed. The black horse was now madly galloping straight as an arrow for two trees between which it seemed impossible for horse and rider to pass through. The feeling of relief that Beverly experienced when he found himself clear of these two trees, was barely realised, when crash went two fencing posts, and horse and rider turned a complete somersault in the air. He had hit the boundary fence well and truly. The horse scrambled to his legs, with the saddle underneath him, and trotted along the wire fence.

The form of Beverly lay silent. He lie, full stretch on his back, some yards ahead of the fence where the impact had thrown him. Only that morning Mrs. Wilson had pleaded with him to abandon Larrikin, the black horse ,and ride a quieter animal. He had thanked her, and promised that, after doing a day's work, the horse should be turned out.

XIX.

JOYCE AND BEVERLY MEET AGAIN.

Uncle Jim was angry. It was a very rare thing with him. Harry, the boundary rider, had gone to the shanty on Saturday night, and so far had not put in an appearance. Uncle Jim knew what this meant. He was on a bushman's spree. He would want a settlement, and would not leave Connolly's until he had spent his cheque. In the meantime here he was, with rams in the yard to be taken away, and nobody to send to the top mountain pocket.

"Pity," he said savagely, "that the stuff would not poison some of them, then they would not be so fond of it."

"Well, Uncle, what is all the trouble this morning?" It was Joyce who spoke.

"Matter Joyce? Why, that beggar Harry is at the shanty drinking. I am already short-handed, and he knew the rams had to be got away this morning."

"Why you can take the rams away yourself, Uncle."

"I know I can, but what about the mountain pocket. Three days ago the overseer at Merthon Station sent me word to say that there were sheep hanging on the fence there."

"Well, Uncle, tell me how to get there. I can give the sheep a start down."

"Will you indeed! Joyce, you are a brick. You will make a great squatter's wife some day, Joyce."

"How do you know I will, Uncle? But if you give me the directions I will find the pocket."

Before long Joyce was saddled and ready to start.

Old Tom came out with a small canvas water bag, such as boundary rider's carry on the side of their saddle, and holding about two drinks of water. This he strapped on the dees of the saddle.

"This is always a handy thing on the Downs, Miss Joyce," he remarked.

Joyce could follow directions as well as any bushman. She was just rising out of a billabong close up to the pocket fence, when the thunder of galloping hoofs caught her ear.

The next thing she saw was a huge black horse, tearing out of the gidyea timber, with his rider lying low on his neck, and making straight for two thick trees. He raced between them, but a second afterwards horse and rider were in the air. She saw the horse get up and trot down the fence. "Has the rider

fared as well" she thought. She raced up to the broken fence, Bobs swerving aside when he caught sight of the outstretched figure on the ground. She was off in an instant and ran to the side of the silent form.

One glance at the face, and she turned deadly pale, and trembled, for she recognised the form instantly. It was the stranger she had seen at the Mail Change. Recovering her composure, she knelt down beside him, and placed her hand over his heart. She could feel it beating. She picked up the broad-brimmed felt hat and placed it under his head for a pillow. Then she thought of the small water bag old Tom had strapped on. "To have this water is nothing short of Providential," she murmured. She undid the strap with trembling fingers, and returned to the still unconscious man. Kneeling beside him she moistened her handkerchief and bathed his forehead.

Apparently no bones were broken, and the heavy fall on the soft crumbling black soil had only stunned him. She kept on bathing his forehead. He showed signs of returning consciousness and opened his eyes and essayed to raise his head. The effort caused him intense pain.

"Caesar's Ghost," he murmured. She could tell by his voice that he was suffering.

She spoke to him, "Lie quiet for a few minutes. You will quite recover before long."

At the sound of the voice, he opened his eyes and gazed up at her. "Am I dreaming," he muttered. "It surely must be so."

She asked, "Are you feeling better?"

Again he opened his eyes at the sound of that low voice This time he looked fixedly at her and passed a hand over his eyes, as if trying to recover his wandering wits.

Once more he turned his gaze upon her. "You came a dreadful cropper," she said.

The remark recalled the incident of his fall. "I remember now. The brute rushed me at the fence," he muttered.

"You had a marvellous escape," she replied.

He attempted to raise his head, but had she not caught him, and placed it upon her lap, he would have relapsed into unconsciousness again. She kept damping her handkerchief and applying it to his forehead.

"Rest for a few minutes," she told him. He remained quiet for a while, and the spell improved him.

He spoke. "I am quite clear now; my horse bolted through the timber, and the last thing I recollect was he and I heading for the trees, and then 'smash!'"

He rubbed the back of his head, and raised himself on his elbow. He next sat up and rested his head upon his hands.

She could see that he was still in great pain. She picked up his hat and placed it gently on his head. She filled a small

enamel mug with water and held it to his lips. The drink refreshed him.

"You are lucky there are no broken bones," she said.

"I truly am," he replied. "Pardon me," he continued, "for my want of civility. I have omitted to offer you thanks for all you have done for me. Believe me I was suffering intensely. Thank Goodness I am feeling better every minute."

"I am indeed relieved to see you make such a wonderful recovery. Are you well enough to walk as far as the shade of a tree?"

"I'll make an effort," he replied.

She took his arm and helped him; he sat with his back resting against the trunk of a tree.

"I will leave you for a few minutes and round up your horse," Joyce said.

"Really, Miss Hilston, I am putting you to too much trouble."

A look of surprise came over her face at the mention of her name.

The black horse had stopped a few hundred yards down the fence, and was cropping the rich Flinders grass.

Joyce had no trouble in catching him, Beverly watching the business-like manner in which she went about her work. She hung both horses upon the fence and returned to Beverly.

"I am feeling much better," he said, interpreting her glance.

In half an hour he was well enough to get up and walk about. It suddenly dawned upon him that he had not made himself known to the lady.

"You will excuse me," he said, "my wits are so scattered that I cannot do anything rightly. My name is Beverly. I am of Sydney, making a stay on Merthon for a time."

"I am indeed pleased to know you, Mr. Beverly. My name is Joyce Hilston. I am at present visiting my uncle, Mr. Megson, who owns this run. I have heard much of your father. A neighbour of ours in New South South Wales knows him well. How do you propose to reach the homestead, Mr. Beverly?" she asked.

"I shall make that brute carry me back, and that will be the last time he will ever carry a man."

"You surely would not risk another smash?" she asked.

She found him absolutely adamant.

He adjusted the saddle and led the black horse through the fence. She helped him to temporarily repair the broken fence. He climbed into the siddle with difficulty.

"Miss Hilston," he said, "a thousand thanks for your kind help to me. Words from me will not express the gratitude I feel."

"It is a relief on my part to find you quite unhurt. I confess I will be anxious until I hear that you have arrived safely."

"Good-bye, Miss Hilston," he said, offering his hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Beverly," she said, placing her hand in his. "Are you sure that you have quite recovered?"

"Quite, thank you," he replied.

He rode slowly along the fence. She watched him well out of sight, and then, satisfied that he was going along well enough, she visited the pocket and chivvied the sheep down the fence. Then she sent Bobs along at a good hard gallop, and was home in good time.

Her uncle had sent word back to the effect that he was helping a neighbour fight a fire up the river, and that he would be away for a couple of days.

The black horse appeared quite satisfied with his performance, and gave no further demonstrations of his treachery. Beverly's thoughts dwelt upon the strange meeting with Joyce Hilston. It is a strange coincidence that we should meet under such circumstances. "Why is it?" he asked himself, "that her face and form have so frequently recurred to my mind?" He smiled pleasantly at the thought of his head reclining on her lap. A thrill passed through him as he reflected on the touch of the soft hand on his forehead. "A splendid type of an Australian girl," he avowed to himself. "Certainly the best figure on a horse my eye has ever rested on."

Something startled the black horse, and he made a spring aside. "What, old chap," Beverly said, addressing the animal, "No more pranks I hope. The last was a close shave for both of us, but all's well that ends well." Once more his thoughts reverted to the handsome face of Joyce Hilston. "I wonder will I feet her again," he soliloquised. A troubled expression passed over his features. The kindly, patient face of Ann Gordon appeared before his mind. His thoughts turned to the good father and mother. He tried to turn his meditations to the future, associated with Ann Gordon. He reasoned with himself. He had no right to allow his mind to dwell upon the charms of the bright animated creature had just parted from. Try as he would, though, the handsome face still kept appearing before his minds eye.

There was nothing secretive in Beverly's nature. Still, when he arrived at the homestead he made no mention of the episode of the day. For some inexplicable reason he shrank from mentioning it. Had he been asked for an explanation of this omission he would have been at a loss to give one.

At dinner, Mr. Wilson, the manager, asked him, "How did the black horse behave to-day? I must confess I was relieved to see you riding home safe and sound."

"I found you were right. He is indeed a most unreliable brute. A dangerous animal to ride. The safest course will be to destroy him. Better to destroy a hundred horses than any one should be injured." The black horse never bolted again.

He did not vouchsafe any further information and the subject dropped.

Beverly rested the next day, and on the one following, he rode again to the Dry Pocket. He went to the corner of the fence, where there was a set of boundary rider's tools, and repaired the broken fence.

XX.

LOVE'S AWAKENING.

On the second day after the accident on the boundary fence, Joyce mounted Bobs, and in a couple of hours found herself in the vicinity of the pocket. When she came out of the timber on the fence, she could see that the fence, where the horse had gone over, was being repaired by some one. A closer inspection reevaled that Beverly himself was doing the work. Immediately he saw her he got through the fence and approached her.

"This is indeed a pleasure I did not expect, Miss Hilston," he said.

"I am relieved to see you so well," she answered.

Somehow she felt annoyed with herself for coming. What instinct told you, Joyce, that your good-looking stranger would be there?

He asked her, "Will you not get off for a few moments?"

He helped her down, and together they walked over to the two trees which the black horse had raced between. He mounted his horse and showed her, it was almost impossible to ride between the two at a walk, without touching one or the other.

"You had indeed a marvellous escape," she told him.

"I know you realise my gratitude to you, Miss Hilston. I was not in good form that day for thanking you."

"Mr. Beverly, please do not mention it." Joyce said in her candid manner. "I prefer you would not."

He asked her, "Do you often visit this part of the run?"

"No. Strange to say, the day of your accident, was the very first time I had been to this vicinity. Uncle's boundary rider is on what Uncle calls a spree at Mr. Conolly's, and I volunteered to give the sheep a start from the pocket. They perish if not cleared out."

"This is the boundary fence between your Uncle's place and ours?"

"Yes," she said. "I believe so. Mr. Beverly, I was going to ask you a question.

He looked up, interested. "How did you know my name was Miss Hilston?"

"I must confess I admired your riding so much that day you jumped the gate that I inquired who you were."

She changed the subject, "Are you feeling quite well?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Perfectly, thank you."

"I'll have to bid you good-bye," she said.

He assisted her to mount. "Good-bye, Miss Hilston," he said, looking up, and their eyes met. She turned her horse and trotted out of sight.

What mystic message was conveyed to each, in the meeting of those two pairs of eyes? Was it the call of one soul to another? Do the eyes speak the language of love? Are the sentiments of the soul reflected in humanity's orbs? It would sometimes appear as if the innermost sentiments of the heart, by some invisible current, reproduced in the expression of the eye. She rode through the pocket, and finding everything all right, returned home. Beverly had finished his work and had taken his departure. As Joyce rode homeward, her thoughts were of Beverly. She had often heard Mr. Wells speak of Richard Beverly as the whitest man in Australia. She wondered how long the son would stay. She knew that his father was known as the Pastoral King, for she had often read of them in the society news of the city. Joyce allowed her thoughts to run on, thinking of his narrow escape, and wondering if they would meet again. Like all women who had met him, she was struck with his good looks, the charm and civility of his manner. She thought of that dreadful dream. "What could that mean," she thought. "Come along, Bobs," she said, addressing her horse, "Let us move along. The thoughts of that nightmare gives me the shivers."

Beverly rode away from his work, with a mind full of the handsome girl from whom he had just parted. The last glance, as eye met eye, had thrilled his very being in a way he had never experienced before. What was there about her that he had never been able to discover in any other woman? Why should her very looks send the hot blood tingling through his veins? Lately she was much in his thoughts. What was this indefinable craving within, for her presence. At the sight of her to-day his very being glowed.

Ah, why deceive yourself, Beverly? How well you know what prospect induced you to visit the scene of the narrow escape. Did it not pass through your mind, possibly it was her custom to pay visits to that vicinity? Will you tell how often your gaze was directed the way you expected her to come? He drifted into a serious vein of thought. Good God! he reflected, could it be that he was already growing to love this girl? Was this the love that comes but once into humanity's breast?

"How can I think of loving her?" he asked himself. "A man already pledged in marriage to another good woman. Beverly's mind was greatly disturbed. Shining out clear and bright from his mental perplexity, like a beacon light, was the remembrance of the expression of those beautiful eyes, as they softly

looked into his own. He looked down as he rode along. Even the remembrance of the look thrilled him. The soul of one had spoken to the soul of the other.

XXI.

JOYCE DECIDES TO RETURN HOME.

Some three weeks had elapsed since Joyce and Beverly had last met. Joyce found her thoughts dwelling upon the handsome Beverly so much that she had resolutely determined, it was necessary for her peace of mind, that they should never meet again.

In the still hours of the night she had carefully analysed her feelings towards him. Lying awake in the quiet of the silent night, she had asked herself the question: "Is this love that has come into my heart? Why is it that he is so much in my thoughts? Why is it that during the day I am everlastingly thinking of him."

One night she burst into an emotional fit of sobbing. The battle was fought, and lost. Her emotion meant her capitulation. "Oh," she sobbed to herself, "I love him, God only knows with what depth of feeling. No longer can I deceive myself. I have but one course to follow: pack up and go straight home to my old Dad. Yes," she reflected, "I must get away without seeing him again. He, at least, will never know of my love for him."

Next morning Joyce said to her Uncle, "I will soon have to leave you. I have had quite a long holiday with you Uncle."

"Plenty of time, Joyce," her uncle replied.

But Joyce was firm. "I will leave about the beginning of next week, Uncle."

"I will indeed be sorry to lose you, Joyce," he said kindly. He had learnt to love this bright, handsome daughter of his only sister, as if she had been his own.

It was decided that Joyce was to leave next week.

Joyce felt extremely downhearted at the thought of leaving Queensland, for she knew that she was leaving her heart behind.

On the Friday previous to her proposed departure, the longing to visit the spot, the memory of which was so dear to her, became irresistible. She had Bobs saddled and cantered away in the direction of the pocket. "Just one last glance," she argued with herself. "My last look at the scene of my romance." She arrived at the very spot where the fence had been repaired, and she dismounted and stood alongside of Bobs, with her head resting against the saddle flap. She truly realised what a wrench her departure was going to be. She lifted her head and allowed her gaze to rest upon the very spot where the form of Beverly

had laid so still and silent. There she reflected: "I held his very head on my lap. As he lay almost as still as death I bathed his forehead." Continuing her reflections, she soliloquised, "To be overtaken by such dreadful ill-fate is hard to bear. To love as ardently as I do, and realise my love to be of such an absolutely hopeless character, is sufficient to break the heart, that, unasked, has been given to him."

"Will I ever forget him?" she reflected. "At present it would appear impossible." When she realised what her departure meant, that in all possibility her eyes would never again rest upon the good-looking face and form of Beverly, she felt sick at heart.

So engaged was she in her reflections that she did not hear the quiet approach of a horse and rider. She was startled by a voice saying, in anxious tones, "Are you unwell, Miss Hilston?"

She was both startled and annoyed to think that anybody had caught her in such a despondent attitude.

She recovered her composure, and looking up, replied, "Good day, Mr. Beverly. I knew your voice, but I did not hear your approach."

"I am afraid I startled you," he said.

"Yes," she admitted, "at first. I presume you are quite yourself," she continued.

"Thank you, perfectly so," he answered

"I am having a last look around the old run. I am going away early next week," Joyce told him.

"Are you truly going?" he asked, and there was a note of painful disappointment in his voice.

"Oh, yes," she answered, "back to sunny New South Wales." He had dismounted from his horse, tied him up, and had got through the wire fence, and was now standing by her side.

"Miss Hilston, may I tell you how much I regret you are leaving?"

"That is nice of you, Mr. Beverly, but I expect that it will not be long before you leave for the south," she answered.

"Not for some months," he replied.

"Is this your first visit here since I saw you last?" he continued.

"Yes," she replied. "Is it yours?"

"I have come every day since then," he simply said.

She threw a keen glanec at him, an enquiring look.

"I will be candid. I came always that I might have the pleasure of seeing you again," he went on.

She was quite at a loss, for once, for a reply. Why he should want to see her, she could not for the moment realise. God knows she wanted to see him badly enough, but she would not let him know that. But with her it was different. She had given, unknown to him, her virgin love. For a moment silence reigned between them.

He broke it at last, and said. "Will you regret going away?"

"Yes," she said. "and No. Although that seems a bit incomprehensible, does it not?"

"A little," he said, with a smile.

"Why will you regret going?" he asked.

"Well, I have been very happy with my good uncle. Everybody has been very good to me."

"And why will you not regret going?" he cross-examined.

"That phase of the matter, Mr. Beverly, I think I must decline to discuss with you" (half seriously).

Thinking that he had got on to delicate ground, he expressed his regret.

"I am truly sorry," he explained.

All at once his face turned an ashen white. She was looking straight at him.

"For God's sake, Miss Hilston," he said, in an undertone full of fear and anxiety, "stand as still as marble."

He made a move to catch her arm, as though to shield her from some danger. Turning her eyes downwards, in the direction of his own gaze, she saw, passing close to her feet, a huge tiger snake. A look of deadly fear overspread her features as her looks rested upon the reptile. Beverly had stretched forth his hand and taken hold of her arm. Her form was unsteady with fear. The reptile raised its head from the grass, threw a venomous look at them from a pair of beady glittering eyes, then then noiselessly glided away through the thick grass.

Gently, Beverly drew the trembling form of his companion to his side.

"Thank God," he fervently muttered, "you are safe. The danger has passed." There was no mistaking the sincere feeling of relief he experienced. The tones in which he expressed his thankfulness plainly denoted that.

Quickly recovering herself, she looked into his face, making an effort to disengage herself from his embrace. He gazed down at the upturned face, gently pressed it against his breast, drawing her closer, said:

"Joyce, Joyce, listen to me. Dearest, listen to me, Joyce. I love you dearer than life itself. My Darling," he exclaimed, "do you realise you are my very world."

At his words she lifted her hear from his breast and gazed up into the good-looking face, looking down into her own. Her woman's instinct told her he spoke truly. She realised she was beloved, that her great love was reciprocated. The light of a glorious joy shone from her eyes. Did she hear aright? Was she dreaming? Her love, that only a few minutes past she regarded as so utterly hopeless. Could this be true. Once more she gazed up into the face still looking so intently at her own, and read in the expression of his eyes, that she was indeed beloved. She lowered her eyes, blush overspread her features.

Unresistingly she allowed Beverly to fondly place her head again upon his breast. Supremely happy, she nestled in silence, her being thrilling with the knowledge that her love was returned. Beverly was experiencing a fit of ecstacy only equal to her own. At the moment one thought alone possessed his being. This beautiful girl was his. Loved him as he loved her. What else mattered.

"Joyce," he said, after a brief silence, taking the handsome face between his hands, "I love you very dearly. Rarely has man loved woman as passionately and ardently as I love you. She lifted her head from his breast where it had been reclining, and gazed once again into the pair of handsome brown eyes, looking down so pleadingly into her own.

"To hear you say so is heaven to me, because," she whispered, "I love you as deeply, if not more so, than you love me."

The light of great joy sprang into his eyes. "Dearest, dearest," he passionately exclaimed, "Tell me again of your love. No sweeter sound has ever reached my ears." Call me Lex," he asked her.

She looked up into the face above her, saying, "Lex, I love you better than life itself."

He pressed her passionately to his breast, and kissed her. It was the first time that man's lips had ever touched her own. He held her in his arms and stroked her luxuriant hair.

"Lex," she said, "would you like to know why I did not regret going away?"

"Yes, dear Joyce, I am indeed anxious to hear your explanation," he answered.

"Like a revelation it burst upon me that my very soul had gone out to you. I never dreamt that my love was returned. For the sake of my peace of mind, I decided to return to my father, never dreaming that you would ever learn how deeply I had loved you."

He wrapped her in his arms, saying, "My darling, my darling, I can never part from you."

She nestled against him once more. He said, "My love, you will not leave me now."

"Do you wish me to remain, Lex?"

"Do I what!" he uttered, and again he pressed her cheek against his own, and told her once more of his love.

"Lex, my dear," she said at last. "I must leave you. I am very happy," and she looked into his face with eyes that glowed with the light of love.

"God bless you, dear Joyce," was all he said.

He kissed her good-bye and lifted her into the saddle.

Twenty times she turned to wave, and then disappeared into the timber and was lost to sight.

Beverly continued in the same position for some time, then got through the fence and rode slowly away.

Fate had placed them in their Garden of Eden, surrounded by the circumstances of temptation. Would they, like their ancestor and ancestress fall, and would their undoing be the work of a serpent?

As Beverly rode along the fence his conscience was busy at work. With the recovery of his composure, he commenced to realise what he had been guilty of. Accepting this pure girl's love, offering his own, whilst bound to another! What mad fit had seized him? Once more his thoughts turned to the handsome girl he had held in his arms. Her words still rang in his ears, "Lex, I love you better than life itself." Again the black cloud appeared on the horizon. What of his engagement? What of the good father and mother? He rode along, the expression of his face reflecting the seriousness of his thoughts.

XXII.

CONNOLLY'S TREACHERY.

Shearing was in full swing, and Uncle Jim was a very busy man. To the delight of Megson, Joyce changed her mind and decided to prolong her stay. She spent a great deal of her time indulging in rides over the run. Had there been any one to observe her, they would have been surprised to discover she invariably rode out to the foot of the mountain. Her favourite haunt was the Dry Pocket. Her absence was never commented upon. Her uncle was too busy getting the wool off his flock, to pay much attention to his niece. As long as she was happy, enjoying herself, what else mattered? Her time was her own, to come and go as she pleased. Shortly after their mutual confession of love, Beverly had obtained a promise from Joyce to keep their love a secret. "My darling," he had said, "Promise me one thing."

"What is it, Lex?" she had asked.

"Our love, dearest, yours for me, and mine for you, this imperishable love we feel for one another, will for the present remain a secret."

She had answered simply, "If you wish it, Lex, until Death."

He had gazed down into the pair of loyal eyes looking up into his own. In them he read a great unselfish love for himself. He realised, until the Death, it would be with her. He folded her in his arms. His instinct told him a rare treasure had been won. Day after day they met. Appointing regular times for their meetings. For hours they wandered together, hand in hand, along the narrow tracks of the big black mountain; winding in and out of the huge black boulders, resting on the highest points, and gazing down, as far as the eye would reach, into the hazy valleys below. Stretching away to the left were the numerous buildings of the big station Merthon. Away to the right, nestling on the bank of the creek, was the Megson's homestead. Excepting the presence of a stray native dog sleeping under the cover of a projecting rock, that would, at the sound of their voices, dart out and skulk away, the birds twitting merrily in the trees, the hawks gracefully soaring overhead, no other sign of life was ever within miles of them. Although Beverly now realised his match with Ann must be broken off, he had not made an offer to Joyce. A deep, mutual love had sprung up in their breasts. They were living

in their Paradise. In those days, the world, as they knew it, was their own, their Garden of Eden. Beverly had fully determined upon a certain line of conduct. Each week he made up his mind to place this newly created situation before his father. He had firmly resolved in his mind that Joyce, and no other woman, would be his wife. Each week he allowed the station mail to leave, and each week he postponed the matter until the following week.

At this period, Beverly suffered considerable distress of mind. His thoughts would revert to his good father and mother. He realised how good they were, how good they had been to him. He remembered the pleasure that lit up their faces the night he and Ann walked into their presence and announced their engagement. Even now, he could see the glow of happiness pass over their features. He could see his mother taking Ann in her arms, and welcoming her as a daughter. He could see Ann quietly weeping on her shoulder.

Nightly his mind was greatly troubled with these thoughts. The letter home, telling of his change of plans was not yet written, when a certain incident occurred that accelerated his decision in that respect.

Some three months had passed since Beverly's accident. At the very place he and Joyce were saying good-bye. As usual they had been rambling through the mountain boulders, wandering here and there, hand in hand. They were standing together, saying their last good-bye. Lex put his arm round about her, saying, "Joyce, dearest, you appear depressed. Are you unhappy?"

"Not unhappy when with you," she replied, "but to-day, dear, I feel sad. I never told you, Lex, about a dreadful dream I had the night of the first day that you and I met at the Mail Change. It was a terrible nightmare. She told him of it. He soothed her and placed his arm protectingly around her. He held her closely, as if to protect her from possible danger. He lifted her on her mount, and watched horse and rider until they were out of sight. He rode home to the head station slowly. The whole journey his mind was filled with the most painful reflections. During this ride, he concluded, he must acquaint his father regarding his proposed marriage with Joyce. They could be married at the big coastal town and then roam for a couple of years in the East. It was after dark when he reached the homestead. He rode to the horse stalls and dismounted. In doing so, he landed with his full weight on top of a slip-rail lying on the ground. A sharp cry of pain broke from him as he fell. Mr. Wilson had heard him arrive, and had come out to meet him. With one of the stockmen he helped him in. It was found he had almost twisted his ankle inside out. Mrs. Wilson, who had been engaged in hospital matters before she married, pronounced it to be a very bad dislocation.

"Mr. Beverly," she said, "you are in for a long spell. This will put you on your back weeks, if not months. Beverly's face wore a very serious expression.

"Weeks, months," he reflected to himself. "My God! What is going to become of Joyce?"

"Surely not as bad as that, Mrs. Wilson," he said in a serious tone.

"I am sorry, Mr. Beverly, "but you will find out I am correct," she answered.

That night the pain of his ankle was nothing compared to the mental distress he suffered. It was the third day after the accident. This was his day to ride to the Pocket to meet Joyce. The whole night his mind had been full of the painful position he found himself placed in. He had marked out a certain course to follow. After breakfast he had writing materials brought to his bedside, and penned the following letter to Joyce:—

"My Dearest Girl,—

You will wonder why I was not at the tryst to-day. My darling, I have met with a very awkward accident. I have badly dislocated my ankle, and will be on my back for some weeks. Joyce, I cannot bear the thoughts of a separation. There should be no occasion for it. I am certain I could not successfully face the trial of weeks without seeing you. Firstly, Joyce, I absolve you from the promise you gave me to keep our love a secret. Joyce, darling, I want you to be my wife. Without delay I want you to send word back to me, telling me that your answer is 'Yes.' Ah, Joyce, with your love for me, could it be otherwise? As soon as I have your letter, I will at once take Mrs. Wilson into my confidence, and get her to invite you over as my affianced. You can nurse me. Will that be agreeable to you? Ah, I fancy I see you smile when you read this. Will I not be pleased to have you by my side? Your presence, dearest, will be better than all the liniments. I enclose a letter for your Uncle. I want you to wire to your father, and obtain his consent to our marriage as promptly as possible. As soon as I am well we will travel to the coast, and spend a year or two in the East. My darling, does the prospect of doing the Golden East dazzle you. I must confess to feeling a great pleasure with this vista before my mind. The Orient, with its lavishness, its wealth, its beauty, and the greatest joy of all—your presence at my side. My darling, with this vision before my mind, I feel as if the very gates of Heaven have opened to admit me. Do you realise, Joyce, to tell you in written words of my great love for you, is impossible. A life's devotion only can prove, as I would wish you to understand, its depth. Do not delay to reply as quickly as possible. I am simply hungering for your reply. In my letter to your

good uncle. I have asked him to accocmpany us to the coast, to give you away (to me). Dearest Joyce, Good-bye. Let me have your answer as soon as possible. You have no idea how anxious I am to have your bright presence near me.

Yours until Death,

LEX.

He wrote a straight-forward letter to Jim Megson, in which he said:—

"Dear Sir,

"By accident some months ago I became acquainted with your Niece, Miss Joyce Hilston. We have met repeatedly during the last three months. I might explain I am visiting my father's property, 'Merthon,' and met with a nasty fall some time ago on the boundary fence. Miss Hilston arrived on the scene when I was unconscious, and rendered me every aid possible. From this acquaintance a deeper feeling ripened. I have written to ask Joyce to be my wife. it is right that I should tell you who I am. My name is Alexander Beverly. I am the son of Richard Beverly—his only son. 'Merthon,' as you are aware, is one of the many properties he owns in Australia.

"Will you be good enough to wire Mr. Hilston and ask him to send along the necessary papers, so that our marriage may take place at an early date.

"I would also like you accompany us to the coast to be present at the ceremony. Thanking you in advance for the favours I have asked you to perform.

"Very faithfully yours,

"LEX BEVERLY."

These two letters he placed in an envelope, carefully sealed and addressed to Miss Joyce Hilston, c/o James Megson, Esq. He marked the outside of the envelope "Urgent."

He hobbled outside on his crutches and accosted a stockman. This chap was hanging on to a flighty-looking filly.

"Deigen," he asked, "is anybody going to the mail change to-day?"

"Yes, Mr. Beverly," this man replied. "I am going in a few minutes, as soon as I get some tobacco from the store."

"Oh, are you. Look, Deigen, I have a very important letter here. Give it to Mr. Connolly and tell him to send it over by special messenger to Megson's place. Explain to him I will defray the cost of the messenger."

"Very good, Mr. Beverly," answered the stockman.

Beverly watched him place the letter carefully in the small leather pouch horsemen in the bush always have attached to their saddles.

"I wish you, Deigen, to take especial care of that letter. It is indeed a very important one. Be careful you deliver it safely. Do not lose it."

"Not on your life, Sir," replied the stockman.

"Just then Mr. Wilson, the Manager, came along.

"Alright, Deigen," he said, "you can get away. Tell Mr. Campbell to shift all the sheep out of the top paddock, as the water is giving out. Stay for a couple of days and give them a hand. Get past that shanty without drinking. Connolly knows he has his last chance if ever he encourages any of you to remain there when you are on duty."

"I have a letter to leave for Mr. Beverly; I will drop that in and push straight on," replied Deigen.

The shanty at the mail change was a thorn in the side of the Manager of the Merthon. Bushmen are all more or less addicted to the "Demon," and many a stockman, when sent on an important errand had delayed at this "man trap," and caused Wilson much worry and inconvenience. Much good time was lost one way and another. Matters had reached such a stage, that the Manager had given Connolly his last chance. He had told him definitely if, in the future, any inconvenience was caused the station through the stockmen getting on the spree during their working hours, he, Wilson, would take steps to have the license cancelled at the next Licensing Court.

This had put the wind up Connolly, who was now very careful to see the station hands, when on duty, were bundled off on the track to do what work had been allotted to them.

Deigen threw the reins over the head of the filly and prepared to mount. She danced round, but the stockman was a horseman, and was soon safely seated in the saddle and on his way to the shanty.

XXIII.

CONNOLLY'S JOKE.

When Deigen pulled up at the shanty there was a good crowd of "walers" (swagmen) hanging around. There was a man called "Frank the Fencer" knocking down a cheque he had earned from a fencing contract on "Merthon" Station.

This chap was a typical bushman. A thorough victim to the "Demon." He would be at work before the stars were off the sky, and would continue working until it was too dark to see what he was doing. He would quibble with the storekeeper of the station over a penny difference in the price of a bottle of pickles. In six months he would finish his contract, collect a cheque for a couple of hundred pounds, make a bee line for the shanty, pass the cheque over the counter without even looking at it, saying, "Let's know when she's finished."

For a couple of days he would gorge himself with rum, and then relapse into a state of sodden stupidity. He would remain asleep all day, occasionally coming to light to help himself out of a bottle of rum, placed beside the couch upon which he slept..

It was marvellous how word reached all parts of the compass that the "Fencer" was knocking down a cheque at Connolly's Shanty. Whilst the cheque lasted, little old grey-whiskered swagmen arrived from all parts of the district. It would seem as if the very birds of the air carried the news abroad.

"Let them all come," was Connolly's motto, "the more the merrier; the sooner the cheque will be cut out, the quicker the 'Fencer' will be on the job knocking up some more money to spend."

Connolly was a character in his way. He was noted for selling good grog and giving every man value for his money. By that, it was understood if the man spending the money could not drink it, Connolly would find plenty of others to assist him.

Every half hour, he had regular periods to entertain at the "Fencer's" expense. He would call out to the thirsty crowd hanging round the verandah of the shanty:

"Come on, Lads, the 'Fencer' wants to do it again."

At the moment a bombshell would not have disturbed the "Fencer." By and by a thirsty soul would say to the shanty keeper, "Go on, Connolly, put the acid on again."

Putting the acid on meant that Connolly would put his head through the aperture between the bar and the little room where

the soddened fellow slept, and addressed the unconscious man in the following manner:

"Did you say to give them another drink, Frank? Now, look here, you're too good. Why, you only shouted a few minutes ago. Well, it's your money, not mine. Come on, you fellows, he will have you booze up again."

All day, until the cheque was cut out, this farce went on. Connolly had lambed them all down in turn. They all knew him. Whilst he was addressing the sleeping "Fencer," the thirsty souls would knowingly wink at one another. The money had to be spent. From Connolly's point of view, the sooner it was got through the better. The sooner the "Fencer" would be at graft to earn some more for him.

Deigen, like most bushmen of the day, was a victim to the "Demon." To pass the Shanty when a cheque was being knocked down, was a temptation that flesh and blood of the Deigen type was not proof against.

"A few rums," he thought, "and I'll get on the road again."

He dismounted from the flighty filly, and passed the reins over a stout hook in the horse rail in front of the Shanty.

The arrival of Deigen was hailed as an occasion to once more put the acid on the sleeping "Fencer." Deigen joined the drinking, and was having his fifth at the "Fencer's" expense, when some one sang out, "Deigen, your mare's gone."

And so it was. He rushed out of the bar just in time to see the mare turning the corner of the Shanty, and heading for a gidyea scrub behind the back of the shanty.

A fight had taken place between two of the old grey-whiskered swaggies. It appeared one of them had fallen asleep on the verandah of the Shanty. Another, with a strain of humour in his composition, had printed on a piece of cardboard the following lines, "After life's fitful fever, he peacefully slumbers on." When the old chap awoke and discovered the placard on him, he was looking for the perpertrator's scalp. Picking upon the one he considered guilty, and without any explanation, he rolled into him. Before you could say knife, they were at it, hammer and tongs, right under the nose of the flighty mare of Deigen's. She sat back on her haunches and strained. Rip went the station bridle, around the corner galloped the filly, and was soon lost to sight in the gidyea scrub.

There was not a horse about the place to go after her. This had a sobering effect on Deigen. He called Connolly aside.

"Here, Connolly," he said, "I'm in the soup over this business, so are you."

"This is easily fixed," said Connolly. "I'll send down to the paddock and get you a fresh horse. Get away and give Campbell a hand. When you return, I'll have the filly here waiting for you to ride back to the station. No one will be any the wiser."

"That's all right, but the trouble is the big head up at the station gave me an important letter to deliver to you. That letter is in the saddle pouch on the filly. You were to send it over to Megson's. It is addressed to Miss Hilson, Megson's niece. He told me to tell you to send it over by special messenger and it was marked 'Urgent.' I saw that."

Connolly whistled, and looked serious. "Why the devil didn't you give me the blanky thing before you started to shikker?" he said. You know the row Wilson kicked up the last time that boundary rider got on the spree here. The rotter threatened to get my license cancelled. The fat's in the fire alright," he continued, gloomily.

"Send down and get me a horse, and I'll get away," said Deigen.

Connolly stood in deep reflection for a moment or two. "This is rotten luck," he said. "Any day now a buyer might come along. If this gets abroad, I've no hope of selling out. However," he continued, "you leave the matter in my hands, but do as I tell you. We'll have to put a joke up on him."

Within a very short time Connolly's blackboy had a fresh horse for Deigen. He was glad to get away, and cantered along the road to his destination.

As we have explained to our readers, Connolly was a champion "make believe." Lying came as natural to him as breathing the fresh air of the open downs of the great West.

After Deigen had left he sat down and pondered for some time. He went into the little side room where the "Fencer" lay, in absolute oblivion, sat down and addressed a letter to Beverly:

"Dear Sir,—

"Deigon gave me your letter addressed to Miss Hilston. Shortly afterwards the lady herself appeared on the scene, so I handed it to her personally with my own hands.

"R. CONNOLLY."

As there was one of the station hands going the way of the station, he gave it to him with instructions to see the letter was delivered into the hands to Mr. Beverly without fail.

XXIV.

LETTERS THAT WERE NEVER POSTED.

Beverly received Connolly's letter, appreciated his kindly thought.

"This is indeed thoughtful of him," he soliloquised, little realising the treacherous trick that had been played upon him.

"The next day," he told himself, "he would have Joyce's answer. Then to confide in Mrs. Wilson and get Joyce over straightaway. He sat down and wrote a letter each to his father, his mother, and Ann. To his father he wrote as a son would write to a parent, from whom he knew, as long as he was doing the right thing under the circumstances, approbation would be extended to him.

To the mother he wrote in most affectionate terms. He told her he was aware the line of conduct he intended to follow was going to cause her intense grief and disappointment. "My Dear Mother," he wrote, "I cannot marry Ann, my very soul has gone out to this beautiful girl. Ah, mother, did you know her, you would not wonder at my great love for her. We will travel in the East for a year or two before we return to you. Who can tell. Let us hope, by that time, Ann will have formed new ties. I shudder to think, Dearest Mother, what a dreadful tragedy has been avoided. I know now my feeling for Ann is not the feeling a man possesses for the woman he proposes to make his wife. Mother dear, do you know I am equally certain that Ann never bore me the feeling a woman should have for the man to whom she's going to be wife? Do you realise what pitfalls we two, united as man and wife, would in our future, everlastingly be on the brink of? Thank God that danger has been averted."

To Ann he wrote as a brother might write to a sister. "Will you ever forgive, Dearest Ann? Ah, as time wears on, like myself, you will realise how fortunate has been our escape. In words I cannot tell you, more for your sake than mine, how narrowly we both escaped a life of Hell. Dear Ann, I have learned to love. The day will come when, with you, it will be likewise. Only then will you realise the dreadful doom we both missed. He wrote of other matters. He addressed the three letters anl felt as if a great load had been lifted off his shoulders. As soon as Joyce's reply reached him, he would despatch these fateful letters on their way. Pain they were bound to cause. Time would alleviate that, and when, after

a couple years' travel, he brought his handsome wife home, a joyful welcome would be theirs.

The next day passed without reply from Joyce, and Beverly became restless and uneasy. The thought of treachery never entered his head. He knew of no reason why it should be practiced. The second and the third day passed, and still no answer. The fourth day produced Deigen. Beverly heard of his arrival, and hobbled out to meet him.

"I had a letter from Connolly to say you delivered the letter. Were you there when Miss Hilston received the letter?"

"No," Deigen replied. "I had left. But Connolly told me he gave it to her. He said she opened it as she rode away, reading as she walked her horse along."

Deigen was well primed by Connolly. The latter had told him he had written to Beverly and coached him up to back the contents of the letter he had sent.

When Deigen returned to the Shanty on his return journey, he had found the filly waiting for him. She had parted with the saddle, which was still lying in the gidgee scrub, with Beverly's letter to Joyce in the saddle pouch.

Beverly spoke to Wilson. He was at a loss to understand why a reply had not come to him.

"I gave a very important letter to Deigen to leave at the Mail Change the day he left to give Campbell a hand. I expected a reply. So far I have not received one. Is he reliable?"

"If he knew it was from you, no one would be more so."

Beverly was sorely puzzled. He could not understand why the reply had not reached him. He sent to the Shanty to ask for letters, but the messenger came back with the usual reply, "Nothing there." The only excuse he could find for the delay was that Joyce was taking time to think over it. This was strange again, he argued with himself, for had he not specially asked her to reply without delay?

The mail left. He was feeling slightly resentful. His spirit was chafing. The station mail left. His letters to Sydney remained unposted. Mr. Wilson came to him before he closed the mail bag, saying, "Have you any letters for the mail, Mr. Beverly?"

Beverly looked at the three letters addressed and stamped. Would he post them on? "No, thank you, Mr. Wilson. I will catch next week's trip. He could not explain why he did not post them. He placed them carefully in a draw in the bedroom. He walked out and accosted Deigen

He beckoned him over to where he stood, leaning up against the small picket fence around the garden in front of the homestead.

"Were you at the mail change when the coach came in yesterday," he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Beverly," replied Deigen.

"Was Miss Hilston there " enquired Beverly.

"Yes, sir," he answered, "riding the big bay."

He returned to his room very disconcerted. He rested on the stretcher they had provided for him, being easier to rise from than the high bed. At the mail change yesterday, and never brought any reply to his urgent letter; his urgent wishes. What in the name of goodness could be the matter, he reflected. On her love for him he could stake his life. He sick, with this wretched ankle, she apparently not concerned. He paled at the thought of her want of sympathy. He had pleaded for an immediate reply. Were his wishes of no concern to her? He became very despondent. A doubt was creeping into his mind. There were some women to whom fickleness was natural. Surely Joyce was not of this character? He would never believe that of her. Should he write again? he contemplated. His natural pride revolted at the idea. She had received his letter, had even read it. What was the reason for her silence? His mind was deeply distressed. He would wait for the next few days and see what they brought forth.

XXV.

JOYCE DEPARTS FROM HER UNCLE'S.

Joyce had ridden to the "Pocket" to meet Beverly on the day appointed when they last parted. She was surprised to find, for the first time, she was earlier than Beverly at the tryst. He was always there before she arrived. She smiled to herself, thinking of his astonishment when he discovered she was waiting for him. The time dragged on. Many anxious looks had she cast along the boundary fence. Often deceiving herself a horseman was coming along the track. Her face betokened feelings of alarm. Had he met with an accident. She thought of the other narrow escape he experienced. At the thought of any peril overtaking him, her face turned as white as a sheet. She must not agitate herself, she soliloquised, he would arrive before long. Some trifling delay at the head station. She knew by the position of the sun the day was creeping on. The dainty lunch she had prepared for herself and Beverly remained untouched. Again the serious expression overspread her features. Could it be possible, she asked herself, she would return without seeing him. Ah, Joyce, whilst you wait at the place that holds such a charm for you, your lover lies on his back, suffering the mental tortures of Hell. The sun was getting low in the West. She realised that darkness would be upon her, unless she made a start to get home. Suffering the keenest pangs of disappointment, sore at heart, not knowing what to think, she untied Bobs, slowly mounted him, and rode away.

During the ride back to the homestead her thoughts were full of the day's disappointment. What could have prevented him from coming? This was uppermost in her mind. She would not allow herself to think that some evil may have befallen him. The reflection was too dreadful, even for the briefest space. She little knew what the future held for her. Many trips yet would she make and suffer still keener mortification.

The next day found her at the tryst again. He would come to-day, she assured herself. Once more she had to return with a sad and heavy heart. It was the ninth day since she suffered her first disappointment. Not one day had she allowed to pass without paying the pocket a visit.

She was anxiously gazing along the fence with a careworn expression on her features. The intense anxiety she was suffer-

ing was commencing to leave its mark. Suddenly the expression of the face brightened. In the distance a horseman was approaching. When horse and rider were within sight range a look of disappointment settled on her countenance. She knew the upright form of Beverly mounted. This was not him. She waited until the horseman came up to where she was standing, holding the bridle of her horse.

"Good day," she addressed him, dropping into the ordinary vernacular of the bush.

"Good day, Miss," he answered.

He struck her as being a decent fellow.

"Are you riding this fence?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss, but I'm a new hand. I have only been on a fortnight. This is my first trip on it. Is this the boundary, Miss?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, this is the boundary fence. Have they finished shearing yet?" she asked.

"Not yet," he answered; "it will take a few weeks yet to cut out."

"Any visitors at the homestead?" she quiered.

'I couldn't say, Miss," was his reply.

"Is Mr. Beverly, the owner's son, still at the station?"

"I don't know. I don't think I would know him if I saw him."

"You could not mistake him if you saw him. He is a well-set up man. Good looking, tall and dark," she told him.

" I haven't seen anyone like that at the station. Stay, though," he continued, adopting a reflective manner, "about a fortnight ago, the day I was put on, there was a young, good-looking chap went away in the station buck-board to catch the mail coach."

The boundary rider was quite correct. It was the assistant woolclasser, going away to work another shed.

Joyce could get no further information. She bid the man good day, and rode sadly and slowly home.

In her room, in the quiet of the night, she reflected what was the best thing to do. Of his loyalty and love she felt as certain as she was of her own. What was it that was keeping him from her side? "Would she write to him?" she asked herself. No," she answered herself. "Her faith in him was too true and deep to do that. Everything would come right. She had given her promise that their love, sacred to them both, would remain a secret. With her until the Death it would be. She would be loyal to him and to her promise. Not by word or deed would he ever have cause to doubt her love and her fidelity."

He would never leave me without explanation. Her instinct told her Beverly was a man of honour. He was not a craven or a blackguard. She recalled one evening, a few years ago, when dining at Bandomile, old Tom Wells had been speaking of Richard Beverly. He was telling of the Pastoral Kings

goodness. He had read that day in the Sydney papers where Beverly had given a substantial sum of money to some charity. Young Tom had asked his father, "Did you ever meet the son Alexander? He was at the King's School when I was there, but, of course, I was younger than him."

"I have never seen the young chap," the Boss of Bandomile had said, "but they tell me he is a grand young fellow, a great favourite with everybody. Just as honourable and as generous as his father, and likely to be as good a man, although that will take some doing."

How well she remembered the words.

Could it have been her lover the boundary rider had spoken of. Was he the man who had left to catch the mail coach? No, she would not entertain that idea. To-morrow she would ride to the Mail Change and ascertain if possible who it was that left the station.

When she arrived at Connolly's, the place was quiet. Connolly saw her ride up. Was she coming to enquire about the lost letter?

"Good day, Miss Hilston. Having grand weather," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Connolly," she answered. "The weather is indeed perfect. Are there any letters for the selection?" she asked.

"No, Miss Hilston. Were you expecting any?" he queried.

"Oh, no," she answered, "only just a matter of formal enquiry."

A look of relief overspread Connolly's features.

"Shearing going along alright at the big station," she asked.

"Yes, they're having a splendid run this year," he answered.

"They have the owner's son staying with them, have they not?" she asked.

"They had, I believe," he said.

Had he been watching her he would have noticed the change of colour at his words.

"The last couple of mail days I've been away." He turned to Jacky, a blackboy he kept about the place, and, unnoticed by Joyce, passed a knowing wink along to him.

"Jacky," he said, "that big fellow boss alonga station, young fellowbos, no more old man, that one go away?"

"Yowi, Boss, he been go away alonga coach."

After a few commonplace remarks, Joyce wheeled her horse around and cantered along the road homeward.

When well on the roadside she was seized with a fit of emotion. Could it be possible he would go away without explanation or word? No she would not believe that. She would wait for a few days and see what they brought forth.

A month passed, and still Beverly made no sign. Joyce grew sick. She fought against it, but at last had to give in. A very bad cold she told Uncle Jim, which was indeed one of the primary causes of her indisposition.

That night Megson wrote to Mrs. McCallum to come out and stay a week, telling her Joyce was unwell with a bad cold.

The queer woman lost no time. She had developed strong love for the girl who had reclaimed her soul. She stayed a week, at the end of that time Joyce was quite recovered. The morning she was leaving, she took Joyce in her arms, and kissed her tenderly.

"My dear," she said, "Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is that, Mrs. McCallum?" Joyce asked.

"If ever you want a friend, will you come to me. There is nothing in the world I would not do for you," she said.

Joyce wept silently on her breast for a few minutes. She assured her she would never forget such a kind offer. "If ever I require a friend, Mrs. McCallum, I shall put my trust in you."

Joyce had seen very little of Armitage during these days. He was busy with his shearing. When Geoffry had cleaned up the shed, forwarded the last of his clip, he rode over to Megson's. His mission was an important one. He had the offer of a large mob of sheep, and wanted Megson to buy in conjunction with him. Together they went into the matter and decided to close on the deal. They arranged to appoint a man to look after both properties during their absence. It would mean a three or four months' trip. That night Geoffry bid Joyce goodbye. He was only a young, soft-hearted chap, perhaps some excuse could be offered for moist eyes as he bid her farewell "After I return," he said, "I intend to have a trip into New South Wales, and will do myself the honour of calling upon you and your good father," he told her.

Joyce, looking sad enough with her own load of sorrow, assured him of a hearty welcome.

Next morning Megson drove his niece to the Mail Change and waited until the crack of the whip started the fresh horses.

Connolly was restless. He kept looking around nervously. "Once I get this coach away," he muttered, " I can breathe freely."

He was afraid Beverly might appear on the scene any moment, which would mean all his foul lying would be exposed.

Joyce sat in the coach with a heart as heavy as lead.

The whip cracked, the horses bounded forward. One despairing look the sorrowful girl cast behind, hoping at the last moment to see the form of her lover appear. She was doomed to disappointment. She was the only occupant of the coach. Her feelings overcame her, and she relapsed into a fit of deep grief. The five horses rattled along the even road of the open downs, but never in this world was carried a sadder heart than the one that beat within the breast of Joyce Hilston.

XXVI.

BEVERLY LEAVES FOR THE NEVER NEVER.

It was only the next day that Beverly rode up to the Mail Change. Connolly was on the verandah. Beverly spoke to him.

"Connolly, I wish to speak to you."

"Certainly," Mr. Beverly," he answered.

"Did you give my letter to Miss Hilston as I instructed you?"

"Yes, Mr. Beverly. You know I hold my license here on sufferance, and that a man of your standing could take it away any time you wished. Isn't it to my own interests to do all I can for you big station folk?"

"Did she never send any answer?"

"No, Mr. Beverly, she never did. She opened the letter on horseback, and I watched her read it. Then she tore it up and threw it away."

Beverly turned very white and got off his horse. "Have you any decent brandy?" he asked.

"I have some Martelles," Connolly answered.

"That will do," replied Beverly. "Does she come for the mail now?" he asked.

"Oh, no," Connolly replied, "she has returned to New South Wales."

"Returned to New South Wales?" exclaimed Beverly. "When did she go away?"

"Well, I couldn't tell the exact coach, but I saw her with my own eyes get into the coach and drive away," he volunteered.

Beverly was thunderstruck. Gone away without a word, without a sign. God help him! What had he worshipped? A thing of clay?

He mounted his horse and rode slowly away, his mind filled with the bitterest disappointment, his love wounded in the very deepest possible sense, his feelings full of acute resentment at her heartless behaviour. He could bear the suspense no longer. That very day he had cast every feeling aside, pride, self-respect, and dignity, and as his ankle was recovered, had determined to ride over and have an explanation of some character with her. If he was deceived in her, if she was not the priceless jewel he had considered her, if she did not want him, he would take his gruel like a man. He doubted not that, if he could but see her, all would be well.

"Gone," he muttered again," not even a line to say 'Good-bye.' I thought my experience had taught me something of the opposite sex, but I must yet have a lot to learn."

He arrived at the homestead, and went to his room. He took the three unposted letters, and burnt them, saying, "Thank God, they were spared."

He sat down in deep reflection for fully an hour. Beverly went out and enquired for Deigen. He was in the stockyard, and Lex sent down for him. He had taken a fancy to the man.

There was something familiar about his face.

When Deigen arrived Lex spoke to him: "Deigen," he said, "have you ever been on the company's big cattle ranch over the border?"

"Yes," Mr. Beverly, "I was there two years ago."

"What sort of a track is it across country?" he asked.

"Not bad at this time of the year," Deigen answered.

"How long will it take us to get there?" Lex asked.

"About four weeks," he was told.

"Will you take the trip with me?"

"Yes, I will, Mr. Beverly. Nothing I would like to do better."

"Right; set about it straight away. Get your plant together. We will start in the morning, and do not make any fuss about it. We will pick our stores up at the last township," he told him.

At sundown on the morrow they camped at a place forty miles on their way. It had been a long day, and darkness had look was in the direction of the horse bells to note which way look was in the direction of the horse bells to not which way they were feeding, and he was soon wrapped in deep slumber.

Beverly sat at the fireside in deep reflection. All day he had hardly uttered a word. Filled with disappointment and mentally harassed, he had tried to place a reasonable construction upon Joyce's utterly incomprehensible silence. He was deeply wounded at her flippant and unnatural behaviour regarding his letter. Realising how dearly he would have cherished her written reply, her conduct and neglect was unforgivable. He gazed through the leaves and boughs of the giant eucalyptus at the firmanents ablaze with the brilliance of starlight, and thanked God that he had not sacrificed the happiness of those three good people in Sydney for such a fickle, worthless creature. Then there came over him a feeling of great sorrow for her. "Good God," he muttered, "is it possible I could be so mistaken in a woman?"

He recalled the day he had asked for the present to keep their love a secret. The expression on her face, when she replied, was before him now. Gazing into the dying embers of the fire, he could see her face as he saw it that day. Her words, "Until death," were as if they were now being softly whispered in his ear.

He started to his feet, and though, "Could there have been a mistake?" Then he thought of the loving strain in which he had couched his letter. Had he been hasty in making his departure? May she not have written, and the reply have gone astray.

He blamed himself for not following her to the end of the world, if necessary.

The stars moved across the heavens in their nightly journey. Still Beverly sat at the fire. His last reflection had been, before finally turning in to a restless slumber, should he not return? He had now a doubt in his mind as to whether he had given such a serious matter the keen investigation that it demanded.

At sunrise all was ready to move off the camp. Beverly had not mounted. His mind was on the balance. Would he return or would he go on?

"We have a long stage for dinner camp, Mr. Beverly." Deigen reminded; and Lex mounted and followed in the wake of the horses.

Day after day they continued their journey, passing through the last iron township existing on the fringe of civilisation, thence into the silence of the trackless Australian forest.

Deigen's association with Beverly in those days taught him to reverence him. He grew to like him in a way that he had never felt for any man before. It was true what people said of Beverly: that to know him was to love him.

If Beverly had his worries, Deigen was not without his. The more he thought of Beverly, the sharper his conscience pricked him. He was troubled over the episode of the letter to Joyce Hilston. Deigen observed that there were periods when Beverly was very cast down. From him she had gone for ever, and he felt that in losing her he had lost some part of his own life. At the thought, an unbridgable gulf now separated him from Joyce, a fit of depression would seize him.

Fifty times during the course of his journey Deigen had opened his lips to confess all, and fifty times his moral courage had deserted him.

They were nearing the end of their journey and were camped on a chain of lagoons. The night was as bright as day, the moon being at the zenith of her glory. Beverly and Deigen were seated at the camp fire, smoking in silence. Deigen broke the silence.

"Mr. Beverly, do you know Sydney very well?"

"Yes," replied Beverly. "I could find my way about, I believe, blindfolded."

"I was born in Sydney," remarked Deigen.

"Were you?" asked Beverly. "What part?"

"Riley Street, Surrey Hills," Deigen answered.

"I cannot claim to know much about that locality. I was there but once or twice. Your face always reminds me of someone I have known in the past, Deigen," he continued.

Often Beverly had noted the quick manner, the features, and wondered who it was he resembled.

"I had good people," Mr. Beverly. "But I cleared out when I was a young chap."

"What was that for, Deigen?" he asked.

"Well, I was apprenticed at Mort's Dock, and learning fast enough at my trade. I got in with a rowdy crowd of young chaps. Some of them were right enough, and some bad enough for anything. One night we came across a chap who had belted two or three of our push, and a pretty cowardly beggar, too. If he got you down you would never get up again. He would see to that. Before he saw them, they were on top of him. He went down, and then they started to put the boot in. I did all I could to stop the kicking, but I was only one against six. They killed him. That night I hung around the wharves at Wooloomooloo. It was daylight, and I was standing alongside a sailing boat, which looked as though she was ready to sail. A rough sailor chap looked over the rail, and said, "That cow has given us the slip. We will have to catch the tide and go without him; blast him.' I asked, 'Do you want a hand, mister?' He said, 'Do you want work?' 'Yes.' Well come aboard; get down below until I get away from the wharf.' He had taken me for what I was, a runaway. I landed at Normanton, and ever since I have been in these parts."

While he was telling the story, Beverly was scanning him very closely, and then a light dawned on his mind.

"Your name is not Deigen?" Beverly said.

"How do you know?" Deigen asked.

"Your name is Robert Dawson," Beverly quietly said.

"Good God, Mr. Beverly; how did you know that?"

"I know your sister, Margery," Beverly replied.

In his excitement, Deigen stood up. "Do you know my people, Mr. Beverly?"

"Yes; I knew your good father and mother. I know they often wondered whether you were alive or dead. They are all well, and your sister is well married. She is the wife of my dearest friend. The young chap died in the hospital, but, in his depositions, he said you took his part and tried to save him."

"I am glad to hear that. I thought that it would be a case of hanging," said Deigen.

This was the black curly-headed boy that Margery had often told Jim about with moist eyes. The boy that the mother referred to when she asked the father would the other ever come home.

He told Deigen of Margery's happy life, of her good husband, of the comfort of his good mother and father. "It was I," he told Deigen, " who persuaded your sister to marry my friend. He was a good man of fair means, and very fond of her. I

wanted her to accept him. I knew she was a good girl, and would make him a good wife."

Beverly was now sleeping better, but that night Deigen lay awake, thinking of his own and Connolly's treachery.

A few days afterwards they reached the head station. Here Beverly made himself known, and spelled.

XXVII.

AMONG THE OUTLAWS OF THE NEVER NEVER.

A couple of days after Beverly had arrived at the cattle ranch, he expressed his intentions of joining the musterers' camp, distant some 90 miles from the head station.

"I am not sure if it will suit you," the manager said. "There's a rough mob out there; mostly outlaws and gaol-breakers.. The greatest horsemen that you ever saw. They only come in for the few months' work, mustering and branding, and after that, back to their haunts again."

Beverly always had his own way. "I'll see the mustering through," he said.

The manager looked up at him. "It will be three or four months before the work is finished," he said.

"The longer the better," said Beverly.

The manager concluded that this man was after some experience alright. They got on their horses and rode down to the stockyard.

"I have a chap on contract breaking-in," the manager explained. "A good man with horses, and a great rider."

Beverly knew the man as soon as he saw him. He was in Bathurst when this man was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment for a particularly bad case of horse stealing. A valuable mare and her foal were stolen. The mare was found in the ranges with her throat cut. The foal was never recovered. Pastoral people interested in the case believed the wrong man had been convicted, and that it was a miscarriage of justice—one of the many.

Beverly had said to a pastoral friend, "I would never allow an innocent man to go to gaol if I could prevent it."

The other man had answered, "Well, if he does not deserve it for this, there is a lot of undetected work that he does deserve it for."

"It is not a just argument," Beverly had responded.

He was a great horseman, and was sitting a particularly bad class of horse, the class of colt that wanted flogging into decent manners.

The rider looked around, and Beverly threw him his slogger.

Although the animal was bucking savagely, the rider caught it as it flew through the air, and very soon he was master.

Beverly himself a good horseman, had a wonderful leaning towards others accomplished in the same direction.

On the morrow he and Deigen were leaving for the camp among the wild men. After supper he and the manager were talking matters over, when the manager was mysteriously called away. When he returned he looked concerned, and said, "The inspector is here with his troopers. What do you think? This chap at the stockyard is a Maitland gaol-breaker, doing ten years' stretch when he escaped."

"Have they come to re-take him?" asked Beverly.

"Yes," the manager replied. "They will surround his camp at daylight."

Beverly said no more. He retired shortly afterwards.

Black, the rider, had been uneasy since Beverly's visit to the yards. He did not like the look of him. When at eleven o'clock he was awakened and found Beverly standing at his side, he immediately called upon him to put his hands up. Beverly put his hands up and smiled. That smile was sufficient for Black. He cast his revolver on the ground, and looked up enquiringly.

"What is your account on the station?" Beverly asked.

"I have a credit of about twenty pounds. Why do you ask?" said Black wonderingly.

"Well, here it is," said Beverly, handing him notes to that amount. "You will have a visit from the Inspector and his troopers about daylight. Make down to the coast and get a boat. Make over to the Argentine. A man who can ride like you will get along all right over there."

Just before daylight the troopers surrounded the sleeping form of Black. They rushed at a given signal, calling upon him to surrender. No answer. Again the demand was made. Still no response. The Inspector suspected a ruse, and placed a shot alongside of Black's head.

One trooper, with pointed revolver, rushed in and pulled the blanket aside, only to expose a log, cunningly covered with a blanket to look like a man sleeping, entirely covered.

Black next day passed the mustering camp. He had tea with them, and pushed on in the night. MacKenzie, one of the outlaws, a big, black-whiskered man, known as Black Mac, was talking quietly to some of his mates. Thoughtfully stroking his beard, he said, "He must be a rattling decent cove. I never could stand any of his sort, they are not one of us, but this bloke must be a good fellow. You wouldn't get one in ten thousand of their kind to give any poor wretch the office to get."

Black had told the camp of Beverly's warning.

In a few days Beverly and Deigen arrived at the camp. It was the slack of the afternoon. It was tail end work, and the camp had finished early. All these wild men of the outback took stock of this good-looking man, well set up as he was,

who took his own saddle off his horse, rubbed him down, and hobbled him out with the rest.

These wild men of Never Never watched Beverly with keen eyes.

The head stockman came along and shook hands with him. He had received word that one of the big heads was coming out to join the camp.

After supper was over the men sat around the bush fire, and the conversation ran on horses and stock. Every man slept in the open, wrapped in his blanket. One after the other they dropped away. Beverly was the last at the fire. He still reflected upon the strange conduct of Joyce. A day or night never passed without Lex's thoughts reverting to her. He quite realised it would be a long time before he forgot her, if he ever did so. He worried a good deal over his future life with Ann. Love he could not give. Never in his life would it be possible for him to love again. However, the excitement of the life he was going to lead would, he hoped, take his mind off the tragedy of his life.

He was not long among the outlawed men when they, like Deigen, fell under the charm of his genial manner. They were not long in discovering that he was a great horseman, the boldest of them all. Away in this unknown country gathering together the wild mobs of cattle, leading a life full of risk and danger, Beverly tried his hardest to forget Joyce Hilston.

Often camped with these outlawed men, miles away from the main camp, every day full of hard work, danger, and excitement, night time found him as usual, the very last to leave the camp fire.

Amongst themselves these outlawed men spoke of him. They talked of his great riding, of his genial manner, of his generous disposition. After the bush supper of corn beef and damper, they would sit around the camp fire and talk over the day's events. Beverly was much attached to his pipe. He took great care to provide himself with a substantial supply of his favourite tobacco. To those camped out with him, he was as one of them. He would pass his expensive weed around. Under the soothing influence of the good tobacco, and Beverly's genial manner, the thoughts of the rough outlawed men drifted into channels that were new to them. They thought of the world to which he belonged, a world unknown to them, one they had regarded as holding enemies only. Given food for reflection these men were not wanting in logical deduction. They spoke of his presence amongst them. With these men life in the Never Never was compulsory, but Beverly's long stay to them was hard to understand. They all agreed, in their rough bush language, "That he was a great cove, the sort of chap. Black Mac once said, that a man would follow to hell." The conversation would slacken, one by one they would silently

drop off, roll up in a blanket, and in an instant become sound asleep.

No matter how hard the day, Beverly was always the last to turn in. Always the last to leave the dying embers of the fire; a silent figure, his reflections always drifting in the one channel, the reason of Joyce Hilston silence.

"Would he ever forget her?" he asked himself a hundred times. "God only knows," he would mutter to himself. "It would seem not."

XXVIII.

DEIGEN'S DEATH—HIS CONFESSION.

Weeks had passed into months, and the work of mustering and branding the huge herd was almost finished.

Beverly had been close on six months with the musterers. Mails came very rarely to this isolated part of the world. His father and mother and Ann were all anxious for his return. Richard Beverly was quite at a loss to understand his son's reason for visiting such an outlandish part as that in which the Great Cattle Ranch was situated. He did not wish his son to isolate himself from the world quite as completely as he had done. He was aware of the danger that existed in such parts. The blacks were bad, the very worst type of men existed in those wild parts. In the event of accident, a thing that often happened on a mustering camp, the injured person would die before medical aid could be brought to him.

The camp was now within a week of breaking up. The last mob of stragglers was on the drafting ground. They were a bad, sulky lot, and troublesome to hold. Horses and whips were going incessantly. A big red steer, tail erect, eyes on fire, tongue hanging out, made a bold bid for liberty. Like a flash, Deigen was after him. He was a great beast that would get away from Deigen. Man, horse, and beast raced together. Deigen had just got the swing on the steer, when man and horse were on the ground, rolling in a cloud of dust. The horse had put his shoulder out. He half struggled to his feet, and once more fell on the prostrate form of his rider. Beverly and Black Mac were first to reach the scene of the accident. One glance at the form stretched upon the ground, and Black Mac said, "He's settled, Mr. Beverly."

"I hope to God not. Let us get him under the tarpaulin."

They made a stretcher, and between them carefully and gently carried him under the canvas.

Beverly could see that Deigen was mortally injured. His ribs were smashed, besides dreadful internal injuries. The horse had rolled on him, and in attempting to rise and regain its feet, had fallen back upon him. Beverly stood looking down upon him, with a sad expression upon his face. As Black Mac had said, he was settled. His time in the world was short.

He was quite unconscious. They all hung round the camp fire. Beverly had remained by the side of the dying man

Black Mac approached Lex, saying, "Better come and have a drink of tea. He cannot last long."

Beverly was very upset. He had taken a fancy to Deigen from the start, and had made up his mind to do something for him and restore him to Margery, and here he was lying with the very life crushed out of him. He must die, nothing could save him.

"Thanks, Mac," he replied. "Stand by him. He may regain his senses."

Beverly was standing by the fire drinking his tea when Black Mac approached him and said, "He is asking for you."

Beverly repaired to where Deigen was lying. The end was not far away, but his voice for one so near death was clear.

"My sight is dim," he said. "Are you there, Mr. Beverly?"

"Yes, Deigen, my poor fellow, I am standing by your side."

"Sit down, Mr. Beverly, I want to tell you something. It has been on my mind like a black cloud for months and months. I know I am going out, but I must tell you before I die. You will forgive me, Mr. Beverly," he said, with a voice growing weaker.

"Yes, certainly, Deigen," said Beverly. He thought Diegen's mind was running on the trouble he got into in Sydney. "Don't worry, Deigen. Everything is all right."

"Mr. Beverly," Deigen replied, "you remember that letter you gave me to give to Connolly for Miss Hilston?"

"That is all right, Diegen, don't worry over that matter, that's a good chap. Rest like a good fellow," said Beverly. He sat down beside him and took his hand.

"No, it is not alright, because it was never given to her."

Beverly thought for a moment that the dying man's mind was wandering.

"Listen to me, Mr. Beverly. The day I took that letter to Connolly's I had a few drinks. I was riding a young filly that was just broken in. Whilst I was in the bar a fight started right under her nose, and she broke away and went bush. Connolly gave me a horse, and promised to send his blackboy after the filly. They found her two days afterwards, but without the saddle. The letter is still in the saddle pouch in the gidyea scrub."

Whilst Deigen was making his confession, Beverly's face was a study. At first he paid little attention to the dying man's words, but, like lightning, the thought rushed through his mind, if this was true, it was the explanation of Joyce's silence.

When he fully grasped the dreadful nature of their treachery, he became like a man demented. His voice was raised to its highest pitch. He called down upon the heads of Diegen and Connolly fearful imprecations. He threatened to drag the lying tongue out of Deigen's head. Had it not been for Black Mac and the others rushing in, he would have picked

Diegen up and crashed him to the ground. He was recalled to his sense by Black Mac saying, in stern tones, "Behave like a man, Mr. Beverly, this chap's dying."

With eyes ablaze with passion, and with features convulsed with anger, he stood over the prostrate form of the dying man, his hands clenched and uplifted, as though to strike out of the form what little life remained in it. He rushed from under the canvas, his frame convulsed with anger. He sat down against the trunk of a big tree, and tried to think and regain his composure. He felt that if he had stopped in the tent he must have laid violent hands on the dying man. His thoughts turned back to the upturned face, the look of undying fidelity in the eyes, the murmured words, "If you wish it, Lex, until death." With the revelation of Connolly's dreadful treachery, he fully realised the reason of her silence. Unto the death she would be loyal.

Black Mac and the others gathered in a knot to discuss things.

"I don't get it," said Mac. "As far as I can see, Diegen and some shanty keeper have put the dirt into Beverly about a woman."

"It's been pretty rotten business. It would take a lot to send him off the handle like that," remarked another.

Deigen had lapsed into unconsciousness again. Beverly was a prey to the most painful reflections. The thought uppermost in his mind was "what had become of her. Where had she gone. Oh, God, oh, God," he thought, "had I only followed her."

He rested his head on his knees and groaned aloud. "Were her thoughts of me as black as mine have been of her? Would she think I had callously left her?"

One of the stockmen approached him and touched him on the shoulder. "Deigen," he said, "has come to light, and wants to speak to you."

Beverly collected himself, rose, and went into the tent.

"Deigen," he said (the others stood by and looked on), "I am sorry I behaved in such an unmanly way towards you, in your present dreadful state. I am sorry," he said quietly. "I want to ask you a question," he continued. "When Connolly told me that he delivered that letter and saw that lady tear it up and cast it away (you are on your death-bed, Deigen), did he lie?"

"Yes, Mr. Beverly. Miss Hilston never saw the letter. He gave Miss Hilston to understand that you had left Merthon."

"What was his object."

"Had Mr. Wilson found out about your letter and the horse getting away, he would have blocked Connolly's license at the next court. Connoly was trying to sell out, and he wanted to save the license."

Beverly had heard all that was necessary. Deigen had hardly finished speaking when he was seized with a dreadful spasm of pain. Beverly took his hand.

"Deigen, all is forgiven. Have you any message?"

"Tell them," he murmured, "I died thinking of them."

The words were hardly uttered when the body stiffened and the eyes closed. The jaw dropped, and Deigen had passed beyond the Great Divide.

Beverly reverently crossed the hands, straightened the crushed limbs, and covered the body with a rug. He was much affected at the sudden ending of this man. He had grown to like him.

He spoke to the head stockman. "Blake," he said, "I must leave to-night. See that this poor chap is buried decently."

"You surely don't intend to leave to-night, Mr. Beverly?"

"Without a minute's delay. Please send the blackboy for my horses." And forthwith he started to gather his things together. The words were overheard by Black Mac and the others. He and a mate called Ned held a whispered parley together, and after some doubtful conservation, Black Mac approached Mr. Beverly.

"Mr. Beverly," he said, "is it right that you must leave straight away?"

"Yes, Mac; it is of tragical importance that I should not lose a single moment. Cannot you see what a dreadful, treacherous trick has been played on a woman who is very dear to me?"

"Well, Mr. Beverly,' Black Mac continued, "you have done a pal of ours a good turn."

Beverly went on gathering his things together.

"I mean," Mac explained, "Black, the Breaker."

He paid little attention to Mac's conversation, but continued on, and never answered.

"One good turn deserves another," continued Mac, "and we can help you now. Nobody knows the country from here to the border better than Ned and I. If time is important, we can take you across country, as the crow flies, and save you days of travel."

Beverly jumped to his feet. "Will you, indeed?" he said, in a surprised voice, now grasping the vein of Mac's words. He knew that these men disliked going into civilisation; he realised the risks they run; and he fully valued such a magnanimous offer.

He clasped Mac fervently by the hand, and said, "Mac, I will never forget you."

The outlawed man turned away his head. For Beverly he would have risked more than gaol. In a few minutes the camp was busy. Horses were brought up quickly, saddled and packed. Sufficient stores were put up, and in a very short time every-

thing was ready to start. Beverly, hat in hand, walked to the dead Deigen, and took a last respectful look at the face.

It was ten o'clock at night, and with Black Mac in the lead, the party plunged into the blackness of the night, and the silence of the great Australian forest.

At three in the morning they came to a chain of lagoons, and camped till daylight. Day after day they pushed on, often travelling at night to reach good camps, turning out in the middle of the day when good grass and water were available. Travelling as straight as the crow flies, encountering in the blackness of night the steep banks of dry creeks and rivers, Black Mac, with the unerring instinct of an animal, would pick a track down these steep, ravine-like banks, the horse he bestrode, almost gliding down on its haunches to the river bed. Through the scrub and timber, Beverly would follow, the pack horses, with their bells and hobble chains jingling, following with Red Ned, behind them. The sleepless nights, the acute mental anguish that he was suffering, left their mark upon Beverly. It was well the restraining hand and sound judgment of Black Mac were ever present, otherwise Beverly, constantly restless to push on, would have knocked himself up, and the animals also. Day and night the thought was ever in his mind, "Would he find her alive? Would all be well? If it was not, thinking herself deserted, callously abandoned. Good Heavens, what desperate extremes might she seek to obtain relief from such suffering, such humiliation."

As the sun was setting on the eighteenth day after leaving the cattle camp, they came to a river. They pulled up and camped. Black Mac threw a critical eye over the horses and reckoned that they had stood the journey well. There was not a better judge in Australia of what a horse could do unshod and off the grass.

"Well, Mr. Beverly," he said, "we part here. That pad that runs down the other side of the river takes you to the township. Once there the game's your own."

That night Black Mac and his mate slept a couple of hundred yards from the track, each with a horse ready saddled and tied handy. They valued their liberty, these men of the Never Never, and took no risks.

The next morning they and Beverly parted, Beverly promising to remit them a draft to Wyndham on his return to Sydney.

The sun was setting when he reached the iron township. For the night he camped at the only hotel of which the place boasted. From here he wired to Wilson to forward his things to the railway head. Eighty miles from the township, on the road, his father had a holding. He made the place by arranging a change of horse half-way. Two days' travelling brought him to the coach route, and he arrived to find the coach leaving in the morning for the Railway Head, where he had landed on

his visit to Merthon. Travelling in the coach over the rolling downs was uneventful enough, and at six o'clock Beverly found himself alighting in front of the hotel, to which he had wired Mr. Wilson to forward his things.

We will leave Beverly to go to his room to get into the garb that civilisation demands, his mind filled with conflicting thoughts, his feelings full of excitement, wondering what news the next few hours would bring him regarding Joyce.

Once seated together on a huge boulder right at the pinnacle of the mountain, Joyce had told him the sad story of Mrs. McCallum's life, of her dreadful misfortune, and of her soul reclaimed at the graveside of the dead bairns.

Between these two women he knew a bond of affection existed. He realised that if Joyce was in any distress, if she was in any trouble, she would go to Mrs. McCallum's.

As soon as he could change and find out her place of abode, he was going straight to consult her.

XXIX.

JOYCE ARRIVES AT MRS. McCALLUM'S.

We parted from Joyce Hilston as she was driving away, sad at heart, in the coach to the township. She had two and a-half days' travelling before arriving at the Railway Head. The night before she arrived, she telegraphed Mrs. McCallum, telling her she would stop a few days with her.

The Nurse got the wire the next morning when she called at the post office for her mail. When she read the wire she muttered, "God help the poor girl. It is a strange mystery. With my life I will shield her. Never a woman in need in this world will have a staunch er friend than I will be."

Towards the end of the evening the coach arrived In company with Mrs. McCallum, Joyce repaired to the latter's dwelling across the river. Joyce was low spirited and worn out with the long coach journey. An anxious look was upon the face of the Nurse, a grave concerned look. She made Joyce rest on an easy chair, and prepared a cup of tea. Joyce would have nothing more. Mrs. McCallum had a comfortable room ready, to which Joyce retired early. She kissed the Nurse an affectionate good-night, and retired to the privacy of the room allotted her.

Mrs. McCallum sat for long hours on the low verandah, wrapped in deep and painful thoughts. She was seriously worried over Joyce. That a great change had taken place in her was unmistakable. She was not the bright, joyous-spirited girl she had met when first visiting her uncle's place. Next day Joyce asked Mrs McCallum "If I wish to remain a few weeks with you would my presence be acceptable to you."

"A few weeks," repeated the Nurse. "A few years if you like, my dear," and she folded the girl in her arms.

She knew that Joyce was full of emotion, and that the silent tears were creeping down her cheeks. Well did this experienced woman know this.

Joyce drew away silently, and once more retired to the seclusion of her room. She could not trust herself to thank Mrs. McCallum for her goodness, fearing that she would give way to an outburst of emotion. The Nurse watched her pass through the door of the room and close it.

"Not yet," she murmured to herself. "But she will tell me. I must let her take her own time."

Joyce had now been with Mrs. McCallum six weeks. The Nurse knew that Joyce spent half the night at the window facing the river, and that the best part of the day she was keeping a vigil There was a patient, expectant look upon her face, as though every hour she expected to see someone crossing the river.

One day Mrs. McCallum had returned from shopping across the river earlier than usual. Her ear caught the sound of loud sobbing. She stood silent and listened. This was the opportunity for which she had been waiting. Without ceremony she pushed the door open. She stood at the threshold looking down upon the girlish form stretched upon the bed, her whole being rising and falling with the depths of her distress. So absorbed in her grief was Joyce, that the Nurse's footfall was unheard by her. The Nurse walked quietly to the side of the bed and placed her hand gently upon the sobbing girl. She looked up with fear and surprise written upon her countenance.

"My dear child, my dear child," said Mrs. McCallum, "what is the trouble? Joyce," she continued, "I love you better than my own life. Trust me, dearest; give me your confidence. Woman never had a better friend in the world than I will be to you." With these kindly words, Joyce's sobbing became greater.

Eventually Mrs. McCallum soothed her distress, and made her take a cup of tea

"Oh, Mrs. McCallum, if it was not for the thoughts of my dear old dad, I could bear my cross more bravely."

No need to tell the Nurse what the cross was, but the mystery that the cute-minded woman could not solve was, who was responsible for it.

From that day the subject was not further discussed. The days dragged on slowly, and still Joyce waited, never the slightest space of a second wavering in her loyalty to Beverly, either in thought or deed. Day and night she sustained herself with the thought that her lover, sooner or later, would be by her side. It may not be to-day or to-morrow, but as sure as the sun rose and did his daily duty, so sure did Joyce believe that Beverly would come to her. Of his love for her she felt as certain as she was of her love for him. At times the thought crossed her mind, "Could he have written and the letter strayed?" "No," she would conclude, "that was impossible. Such a letter must come to Mr. Connolly's, and he would send it over to her.

Like Beverly, no suspicion of treachery ever occurred to her mind Excepting the feeling of prejudice she had entertained against her step-mother, never in her life had she experienced an evil thought of any one. That he was staying from her side of his own free will, she would not believe for the briefest space. All day and well into the silent night, the thought was ever in her mind, "that he would be true; he would be loyal, and come to her. Who can tell," she would reflect, "apparently

something of very grave importance has happened, to take him from my side without explanation. He will return; he will come back to me."

The days dragged themselves into weeks, the weeks into months, and Joyce's hopeful spirits regarding Beverly was as buoyant as the first day she arrived at Mrs. McCallum's.

Time was wearing on. Three months had elapsed since her arrival at the lonely house on the River Bank.

Mrs. McCallum had waited patiently for Joyce to speak openly of her trouble, but up to the present time Joyce had made no full confession to her friend.

The Nurse and Joyce were quietly conversing. The Nurse was casting anxious glances at the young girl. She was not looking well, and the subject turned upon her indisposition. They were sitting close together. Some impulse moved the elder woman to put her arm around the younger woman and draw her head down upon her breast. Upon the Nurse's breast she sobbed out the confession of her fall. Clasped in the loving arms of the Nurse, she told how she had prayed nightly to her God to be forgiven.

"My cross is a very heavy one. I am to blame, and I am struggling to bear it, looking upon it as a just punishment for my sin. At times I find it almost too much for me. At such a time I kneel down and pray to God, asking Him for forgiveness, and asking him for strength to do what is right. Sometimes I am seized with the dreadful fear that my mind might give way. I think, with horror, if my mind became unbalanced, I might seek self destruction for myself and my unborn child." She shuddered and drew closer into the protecting bosom of her friend. Joyce could not deceive this skilful and experienced woman for a moment. The nurse had realised what was wrong with Joyce when she visited her at her uncle's. She knew what was wrong when she made Joyce promise if she ever wanted a friend she would come to her. Not one word of reproof the Nurse uttered since Joyce's confession, and when she had finished, she said, "My poor girl." and she put the girl's head down protectingly on her breast.

"If you were my own daughter I could not love you greater. You must stop with me. I will indeed take a mother's place by your side, in this, your time of great tribulation."

She pressed the weeping girl to her bosom.

"Joyce," she continued, "I wish you would tell me something."

"Yes," answered Joyce. "What is it?"

"Was Geoffrey Armitage the author of your position to-day?"

Joyce sprang away, her cheeks aflame with indignation. "How can you insinuate such a monstrous thing?"

The Nurse spoke soothingly to her. "I did not wish to offend you, child. I did but ask a reasonable question. Will you give me your confidence and tell me the author?"

"Nurse," she said, drawing herself up, "I gave my sacred promise to him I love, that our love would remain a secret."

"Whoever he was," the nurse hotly answered, her eyes aflame with anger, "he was a miserable, cowardly hound to exact such a promise from a girl like you. He knew your principles. He knew you would hold your word sacred, and exacted it for the protection of his own cowardly carcass.

The changing expressions on Joyce's face as the insults were hurled at Beverly, was indeed a study. Without a word she passed in to her room, and commenced packing her things. The look of reproach she cast upon the Nurse told the latter how deeply the words had stung her. The Nurse saw she had made a dreadful mistake. If Joyce was to be saved, different means must be adopted. Mrs. McCallum followed her into the room, where she was busy packing hurriedly, the idea fixed in her mind to get from under such a roof with all possible expedition. The Nurse pleaded with her to let pass unnoticed her heated words. She explained that she could not help herself. Her love for her, she told Joyce, was responsible for the outburst of feeling.

Joyce was adamant. Not a word would she listen to. This dreadful abuse of Beverly, this awful epitath the Nurse had applied to him, to whom she had given her very soul, sounded in her ears like blasphemy.

Mrs. McCallum bore Joyce a great love, and when she realised her own words were driving Joyce out into the world friendless, she fell weeping upon the indignant girl's neck. Then and only then did Jocye relent. She agreed to remain under the friendly roof, on one condition, and that was that never again was the subject of her lover to be mentioned.

Only once again did the Nurse offend her. Mrs. McCallum had quite decided, in her own mind, that the girl's lover was a craven, and had deserted her.

It was in the quiet of the waning evening. The Nurse was sitting quietly thinking, with a very serious look upon her face. She rose and walked to the side of Joyce, spoke to her. She addressed her in low tones, throwing out a dark hint to the girl.

A startled look spread itself over the face of the younger woman. She rose hastily and sprang away from the side of the Nurse. Had she suddenly discovered a adder or poisonous reptile at her side, her action could carry no greater significance. Her face wore a look of fear. She stood looking at the Nurse, holding her hands up, as if to ward off some unseen danger.

"Nurse, Nurse," she cried, "How could you be so wicked; how could you be so dreadful, to hint at such a thing to me. My sin presses heavily upon my conscience; would you have me add the burden of cowardly crime to it? The destruction of my unborn life. Shame on you for such a wicked thought. God help the unfortunate creature, dead to all the beauty of maternal

instinct, who would stain her soul with such a cowardly sin. Every hour of my life, kindling stronger, is my love for this being within me. I pray to Him for forgiveness for my sin, and ask that I may be spared to bring into this world His most precious gift—Life.

She fell into a fit of emotion, and threw herself upon the couch that stood in the room.

The Nurse sat down beside her. She lifted the sobbing girl's head, and, with loving care, placed it gently upon her lap.

"Joyce, dear Joyce," she exclaimed, "I'm sorry, more so than I can explain. My love for you is so deep that my very heart bleeds to see you in this dreadful position. The Nurse placed a kindly hand upon her shoulder, looked down into the sad-looking face beneath her gaze, saying:

"God help you, child; you little realise how bitter and scathing is the world's condemnation for such a sin as yours. On the shoulders of the unfortunate mother," she continued, "falls the whole burden of shame."

She was about to add, "No matter how guilty the miscreant who has robbed her of her most priceless possession, her virginity." She checked her utterance, recognising she would be on forbidden ground.

Joyce looked up and gazed into the kindly face above her. "Nurse," she said, in serious tones, with an expression of face full of purity, "Some instinct tells me my prayers have been answered. That He has forgiven me. There are times, Nurse, when I think I can see Him looking down upon me. His face full of sadness, His arms outstretched, as if waiting to receive a sinner, surrounded with the Glory of Divine Forgiveness. What is the bitterness and condemnation of this World of Clay," she continued "compared to the Godly Blessing of His Forgiveness? Have they who would condemn the power to open the gates of Heaven for the sinner? Do you wonder, Nurse, at my horror of your thought, when I realise what I would appear in His eyes. Was I guilty of that cowardly crime, 'the destruction of unborn life?'"

"Dearest Joyce," Mrs. McCallum exclaimed, "Forgive me, forgive me. I was wrong, very wrong." There were tears in the elder woman's eyes.

The girl's sublime belief in her Maker, the voice so soft and low, the reverent expression of the face when she spoke of her forgiveness, had deeply moved the Nurse.

Joyce lifted her hand and placed it in her friend's. She had forgiven.

Looking up at Nurse, she said: "I wonder at times, Nurse, whether He above surrounds us with the circumstances of temptation to test our strength and belief in Him. I reflect upon my own fall. That I should have stepped aside from the righteous track seems so incomprehensible to me. I have heard cultivated

members of our sex discussing the question of the morality of woman. I remember a lady once saying, the moral code of the poorer class of women was of a low standard. If she was correct in her opinion, I would account for it by the fact that they are constantly surrounded by the circumstances of temptation. It would seem to me, Nurse, if I fell, with my belief in my Maker with my education, possessing an unmistakable knowledge of what was right and what was wrong, in almost the period of matured womanhood, that there are times when the circumstances of temptation are too strong for humanity to resist. If such is the case, God help the unfortunate creature, lowly reared, poorly educated in her Christian beliefs, who faces temptation, not once, but every day of her life. Sin would be certain to claim her for a victim. Her escape from it would be hopeless."

"There may be much in your reasoning, much in what you say regarding the circumstances of temptation, but I maintain at the door of mankind lies the guilt of woman's fall. We are described as the weaker sex, mankind the stronger. Justice demands that the strong shall protect the weak, but has not their attitude towards woman earned the strongest condemnation? For the satisfaction of the animal passion will they not encompass the fall of any woman? It is good to think," she continued, "the world is full of good, pure women, and," she added, the expression of her face changing with the tones of her voice, "full of the opposite sex, devoid of moral code."

"How many men," she continued bitterly, "stand at the marriage altar pure moral beings in the true full acceptation of the phrase, still expecting the bride, who stands beside them, to be surrounded by the atmosphere of virginal purity. Bah," she said, in tones of disgust, "I lose patience discussing the matter. I have heard people say that man has the long end of the stick in this World. I have always credited him with holding the whole of it."

" I cannot agree with you regarding what you say of mankind. Your condemnation is too sweeping, too severely drastic. I think the World holds many good men, as it holds many good women." Looking at the Nurse, she said, in a kindly voice, "You have had your share of sorrow and trouble. I sometimes think the iron is not quite eliminated from your being."

Mrs. McCallum rose and gazed at the patient-sad expression on the girl's face, saying, "Is it any wonder, Joyce, if some of the iron has returned to my soul." The Nurse allowed her gaze to rest upon the face of Joyce, full of unmistakable meaning.

The younger woman looked down and remained silent. It was as the Nurse had said, her spirit was again full of bitterness. It would seem as if ill-fate dogged the footsteps of every being on whom she fixed her affections.

The Nurse left the room. Joyce remained in silent reflection. She thought of the Nurse's condemnation of man-

kind, and resolutely concluded, whatever they were, Beverly was not of the type described by Mrs. McCallum.

She retired to her seat at the window-still, wearing the expectant look upon her features.

XXX.

MRS. McCALLUM AS DETECTIVE.

The Nurse, an astute woman, set to work quietly. She was determined, if it was possible, to find the name of Joyce's destroyer. The cowardly blackguard, as she stigmatised him. She was at a dead end. Not the remotest information could she gather that gave her the slightest clue. She had to be both prudent and discreet in her work. She knew if Joyce obtained the slightest hint of her intentions, nothing would hold her in the house. Old Tom, Megson's cook, came to town for a spree. Mrs. McCallum dogged him like a detective. She placed herself in the way of meeting him. For the first few days the old chap was too far gone with drink to get any satisfaction from him. One day, however, she struck him fairly sober. Joyce had been a great favourite with the old man.

Tom enquired after Miss Hilston. "Has she gone back to New South Wales," he asked.

"I hope so," evasively replied Mrs. McCallum.

"She was a grand girl," said Tom. "The best on a horse I've ever seen."

"She was a splendid girl," answered the Nurse.

"The best in the world," agreed Tom.

"I thought she would have got married up there, Tom. Such a fine-looking girl," said the Nurse.

"Yes," he answered. "The new chum was gone a million on her."

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Know," said Tom. "Why, he used to follow her about like a lap dog. He was dead gone on her alright."

"I expect others used to come and see her," said Mrs. McCallum.

"No," he said. "Never another living soul near the place."

Tom was getting dry; he could hang on no longer. "So long, missus," he said, "I've got a friend waiting."

She waylaid him on several occasions. The old chap got full of her. He saw her one day watching for him. He was a bit puzzled. He could not find any reason for her behaviour. Some of the bushies, those who were helping him to knock his cheque down, commenced to chaff him. They said, "She, the queer woman, had her eye on him. If he didn't get out of town quick, he was gone for a certainty."

This day Tom got out of her way. "Damn her," he said. "She't got a rat. I don't want to speak to her."

The old chap was soon "fly blown," and made back to the bush.

Nightly Joyce sat at the open window facing the river. Sunday night was her favourite time. On this evening, service was held in the little iron church on the opposite bank of the river. The strains of the small harmonium, mingled with the voices of the singers, floated on the breeze across the river.

Long into the silent hours of the night she would sit and watch. Never doubting for an instant the fidelity or faith of Beverly. The belief firmly fixed in her soul, he would come to her side. She wrote home to her good step-mother and the father, telling them Uncle Jim and a neighbour had bought a large mob of sheep, and they had left to drove them to their runs. They were on a long trip, and she could not say when they were likely to return. At present she was staying with a friend in the Township, and would wire when she was leaving to return home.

Ralph Hilston wrote regularly. He told of matters going well on the run. They expected a record lamb-marking. He told of the good, hard-working wife, how he hoped it would not be long before his dear Joyce returned to him.

Often Joyce prayed to God she would be spared to bear her child. She realised she had sinned, and asked Him not to visit her sin on the head of her child. Her thoughts during these days dwelt much upon her unborn child, the child of him to whom, in her darkest hours, she had never swerved in her allegiance. One day she spoke to Mrs. McCallum on the matter.

"Nurse," she always addressed her by that title now, "if anything was to happen to me, what would become of my baby? My thoughts lately have been much occupied with the subject."

"You must not worry over such a subject, dear. Nothing is going to happen to you," she said in a kindly voice.

"It is as well to discuss the subject, dear Nurse. One can never tell what is going to happen."

"Everything will be alright," replied the Nurse. "We have a very clever doctor here, and with my own expert experience, it would be a strange case that we could not pull through with safety."

"Nurse, in the event of the worst happening, I would like you to have my child. To save my father's peace of mind, I must hide everything from him. If ever the knowledge of my dreadful position reached his ears, I believe, Nurse, it would kill him outright."

"Everything than can be done to keep that knowledge from him I solemnly promise to do." The Nurse made this statement in low and sincere tones, "and if you wish me to have

your babe, if it lost its mother, I will gladly, for the sake of its mother, have it and care for it."

"If you will promise to care for my child if I pass away, my mind will be greatly relieved," she said, looking up.

"If it comes, Joyce, I have to take your child," the Nurse said, "no mother in the world will be kinder to her child than I will be to yours."

"I thank you, Nurse," she said, and rose and kissed her affectionately.

Mrs. McCallum had failed absolutely to get any information regarding the author of Joyce's troubles. She had gradually cultivated a deadly animosity for him, who ever he was. The feeling became so intense with her, that it had developed into a monomania of hate.

Beverly had a bitter enemy in this woman, and woe betide him if ever he crossed her path. The cowardly action of binding Joyce down to keep secret their love, created a fierce hatred within her breast. This she reasoned, was a villianous, low-down trick to tie the girl's tongue to prevent her from revealing his name. Not one word of these thoughts dare she utter to Joyce.

Five long, weary months, dreary, unhappy months, had passed over Joyce's head. She was still under the Nurse's roof. Beverly had made no sign, still she was as unwavering in her loyalty to him as the day she made the promise. Not in thought or deed had she deviated the slightest from the word she held to be her bond.

It was a still, summer night, she sat as usual at the open window, softly humming the airs of the old hymns the people were singing in the little church across the river. The words came floating on the light breeze, from the church, "Shadows over evening steal across the sky."

"Ah, me," she sighed, "How dark the shadows that have stole across my sky." The tears stole down her cheeks.

She sat late into the night, watching the stars travelling across the sky, wondering where her lover was? Whether the same stars were twinkling down upon him as they were upon her.

To Mrs. McCallum it was the most extraordinary thing she had ever witnessed, this unselfish nobility of soul. Day after day her very heart bled for the suffering girl. Out of Joyce's hearing she called down upon the head of the unknown lover dreadful imprecations. She prayed to God to visit a dreaded retribution upon him.

XXXI.

CONNOLLY COMMUNICATES WITH JOYCE.

It was three months after Beverly had left for Central Australia that a change of landlords took place at the shanty. The new landlord took things over, and Connolly expressed his intention of taking a trip to America. The day before Connolly was leaving in the coach, the old blackboy came riding out of the gidyia scrub at the back of the shanty, carrying a saddle in front of him.

Connolly knew whose saddle it was at once. It was the saddle that was on Deigen's filly when she broke away. He scanned it, and sure enough there was the saddle pouch intact on it. He took the pouch off and directed that the saddle be sent up to the station.

Inside the house, away from inquiring eyes, he opened it, and there, inside, was the ill-fated letter addressed to Miss Hilston. He deliberated for a moment: whether it would not be better for him to destroy it. On subsequent reflection, he decided to keep it. He thought to himself, "I am going out of the district, and I will post it back from Melbourne." On this decision, he placed it in his portmanteau. He left for Melbourne the next day, and, like all bushmen, had a good time there, and the letter was forgotten.

One day in his cabin on the ocean liner, when going through his portmanteau, he once more came across it. Again he was tempted to tear it up and cast it through the porthole. Once again he restrained himself.

Connolly arrived in California, and whilst there he was seized with serious illness, lying at the point of death, the treacherous trick he had played upon Beverly occurred to his mind. In the quietness of the sickroom he realised that some serious injury might be done to some person through the non-delivery of the letter. When he felt well enough he wrote to Miss Hilston, c/o Mrs. McCallum:

"Dear Miss Hilston,—

I have just struggled through a very serious sickness. During my illness my conscience often worried me over a matter concerning yourself. It may be important to you, or it may not be. If it is of consequence to you, then I am glad I am writing this letter. If of no consequence, there is no harm done. Some time before you left, Deigen, a stockman on the big station, was instructed to deliver

a letter to me addressed to you. It was from Mr. Beverly, and I was to send it over to you by special messenger, and bring a reply back. Deigen stopped in the bar drinking, and the letter was left in the saddle pouch. A row started, and the horse broke away. The saddle was never found until the day before I left the place. The worst part of it is that I gave Mr. Beverly to understand that I had personally delivered the letter into your hands, that I had seen you read it, tear it up and cast it to the winds. I could see that he took it very badly, and I believe that next day he rode with Deigen into the Never Never of Central Australia. This is all I have to say. I have kept the letter and now enclosed it with this one.

Hoping that my action has not injured anyone.

Yours truly,

H. CONNOLLY.

P.S. I was afraid to say anything about the loss of the letter for fear that Mr. Wilson, the manager, might stop my license.

In the same envelope he enclosed the letter that Beverly had written to Joyce, and had so patiently waited for the reply. He gave it to one of the nurses to post and register to Australia; and with this Connolly passes out of the story.

XXXII.

JOYCE RECEIVES BEVERLY'S LETTER.

Six months had passed since Joyce had arrived at Mrs. McCallum's. Mrs. McCallum was going across the river to do some shopping.

"Joyce," she said, "can I bring anything back for you? Do you require anything?"

"No, thank you, Nurse," she replied.

After the Nurse had left, Joyce went to a small Japanese cabinet standing on her dressing table, one she has purchased passing through Townsville, when on her way to visit her uncle. By accident, she had discovered there was a small secret draw at the back. By removing a thin piece of wood at the back, a small receptacle was disclosed. In this she had stored up some old withered wild flowers, some that Beverly had plucked for her, as they wandered hand in hand over the mountain. Some he had placed in her hair, others he had pinned upon her breast. She cherished these tokens sacredly. They were the only momentoes of him she had, the only reminiscences of her romance. She would gaze fondly at these loving relics; his very hands had plucked them for her. She had replaced her treasures, when she saw Mrs. McCallum coming through the gate with her parcels. The Nurse entered quietly and deposited her small burdens on the table. In her hands she held a registered letter addressed to Joyce. It bore the American post-mark.

"God help her if it is from him," she muttered. "If that is where he is, she might wait."

She still fingered the letter as if loth to give it to its rightful owner.

Joyce was in her room, sewing. She approached the door. Opening it, she walked in.

"Joyce," she said, "do you know anybody in America?"

"No," the girl replied. "Why do you ask, Nurse?"

"Because I have a letter for you from there," she answered.

She turned as white as death. Could her lover be in America? No, she would not believe that.

"Let me have it," she said.

The Nurse gave her the letter, watching her closely, as she scanned the hand-writing. She left the room, closing the door as she passed out.

Joyce sat down upon the bedside, still looking intently at the post-mark and hand-writing. With trembling fingers she broke the seal. The two letters fell out. Beverlys enclosed to her by Connolly, and his own letter telling her of its suppression. She read Connolly's first. The more she read the greater her agitation became. She read on with a face white and set. Still wearing the same agitated expression, she nervously tore open the other letter, turning the envelope over to read the address again: "Miss Joyce Hilston, c/o James Megson, Esq. Urgent." "I must not become agitated," she told herself, her thoughts upon her unborn child. Twenty times during the perusal of the letter she was on the point of collapsing. When half through it, she threw her head upon the pillow, with her face pressed to the letter.

"My darling, my darling," she cried. "Why was not your faith in me as great as mine in you. I would have sacrificed my life before I would permit my faith in you to be shaken." These words were wrung from her in anguished tones: "Beverly, Beverly," she cried, "I have born much for your sake. This heavy burden of sin have I carried, but the thoughts of your great love, of your fidelity, of your faith, always made the load lighter to carry. Lex, Lex," she wailed, "could you believe I would destroy your letters? I would sooner destroy myself. Oh, God, Oh, God," she implored, "why did these dreadful men visit their treachery upon me?" Her frame was rising and falling with the depths of her grief; she sobbed as if her very heart was breaking. Regaining her composure, she proceeded with the perusal of Beverly's letter, sobs breaking from her at intervals. Concluding the reading of the epistle, she broke down again.

The Nurse could hear her heavy sobbing from outside the room. She thought "I will not intrude yet. The cry will do her good."

She still held the ill-fated letter in her hand. She read Beverly's letter to her uncle, and at its conclusion, her emotion was greater than ever. Once more she took up Beverly's letter and recommenced to read it over again. Again she came to that part of it where he wrote, "Joyce, Darling, I want you to be my wife." Now she realised why he had left. He had believed her heartless, flippant. The thoughts were more than she could bear. She fully realised the cruel wrong inflicted upon her lover and herself. Three or four times she read the words, where he told her she was to be his wife.

Too obvious to her was the injury she had suffered at the hands of the villian Connolly. Once more she threw herself full length upon the bed, her form again rising and falling with the intensity of her grief. In the middle of her great suffering, she suddenly sat up, with a scared look upon her face. The pain of her mental suffering was replaced by one of a more serious character. She folded her letters together hurriedly,

stepping swiftly to where the small cabinet stood, she placed them in the secret receptacle. It was only the work of a second.

She called to the Nurse, who entered the room, immediately throwing a keen look around in search of the newly-arrived letter. No sign could she see of it.

XXXIII.

A SERIOUS CASE.

In an instant the Nurse realised the condition of her patient. Late that night she administered an opiate, hurriedly put on her hat and cloak, left the house, and proceeded, with an anxious look upon her face, across the river to the doctor's house. He was a kindly-natured, clever man, an Englishman and a gentleman, with a great love for kangarooing.

She found him in his study. The good doctor had a wonderful regard for this clever woman. He wondered what brought her to his place now. He was sitting with a bandaged arm, the result of a fall the previous Sunday, when following his favourite pastime.

Well, Nurse, what brings you over at this hour?" he asked.

For a moment she did not answer. Her gaze was fixed upon the injured arm.

"Doctor," she said, in a serious voice, "What have you been doing to your arm."

He explained he had a fall last Sunday.

"Luckily," he added, "everything is quiet."

The Nurse still wore an anxious look on her face.

"Can you use it for an operation?" she asked, the tone of her voice full of anxiety.

"I am afraid not, Nurse, not for a week, at least, but as I remarked, we are lucky to have matters so quiet."

"If that is so, Doctor," she said, "if it is a fact, your arm is useless, then God help her."

"God help who, woman?" he said, testily.

"Doctor," she answered, "I have under my roof one of the most precarious cases I have ever been associated with. you realise what I mean, when I say that." Her tone was serious.

The Doctor was at once interested.

"Do you mean to say, Nurse, you have a maternity case under your roof?" he asked; his professional instincts aroused.

"Yes, Doctor, "one that only the greatest skill is going to save." She said this very gravely.

The Doctor looked serious. "Why did you not tell me of this before?" he asked.

"There were reasons in this case. You will have to be told all. I must get you to come over as soon as possible. Can't you come now?" she asked.

The doctor prepared immediately, and together they walked to the crossing, and over the almost dry river bed to the nurse's home. The doctor was astounded when he saw this young beautiful girl, and he, like the nurse, at once realised the gravity of the case.

Outside the room they held a consultation.

"She has once chance of life?" he said. "That is to get an urgent wire through to the doctor at the Coast Hospital."

"What is her financial position?" he asked.

"That part of it is all right," she answered.

He hurried over to the little building that served as post and telegraph office and woke up the sleeping postmaster. He sent the great doctor an urgent wire, conveying to him his own unfortunate position, and the life and death nature of the case. He went back to the house across the river. Together he and the nurse conversed in low voices in an adjoining room.

"Who is she, and how long have you had her with you?" he asked.

The nurse told the doctor all she knew. She spoke of the suffering girl as one of God's most noble creatures. She told the doctor of her loyalty, of her patience, of her unselfishness and of her goodness. "Just one step aside," she said, "and upon her shoulders a burden of shame and suffering and pain. The last time I spoke to her she said, 'Dear nurse, all the burden of this trouble rests upon my back. I would bear a ten times heavier burden rather than be disloyal to the father of my unborn child.'

"And such a woman has been left deserted?" said the doctor. "I would not have his crime on my conscience. Can you not get the slightest clue as to who the father is?"

"No, not the remotest. In her murmurings when asleep she has several times whispered the words 'Dear Lex,' but that is all."

"Lex," the doctor said. "I have never heard such a name in my life." And he spoke truthfully.

"Nor have I," responded the nurse.

"Lex," he again repeated. "No," he said decidedly, "I have never, never heard the name in my life."

The doctor stopped well into the early morn, allowing the nurse to obtain some hours of much needed rest.

Daylight broke with the sufferer's life still in danger.

During the morning word was received that the doctor was leaving by special train, but could not reach the township until 12 o'clock at night. The doctor's face was very grave when he handed the wire to the nurse.

"Unless something happens before then I am afraid it will be too late," he said sorrowfully.

The nurse was deeply affected by his words. Well her experience told her they were only too true. At 6 o'clock that night the doctor's face wore a very serious expression.

"Her constitution might save her," he said to the nurse. "If the train is only up to time. I am afraid though." he commented, in a sad voice, "we are going to lose them both."

He rode slowly back to town, sad at heart, thinking if it had not been for this wretched accident he could have saved the life of this beautiful girl. "God knows," he soliloquised, "the world could ill afford to lose such a noble creature."

XXXIV.

A CHANCE MEETING.

The doctor dined at the hotel. The bell had rung, and he had taken his usual seat at the table. Opposite to him, sitting alongside a squatter friend, a stranger sat. The doctor was attracted by his good looks. His mind, however, was on the suffering girl with whom he had been most of the day. Some one else had come into the room, and had taken a seat beside the good-looking stranger. The doctor was slowly drinking his soup, when he heard the voice of his squatter friend saying, "Harris, meet Mr. Lex Beverly, the son of the Pastoral King."

The doctor let his spoon fall with a clatter into his soup. "Doctor," his friend said, "This is Mr. Lex Beverly of Sydney. He has been visiting his father's Queensland properties."

The doctor bowed stiffly across the table.

Beverly's new friends found him very uninteresting. He merely said, "Is that so?" or "There is much in what you say."

He made his apologies and rose early. The doctor rose and followed him out.

"Mr. Beverly," he said, "can I have a few minutes' conversation with you?"

Beverly looked at him in surprise. He was anxious to get away to find Mrs. McCallum.

"Do you wish to see me doctor?" he asked.

"Yes," the doctor replied, "urgently and privately."

The doctor had no doubt that he had found Joyce's destroyer in Beverly. "Will you walk down to my study? It is only a few steps down the street?"

Beverly accompanied him, and together they entered the doctor's study.

"Mr. Beverly," the doctor said, "I am a stranger to you, but I am going to ask you a question."

Beverly regarded him in a surprised, puzzled manner, and waited for him to proceed.

"Mr. Beverly," the doctor continued, "Do you know a young lady, by name, Miss Joyce Hilston?"

The doctor noted the startled look Beverly gave when the name was mentioned.

"You are a perfect stranger to me, doctor," Beverly said. "Before I answer your question, you will understand, as a gentleman, I must know your reason for asking it."

"My reason is quickly explained. The young lady lies dying in this township, away from all friends, away from all relatives."

"Good God, man, do not tell me this!" The words were not spoken, but burst from Beverly. In his distress he made a sudden movement forward, clutching the doctor by both arms, sending a spasm of pain through the injured arm.

"I wish, Beverly, that I could tell you otherwise, but the case is absolutely hopeless. She lies in the throes of impossible childbirth, and I, with this injured arm, am as helpless as a babe," he said sadly.

"But, Heavens, man, her life must be saved. The cost, doctor, is nothing. Money is no object in this case. Everybody knows of my father's wealth."

"Mr. Beverly, if you had the wealth of the Bank of England in this room this minute, it would not save her life."

"But, surely, doctor, in your helpless condition, you have made some effort to obtain medical skill from other other quarter? Surely you have done something to preserve her life?" ?

"All that could be done, we have done. We have a special speeding from the coast, carrying one of the most skilful men in the profession."

"Thank God!" fervently said Beverly, clasping the doctor's hand.

Throughout the interview the doctor had been closely observing Beverly's manner. He was at once struck with the genuine depth of feeling the man had displayed.

He looked him straight in the face and said, "Mr. Beverly, I take you to be a man of honour. Why is this lady not your wife?"

"That doctor, is a question which, even with you, I cannot discuss. How are you aware that there is any association between Miss Hilston and myself."

"By accident. In her sleep the nurse had heard her murmur 'Dear Lex.' I heard you introduced at the hotel table, the name being a most uncommon one. I concluded you were her destroyer. The man who is responsible for that girl's sufferings to-day is no man, but a damned scoundrel." With these words, uttered in a most defiant tone, the doctor looked Beverly straight in the face.

"Doctor," Beverly rejoined, "if I was as guilty as you think me, you would be quite right. I can see you are a man to be trusted, and, as briefly as I can, I will tell you my part in this sad matter. As quickly as possible, for Beverly was anxious to reach the side of Joyce, he told the doctor of Connolly's treachery, of Deigen's confession, of the ride night and day to reach her side, only to find on his arrival, his very worst fears realised. The doctor listened to the recital of Beverly's sad story with a face that betokened the interest he manifested in the case, and when he concluded, said:

"Beverly, this is inexpressibly sad. The very saddest story I have ever listened to. Man, you have no idea how she has played the game. To the last minute she has never swerved from her pledge. To this minute her faith is as great in you as the day she made the promise to keep your love a secret. Suffering the agonies of Hell, no word against you has ever passed her lips. I have never heard of a woman playing a nobler game."

Beverly had seated himself at the table. He listened to the doctor's remarks. His distress of mind was intense. The doctor looked down upon him with looks of deep sympathy written upon his face. Beverly lifted his head from the table, where he had allowed it to rest upon his folded arms.

"Doctor," he said, in a voice that told how keenly he had felt his words, "No matter how serious her condition, I wish, if possible, to be united to her. If her case is as hopeless as you tell me, Heavens," he said, turning his head aside as if to hide his grief from the doctor, "it is hard to realise. She must carry my name to her grave, even if the ceremony has to be performed at the side of her death-bed."

"When I left her before tea, her mind was not too well-balanced. The anaesthetics and suffering had wearied her out." He reflected for a minute. "Well," he continued, "if that is your wish, Mr. Beverly, there is no time to lose." He shook his head sadly, thinking how different her position would be, had Beverly's letter only reached her. Surrounded by all the ease, luxury, and skill that wealth could provide for her. "Come along," he said to Beverly, "we will make a call on the parson, and see what he has to say."

Together they went to the small church on the river-side, and saw the kindly, middle-aged parson. The doctor briefly outlined the sad case, leaving Beverly outside. He went to where Beverly waited, and called him into the presence of the man of religion. When the parson's eyes rested upon Beverly, his instinct told him this man was suffering. The case was an extremely painful one. Beverly implored him to let him meet His Maker with as much of the stain removed from his soul as possible, and the kindly man, picking up his book, walked out of the small house where he lived, and accompanied them down the river bank to the crossing. Heavy black clouds had been gathering overhead. They had just reached the verandah of the nurse's house when the storm burst. The rain fell in torrents, gusts of strong wind blew from all quarters, twisting the sleet about in every direction. Flash after flash of lightning lit up the Heavens, with bursting peels of thunder following on the track of each successive flash. Knowing the bitter animosity the nurse bore Joyce's lover, the doctor motioned Beverly to remain outside on the verandah. He remained as requested, his mind a mass of painful conflicting emotions. He paced the short verandah restlessly. His reflections tortured his mind. He realised

he was the author of all this dreadful suffering, pain and humiliation. "Oh, Heavens," he groaned, "that this dreadful treachery should have been practised upon us." The doctor beckoned him.

Joyce had partly recovered from the effects of the opiates, her mind was still dull, her sight slightly clouded. The doctor realised if the ceremony was to be performed this opportunity must be seized. Beverly stood in the passage of the small house. The doctor approached him and spoke: "If you wish the ceremony to be performed, come in quietly and have control over yourself. The slightest excitement will at once send her off into paroxysms of pain."

Mrs. McCallum stood at the door of the room, eyeing him like a tigress, bitter hatred written upon her features.

They arranged themselves around the bed. Joyce gazed at the faces surrounding the bedside, but it was evident her faculties were far from clear. It was apparent she had no mental grip of the proceedings. She appeared not to recognise Beverly. This caused him intense distress. At times a smile played upon her face, as though she was enjoying some pleasant dream. Hastily the ceremony was performed. Mrs. McCallum took the plain gold band off her finger and silently handed it to Beverly, who placed it upon the finger of Joyce. With the assistance of the nurse her name was scrawled on the certificate. The nurse finished guiding her hand. All were hurried from the sick chamber. One quick glance Beverly cast over his shoulder at the agonising, suffering figure on the bed. He buried his face in his hands, as though to shut out the sight. The storm had ceased for a few minutes. The nurse opened the door and made a movement with her hand, indicating he was to go out. Such was her resentment she could not trust herself to speak. He passed through the door, walked as far as the gate, and waited. It was not long before the parson and doctor issued forth. Both had to hurry along. Another fierce storm was approaching. Beverly walked along with them in the direction of the crossing.

"What time," asked Beverly, "will the special arrive?"

"It is running late," the doctor answered.

"Have you had word, doctor, definite word, as to what time it is likely to be here?" he asked in anxious tones.

"About 2 a.m." the doctor replied.

Once more the sky was becoming black and overcast. An atmosphere of inky blackness prevailed. He parted from the doctor and the parson, wringing the latter gratefully by the hand, and thanking him in broken tones for the service he had rendered. He retraced his footsteps, groping his way through the darkness until he arrived opposite the house, wherein lay the newly-made wife. Approaching a large river gum, growing on a slight eminence on the river bank, he leaned up against it, with his arms folded, his eyes fixed intently on the dim light, that shone from the window of the room, wherein Joyce lay suffering. His instinct told him he was unwelcome under the

roof. He realised the nurse had placed her own construction upon the situation, hence the expression of relentless contempt she felt for him, written so plainly upon her features. The storm which had been brewing, now burst with an intensity never before experienced. Flash followed flash of vivid lightning, that lit up the watery screen pouring down from the Heavens. Great crashes of thunder cracked out, that left him dazed and stupefied. Not fifty yards from where he stood, a huge river gum was split into a thousand pieces. The "Old Man" storm of the half century was paying the vicinity a visit. The thunder shook the very earth's surface. In torrents the Heavens continued to send down its waters.

Amidst it all, like a figure of marble, stood Beverly. Still in the same attitude. His arms folded, never for a moment removing his gaze from the window that reflected the dim light. No heed paid he to the lightning, the thunder, or the torrents of rain that penetrated his clothes and ran out of his very boots. Down upon his head, in their fiercest form, the element; beat Still unmoved, he kept his vigil. The one thought passing through his mind, "When will the Doctor from the coast arrive? Will he be in time to save her life?"

Hour after hour dragged slowly by, hours that appeared years to him. Time after time he drew his watch from his pocket, but the inky blackness of the night gave him no chance to discover the hour. Some hours had passed, the storm had exhausted its violence, when he suddenly started from the position against the tree. He became excited and agitated. Something unusual was in progress in the room. Several times he saw the figure of the Nurse cross between the window and the light, which had been turned up, and was now burning brightly. Swiftly she was moving about. Some crisis had been reached. He could restrain his feelings no longer. The suspense was unendurable. Instinct told him something unexpected had occurred. He plunged through the muck and slush, the heavy rains had created, hastily crossing the rough road. He passed through the gate, and along the short foothpath. He reached the verandah, and tried the handle of the door. He found it bolted on the inside, and commenced to knock impatiently with his hand.

XXXV.

PASSING AWAY OF JOYCE HILSTON.

Inside the sick chamber the Nurse prayed at the bedside of the sufferer. She prayed to Him above to grant alleviation of the girl's sufferings. "God on high, spare her this dreadful punishment. Her afflictions for her sin have been keen and mortifying. For this one step from the beaten track, her pain and humiliation have been poignant. Spare her, I beseech Thee, O Lord, spare her."

Her love for the girl was indeed deep. She would have given her own life to save the unfortunate Joyce the bodily affliction she was enduring. She left the chamber to procure an anaesthetic, which she intended to administer. When she returned to the room, the girl was lying white and still. At first the Nurse thought she had passed away. As she bent down close to the silent form, a tiny cry reached her ear. A light overspread her features. To this experienced woman the cry meant everything. Were two lives to be preserved to the world? she asked herself, excitedly. Like lightning she went about her professional duties. Had her prayers been answered? she wondered. A new light was upon her face. Swiftly she had the new-born life sleeping, soundly tucked away in a cosy cot in the back room of the house. Returning quickly to the sick room, she entered it. One glance at the silent form on the bed, and a look of fear spread over her countenance. Joyce Beverly was passing away. The Nurse realised the end was not far off. Reaching the side of the bed, she knelt down, her face wearing a white, serious expression. The lips of the dying girl moved. Her voice was very low. The nurse bent down to catch the words.

"My child," came in weak accents.

Quickly stepping into the back room where she had carefully placed the infant, she gathered it in her arms, returning swiftly to the sick room, she put the child in the dying mother's arms. Joyce was too weak to move a finger. The Nurse wrapped the mother's arms around the sleeping babe.

Once more her lips moved in effort at speech. It was with the greatest difficulty the Nurse could catch the words or meaning. She bent her ear close to the mouth of the dying mother. Intently listening, she caught the words and meaning. They were the last she ever uttered.

"Tell my lover," she whispered almost inaudibly, "that I was loyal to my promise Until Death."

The Nurse realised Joyce was not conscious of the fact that Beverly had been with her, had passed through the marriage ceremony with her. She lifted up the hand so that the plain gold band ring the Nurse had handed Beverly to put on her finger was visible. The sight of it instantly restored her wandering faculties. Like a flash, light penetrated through the clouded intellect. It was true. It was not a dream. Her lover had been by her side. He must be near this very moment. She was his wife? Her child was born.

As the weary mind grasped the amazing facts the face lit up. A beautiful colour glowed in each cheek, a glorious light shone from the eyes, a radiant smile passed over the face.

The Nurse was quick to notice the rapid change. Joyfully she asked herself, "Is she going to recover? Is she going to be snatched from the jaws of Death? Is a miracle going to happen? Rapidly passing through the Nurse's mind were incidents where joy had saved lives. Alas, no, the Nurse's hopes were quickly dispelled.

The colour left the cheeks as quickly as it had come, leaving them white and death-like. The light waned in the eyes, the eyelids half drooped; what was visible of the eye was glazed.

The spirit of Joyce Beverly passed into the presence of her Maker with the smile still playing upon the face. Her account in this world had been settled.

"Debited with life, when she first saw the light of day,
Credited by Death when her being returned to clay."

Thus in the Ledger of Life was her account balanced.

XXXVI.

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING.

As the spirit of Joyce Beverly departed, the faintest colour suffered the delicate cheeks of the child, resting alongside of the now dead mother; the faintest semblance of a smile passed over its face, as if the spirit, winging its flight to another world, had, for the briefest period, delayed its journey to whisper in the tiny ear of this new life, a godly blessing of hope.

The experienced eye of the Nurse told her she was in the presence of Death. She hurriedly gathered th sleeping child in her arms, and, passing quickly to the rear of the house, placed it comfortably in the bed from which she had just withdrawn it.

She returned without loss of time to the room where Joyce had just passed away. She had barely reached it, when a loud and impatient knocking commenced on the outside of the door.

Well she knew who was demanding admittance. Smothering her emotion, choking down the sobs that arose from the deep feeling of grief she experienced, replacing all the outward signs of sorrow with the hard unrelenting look she habitually wore, she stepped to the door and threw it open.

"Is it you?" she demanded, and stood gazing upon him with looks that told only too plainly how unwelcome he was.

In a voice choked with agitation and anxiety, he exclaimed, "I could bear the suspense no longer. What has happened? I could see your figure rapidly passing to and fro. My instincts told me some crisis had taken place. Tell me is there a change for the better? Tell me her sufferings are lighter? Great Heavens, woman, have you no tongue? Will you never speak?" he demanded of her.

She noted his agitation; she realised he was suffering, and a look of grim satisfaction passed over her face.

"Ah," she thought, "this is good to see you suffer." She had conceived a fearful abhorrence for this man, upon whose shoulders she placed the full responsibility for Joyce's sufferings and humiliation.

She fixed a gaze full of loathing contempt upon him, and, pointing with outstretched finger to the door of the room wherein lay the remains of the ill-fated Joyce, she said, "Pass through that door, and gaze down upon the last scene of your dreadful, villianous act?"

He did not appear to comprehend her full meaning, and stood for a second or two, not realising the text of what she said.

Some instinct told him that he was to go into the room where lay the woman he loved. He made the two or three steps necessary to reach the door of the room. The door was half open, he pushed it aside, and stood trembling at the entrance. Another step and he was within view of the inanimate form on the bed.

The sight of the still form lying on the bed wrung a cry of anguish from his lips, a cry that told of his very soul being stricken with mortal agony. He stood for a second or two, with his hands pressed to the sides of his face, the expression upon which showed plainly what he endured, when he fully realised the dreadful fact that his newly-made wife had gone from him for ever.

The dead face still wore the smile that rested upon it, when the spirit had taken its flight, reflecting the last ray of consciousness, the knowledge that her lover had been with her, that he had come, that she was his wife, and that God had answered her prayer, believing, as she passed away, that He had forgiven her. She had died with the spirit of joy enthralling her being. "Though the flesh had erred the soul retained its purity."

Beverly groaned as though his very soul was rent in twain with the intensity of his sufferings.

Wet and drenched, with water running from all parts of his clothing, he threw himself down at the bedside, and clasped the hand of clay. He called upon God to give back the life he had taken. He called upon Him to visit all punishment upon himself, to do as He would with his own worthless being, if He would but restore to him his beloved. With a mind unbalanced with grief, he called upon the dead girl by name, beseeching her to return to him. Rising to his feet, his grief changing to a fit of passion, he called down fearful imprecations upon the heads of Connolly and Deigen. Aloud he called himself dolt, fool, idiot, for ever going from her side. Recalled to himself by the sight of the inanimate form on the bed, he cast himself once more at the bedside, and again relapsed into a deep fit of grief.

Clasping the hand of the dead girl between his own, resting his head upon the side of the bed, he gave full vent to the grief and remorse he suffered. His frame shook with the emotion he endured.

The Nurse stood at the open door and gazed down upon his stricken form, her face wearing the same look of grim satisfaction that reflected itself when she realised he was suffering. No sympathy had she for him. "Suffer," she muttered to herself. "And all your life may your sufferings be equal to all that Hell holds for your kind. May you ever suffer so."

Leaving the grief-stricken man at the bedside of the dead girl, she entered an adjoining room, and addressed a note to the Doctor. Rising, she again approached the room wherein lay

the form of Joyce. Entering it, she stood beside Beverly.

He half rested, half knelt, at the bedside, with his head resting upon it, the hand of the dead girl still held in his own. She stood silently by for a moment or two, contempt written upon her features. She watched his frame shaking with the agitation he suffered. She addressed him, but he was not aware of her presence. She spoke again to him, telling of certain duties she had to perform to the dead, and that he must leave the room.

He still remained in the same position, quite unheeding her. He appeared oblivious to everything excepting the dead form on the bed. She spoke in loud tones, and caught him roughly by the shoulder, shaking him. In stern tones she once more told of the sacred duties she had to perform, and that he must leave the room.

He lifted his head from the bed and stared up blankly at her.

With all the bitter animosity she bore him, she was shocked to see the alteration in his countenance. The eyes were sunken, the cheeks hollow, the face as colourless as the dead one beside him. He appeared powerless to utter a word.

She helped him to rise to his feet; he still gazed at her with the same half-stupid expression written upon his features. She took him by the arm and led him unresistingly from the room, closing the door as they passed through. She led him in the same passive state to the outer door. Whilst she was engaged opening the door, he steadied himself by leaning up against the iron partition of the passage. She held the door open for him to pass out. He remained in the same position, apparently stupified with his grief. She motioned to him that he must leave the place.

Resting, with his hand against the iron wall, he essayed to speak. His voice was low and broken.

"Were you with her when she passed away?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, "I was."

"Did she leave any message for me?" he asked. His voice sounded strange and hollow.

She eyed him grimly, and in the same cold, hard, unsympathetic tones, answered, "Yes. She told me to tell you she was loyal, as she had promised, unto Death."

"My God, my God," he groaned. "My punishment is heavy. It is almost more than mortal man can bear."

The Nurse's words had added to his grief, as she intended they should.

He still remained in the helpless condition. Suddenly a new interest was created within his breast.

"What of her child?" he questioned eagerly, anxiously. "What of her child?"

"The child, like the mother, is lost to you for ever," she answered in tones full of meaning.

"I am, indeed, punished," he muttered, in broken tones.

"Punished," she repeated, her voice full of scorn and contempt for him; her mind full of sufferings of the dead girl. Casting a look of malignant animosity upon him, she said sternly, "Take this letter," putting it into his hand, and give it to the Doctor. Give it to him as soon as possible. It is of importance."

His hand closed mechanically upon the letter. She half forced, half pushed, him through the door, and stood for a moment, watching him pass into the blackness of the night. She closed and bolted the door, and listened to his footsteps as he stumbled, like some drunken man, down the path to the gate. She heard him pass through the gate and stood at the closed door, heeding the retreating footsteps until they died away.

She knew the storm had brought the river down. She could plainly hear the roaring of the new waters, seething, rushing hurrying along, carrying logs of timber and debris of all character. Would the crossing be a swim, she wondered. What matter if it is? she questioned to herself. "Let him drown, the world will not miss his kind."

She went into the room where the silent form of Joyce lay and threw herself down at the bedside. Here her pent-up grief burst forth, little less in intensity, than Beverly's. She who had preserved such a cold callous demeanour throughout the presence of Beverly, now exposed much deep and tender feeling. It appeared difficult to reconcile the woman now softened with grief, with the one who cast such scorn upon Beverly's sufferings. Like Beverly, she clasped the dead girl's hand to her breast, and pressed her lips to it She called upon her God to mette out a fitting punishment to her destroyer. She called the dead girl by every endearing name.

Sitting alongside the bedside, clasping the hand of clay, she swore to use every endeavour to conceal the birth of the child from the knowledge of the father. He who was responsible for her dear one's sorrow, would never have the satisfaction of knowing that a child had been left behind, if it was possible for her to withhold the information from him.

The thoughts of the little child, so much like the mother, restored her composure. She claimed the babe by right of gift from the dead mother. No consideration was paid to the fact that the child was to be hers, only in the event of Joyce dying unmarried. A great love had entered her breast for Joyce Hilston. Rarely had woman loved one of her own sex as deeply and strongly as this woman had loved the dead girl. The soul that was born anew in her breast, at the graveside of the dead bairns, in its entirety, had been given to Joyce. With a sad and heavy heart, she proceeded about the last sacred duties the living owe to the dead.

XXXVII.

THE NURSE'S PLANS WORK WELL.

Beverly had stumbled out of the gate, ploughed through the mud and slush that the heavy rain had left behind, and, reaching the road, still blindly staggering along, he turned down in the direction of the river crossing. His gait was unsteady, like that of a drunken man. He often saved himself, as if by instinct, from pitching head foremost on to the road. Coming to the cutting on the river bank, that led down to its waters, he stumbled down the slippery incline, and plunging heedlessly into the swollen torrent, commenced to ford it.

At the crossing the river was widest, the deepest part of it reaching to his armpits. Little recked Beverly whether it was five feet or fifty feet. In his present condition he would have plunged as heedlessly into its frothing waters, had it been as deep as the sea. He battled through the surging stream, just as he had battled along the road, often on the verge of being taken off his feet, and recovering himself as if by a miracle. As if by some uncanny instinct, he held the hand that clutched the note the Nurse had given him, high above his head. Reaching the opposite bank, he clambered up the steep incline, walked along some distance under an avenue of dripping trees, until he came to the corner of a street, around which he turned, and walked until he reached the Doctor's house.

He pushed the gate open, and opened the door leading to the Doctor's study. A light was burning, turned low. He threw himself into a chair beside the table, his hand still clutching the Nurse's note. He rested his head on his arms, and groaned aloud.

The Doctor was sleeping, fully dressed, in an arm-chair. The noise of Beverly's entrance awakened him. He hurriedly arose, turned the light up, and gazed down upon the desolate-looking figure in the chair. The water was still running from his clothes, making small rivulets start in all directions over the Doctor's floor.

The Doctor spoke to him, calling him by name. "Beverly," he asked him, "am I wanted?"

For answer, Beverly loosened the fingers that clutched the half-soaked letter, and allowed it mechanically to fall from his hand on to the table.

The Doctor immediately seized it, opened it as he walked towards the light to read it. It ran as follows:—

My Dear Doctor,—

Thank God her sufferings are over. She passed away about twenty minutes ago. Towards the end it was too terrible to look upon. Dear Doctor, send your certificate to Jensen as soon as possible, and ask him to see me. Regarding the man, no good can be attained by his presence here. I hold such an abhorrence of him, that I cannot bear to look upon him. For the dead girl's sake, as well as his own, he should be got away with all haste. Get him away by the special bringing the Doctor. It will return almost immediately. The Doctor will not want to delay a minute when he finds he is too late. You will at once see the sagacity of my advice for all concerned. May I thank you in advance for all I have asked you to do.

M. McCALLUM.

The Doctor finished reading the letter. His face expressed the sorrow he felt at the tragic end of such a noble life. He looked down at Beverly, still lying over the table in the same position. He felt a deep sympathy for this man, whose story he was now acquainted with.

He walked over to him, and said, "Beverly, it could not be otherwise. I am indeed greatly affected. Only for this unfortunate accident I could have saved her for you."

Once more Beverly groaned aloud.

Strange as it may seem, the Doctor asked Beverly the same question, in the same words as Beverly had put to the Nurse, "What of the child?"

"Like the mother, lost to me for ever," he groaned out.

"It would be a miracle if it was otherwise."

He re-read the Nurse's letter, and decided her advice was both sound and prudent.

"Mr. Beverly," the Doctor said, in quite serious tones "in this sad matter, all that mortal man could do you have done. Be guided now by me. The special will arrive any moment. It will return as soon as the line is clear. Return with it. It is best for all connected with this sad matter. The less that is known of the unfortunate incident, both for the sake of the dead girl and those belonging to her, for your own sake, and that of your connections, the better."

He went to the back and called his black boy. He despatched him for the one cabman the small township boasted. Returning to the study, he placed his hand kindly upon the shoulder of Beverly.

"Come, Mr. Beverly," he said, "I quite realise you are badly rattled, old chap, but you must get out of these wet clothes. There are those in this world to whom, even in your extreme grief, you owe consideration and thought. Come along, old chap," he continued, in a kindly voice, "shake yourself up."

The Doctors reference to those whom he dearly loved penetrated. He fully realised the reasonableness of the Doctor's remarks. He made an effort to stagger to his feet. The Doctor took him by the arm and assisted him out into the street. The hotel was only a short distance away. Together they entered his room. The Doctor helped him to change into dry clothes. He packed a few loose things in a travelling bag, and all was in readiness when the wheels of the cab were heard stopping in front of the hotel.

Beverly uttered no word of protest. He appeared incapable of words, incapable of action. He permitted the Doctor to assist him into the street and into the cab.

They arrived at the railway station just as the special was steaming in. Very little time was lost in explanation between the two Doctors. It was arranged Beverly was to share the Doctor's car on the return journey. When he was settled in the car, he was given a strong glass of brandy containing an opiate. He at once relapsed into a deep slumber. As soon as the line was clear, the special, like some huge monster, plunged into the blackness of night, racing on its way back to the coast.

In after years, the manner in which he was persuaded to leave the side of his newly-made wife increased the burden of his remorse. The weeks of intense mental suffering left him incapable of action or self direction.

XXXVIII.

THE BURIAL.

On an ironstone ridge, a couple of miles from the small township, surrounded by a wire fence, stood the local cemetery. To this last resting place the remains of Joyce Beverly were slowly carried. The kindly parson, book in hand, standing by the newly-dug grave, awaiting the arrival of the cortege, was the only being present. When the undertaker, with his assistant, had everything in readiness, the Parson, before proceeding with the service, cast an anxious glance along the road leading to the Township. He turned to the coffin-maker, and asked, "Do you expect any mourners?"

"No," the man answered. "Mrs. McCallum told me there would only be yourself, and to bring my assistant to help."

"Strange," the good man muttered to himself, and proceeded to read the service.

He had barely completed his duties, when that ominous, hollow sound echoed, the sound that strikes terror into the hearts of the loved friends of the dead, made by the first clods of earth falling on the coffin at the bottom of the grave.

There were no grief-stricken hearts to be racked at the sound in this sad case.

The parson, wrapped in thought, reflecting on the sad and strange case, had driven slowly away. He wondered who the dead girl was? What become of the newly-made husband? He would have to make a call on the Doctor and ascertain if there were any relatives to communicate with," he soliloquised.

On his arrival home, an urgent message awaited him, calling him to the bedside of a very dear old friend, fourty miles away. Cares for the welfare of his old friend, replaced the sad reflections regarding the burial. Very soon he was jogging along the black soil plains on his errand of mercy.

A few weeks afterwards, he returned to his local duties, but matters of the day kept him too busy to allow of much time to be devoted to the incident of the past.

When he called upon the Doctor, the latter assured him that the dead girl's relatives had been appraised of her sad end. No good, the Doctor argued with himself, could come of giving any publicity to the strange events that he had witnessed.

In the past, the Parson had made several attempts to see the "queer woman," as Mrs. McCallum was called. He had once waited patiently for three-quarters of an hour on the verandah. He knew she was inside the home, but could not get a reply, and had to give up in despair.

After seeing the Doctor, he again called at the lonely house. The place was closed, and a notice posted up, "FOR SALE."

XXXIX.

JOYCE'S CHILD FINDS A FRIEND.

Let us return to the Nurse and the child of Joyce Beverly. The Nurse did not attend the funeral, for she dare not leave the newly-born babe. With jealous care and watchful eye, she was guarding the little one. She had so far been successful in concealing the child's existence from Beverly and the rest of the world. She knew how dear to his heart would have been the possession of the child. To him the infant would be a life's solace, something to live for, something to make his life a blessing instead of a curse.

The Nurse was a shrewd woman, and every part of her keen intellect was now at work upon her scheme.

He, that man who had brought the curse of shame upon the mother would never know his daughter. So she reasoned.

For the success of her plans, matters so far went well. The Doctor was unaware of the existence of the child. Not a living soul suspected that the dead girl had left a babe behind. The child was thriving, and every hour growing the living picture of its mother. Although a week had elapsed since Joyce's death, she was still undecided what course to follow. It was imperative to leave the district, for to remain would sooner or later expose the child's existence.

Joyce had always a fair sum of ready cash. Ralph Hilston had never missed enclosing money in his letters. It was a fear of his that she might get stranded, and he had little confidence in young girls being able to look after themselves without plenty of money. The Nurse had her house rent free as long as she liked to live in it. Ways and means were what she was thinking about.

The child was sleeping peacefully on her lap, and so deeply occupied was she, that a step on the verandah and a knock on the door were unheard. The knock was repeated. It caught her ear this time. A deadly look of fear and alarm showed on her face. Hastily placing the child on a couch, she waited a second to recover her composure. Again the knock was repeated. She approached the door, and opened it. The first think that her eyes rested upon was the haggard face of Geoffrey Armitage.

"Oh, tell me, Mrs. McCallum, is it true that Joyce is dead?"

Before she had time to open her lips these words burst from the young fellow.

At a glance she saw how it was. As she suspected, the young fellow's very soul had been given to Joyce. The tones of despair in which he uttered the words told their own tale. Painful suspense was written on every feature of his face. He stood with hand out-stretched, awaiting her reply. She realised that her answer was going to be a great blow to him, and a great wave of sympathy for him passed through her mind. She scanned his face and understood his suffering. She took his out-stretched hand in her own, and said, sadly, "Alas, Geoffrey, it is only too true."

"I cannot believe it," he said excitedly. "I will not believe it."

"Mr. Armitage," she said quietly, "Joyce lies buried in the cemetery. She was buried this day week."

"My God," he uttered, "I cannot realise it. I cannot believe that she has gone out of the world."

Addressing him by his Christian name, she said, "Geoffrey, life is uncertain. I would have died a thousand times myself rather than see that beautiful life depart. Few in this world will ever know how dear she was to me. Had she been my own child I could not have loved her more dearly."

"What in the name of Heaven happened her? What was it brought about such an untimely end? Good God, Mrs. McCallum, I cannot believe it," he exclaimed.

She had kept him standing in the small passage separating the two small front rooms. Before she had time to make a reply to his last remark, a tiny cry sounded from the room alongside.

Upset as he was, he observed the start she gave at the sound.

He brushed quickly past her, and pushed the door open. Lying on its back, with its mouth and eyes wide open, the image of its mother, was Joyce's child, a tiny smile fluttering across its face, its two wee hands moving about; a most beautiful picture of babyhood; the very image of its mother.

It needed but a glance to tell him who the mother of the child was. With her face fixed in his mind for months, could he mistake the resemblance he saw in the child, with its large brown eyes fixed upon him.

Mrs. McCallum had followed him into the room.

He turned a white-stricken face towards her, and asked, in a low husky voice, "Is this what killed her?" with his gaze fixed upon the child.

"As the spirit of the mother departed from this world, the flesh of the child entered it," she said, sadly.

He sat down on a low stool and rested his head on his hands.

"Where is the man who wrought this dreadful evil?" he asked.

"I can tell you nothing," she replied, "except that the child was born in wedlock. The mother entrusted the care of the child to me. She sacrificed her life to save other distress. From her father especially she wished to preserve all information of her dreadful position. Her marraige," she continued, "was a secret one. I wired to her father that she had died suddenly of typhoid. The day she died I brought a letter from the post office for her, from America. I never saw the contents of it, but whatever they were they threw her into a fearful illness, which ended in this new life coming into the world and hers going out."

"And is her father not to know of his own daughter's child?" he asked.

"I gave my promise to the dying mother, which for the time at least I will hold sacred. Geoffrey," she continued, "there is no secret about your great love for the child's mother."

"I don't wish to conceal it, Mrs. McCallum. I loved her better than life itself," he replied, feelingly.

"Her child requires a friend," she said.

He looked up enquiringly at her.

"I will be all that a good mother can be, but for her sake I cannot keep the child here. Listen to me. Not a living soul must know she left a babe. For her dear sake I have kept the matter a profound secret. It was her wish that I should have the child. Will you assist me to get the little one away quietly, and so preserve the mother's good name. Once I leave the shelter of this roof my allowance stops. Will you do as I ask for the sake of the one who was so dear to you? The father does not know it was born."

Geoffrey was more than interested now. He replied, "There is nothing I would not do for Joyce alive or dead. Tell me what it is you want me to do, and I will gladly do it."

XL.

MRS. McCALLUM DESERTS THE LONELY HOUSE.

A look of pleasure passed over the face of the astute woman. She had won Geoffrey to her assistance. The solution to her troubles was found. They took tea together, and she placed her plans before him.

He was to come over after dark with a buckboard and horses. They would proceed down the line fourty miles, where there was a small, quiet siding. From here she would take the train to the coast, and thence on to Sydney, Geoffrey to meet her there as soon as possible.

She had long since talked of leaving for Scotland, and she knew her sudden departure would cause no comment. "No one bothered much regarding the actions of the 'queer woman,'" she reflected grimly to herself.

She made all arrangements that afternoon, wired her agents she was leaving the house and effects. Just as the moon was rising, Geoffrey drove up with the trap and horses. Her few things were quickly aboard, and they silently drove away.

Next morning, fourty miles distant down the line, an elderly woman with a young child in her arms, boarded the train at the small siding, and took her ticket through to the coast. Geoffrey was on his way back, travelling slowly along the road, thinking of the strange current of events. The sudden death of the girl he had loved, her unknown marriage, who was her husband? who he gathered from the Nurse's conversation was in America. He reflected on the tragic end of this bright, handsome girl. Of the necessity to deceive her father, regarding the manner of her death. He wondered how it was she had tied herself to such a scoundrel. Apparently the husband had deserted the young wife, and was as little interested in the life of her child. He had taken the full responsibility of the welfare of the infant, and would fulfil the obligation as sacredly as if the child was his own. Thus he reasoned with himself, as he sat with a sad expression upon his face, letting the lash of the whip fall harmlessly across the backs of the horses.

Some few weeks afterwards he joined Mrs. McCallum in Sydney. He waited upon Richard Beverly, but the Pastoral King was a very much concerned man. He explain to Geoffrey the critical condition of his only son, who, he told Geoffrey, had just returned from Central Australia suffering

from a dreadful attack of malaria fever, hovering between life and death. Geoffrey expressed his sincere regrets, little realising that he was assisting to rob the sick man of his child.

The Pastoral King gave Geoffrey a letter of introduction to Jim McMasters, through whom a decent cottage was purchased at Coogee. There he established Mrs. McCallum and her charge, as comfortable as it was possible for money to make them.

When he drove out to say good-bye, the little lady had a smile for him. Already she had won her way into Geoffrey's soft heart.

"Have you given her a name yet?" he asked.

"No," the Nurse replied. "Would you like me to give her any particular one?

He thought for a moment, and said, "Yes, I think so. Call her Isabel. It was my mother's name."

The Nurse threw a quick look of appreciation at him. She realised the child would never want for a friend as long as Geoffrey lived.

He asked what arrangement were being made regarding a mark on the grave.

"So far," she replied, "no mark has been arranged."

"Can I attend to it?" he asked.

"Thank you," she said. "Yes."

She told him to erect a plain stone with the following inscription: -

Sacred To The
Memory of
Joyce
Only Child of Ralph Hilston
Bungimeggra, N.S.W.

Geoffrey left for his property in the far North of Queensland, content in his mind that he had done what was good and right. Here for a time we must leave him to his pastoral pursuits.

XLI.

RALPH HILSTON RECEIVES THE NEWS OF JOYCE'S DEATH.

At Bungimeggra, on the day succeeding the one upon which Joyce had been buried, it was mail day, the most interesting of all days to station people living outside the precincts of civilisation. The horse boy had returned with the mail bag. He rode down to the turn off every week to meet the coach.

Hilston opened the bag, and noting the telegrams, opened them first. He was stunned by the contents of the message. It ran:—

"Your daughter Joyce passed away at my place suddenly this morning. Typhoid suspected. Letter fuller particulars.

NURSE McCALLUM."

The one from the Doctor read:—

"Your daughter passed away this morning at Nurse McCallums."

Mrs. Hilston was down in the garden. He rushed out, hatless, to her, waving the telegram excitedly.

"Read," he said. "This cannot be right. I cannot see," he said weakly, becoming totally unnerved.

She read them slowly in her matter of fact manner. She looked up from them, and saw the distress written upon his face. Her own features turned white. She put her hand kindly on his shoulder, and said, "Hilston, this is indeed dreadful news for you and dreadful news for me. I thank God that in her letters she was so reconciled to me. I am indeed thankful," she said, in a low voice.

He bent his head and the tears fell from his eyes. "My poor child, my poor child, alone amongst strangers," he cried.

She took him by the arm and led him back to the house. He wanted to start straight away for the North, but was persuaded to wait until a letter arrived from the Nurse. She made him lie down, and told him of her own conscience, thinking that she had not come into the house, the daughter might still be alive. Hilston, in his justness, would not have this. Messages of sympathy came from all parts of the district, most kindly of all, from the boss of Bandomile, his good wife, and the son Tom.

Megson wrote a long letter full of kindly sympathy and sorrow. In it he told them how he had put Joyce in the coach and watched her take her departure. It afterwards struck him

she did not appear to be looking as well as she usually looked. He told them of his surprise when he learned of the long visit she had paid Mrs. McCallum. It must have been, he wrote, that she had not quite overcome her foolish prejudice against the second marriage. It was the only reason he could think of to account for her long sojourn in the Township.

"Had she been agreeable, she could have made a wonderful good match here. A young Englishman," Megson wrote, "one of the whitest men I have ever met, was deeply in love with her. It was he who accompanied me on the trip. He told me it was his intention to follow Joyce into New South Wales, visit you, and ask you for her. Joyce appeared to think very highly of him, and I was in hopes they would make a match of it. However, that is all past, and the poor girl lies in her last resting place. Northern typhoid is a dreadful fever, and takes its victims off very suddenly. Her sad end has cut young Geoffrey up; in fact, I have never seen any young fellow hit so hard. He is young. That is in his favour, and, with time, should get over his grief."

"As I am right here, I will attend to the headstone. It is a sad, sad business, and I cannot tell in words how deeply I feel the poor girl's loss.

"Let us hope that time will help to soften our grief," he concluded."

It was some months before Megson could visit the Township. When he did, he was surprised to find a mark of remembrance already erected. He concluded her father and stepmother had already attended to the matter.

When the Nurse's letter reached Bungimeggra, its contents did not throw much light on the unfortuuate end of the daughter. "Your daughter was staying with me," the Nurse wrote, "during her Uncle's absence up the river. She was suddenly taken ill and passed away. Eyerything that could be done for her was done. We had a special train, speeding from the coast with a skillful doctor aboard, but before he arrived she had passed away. It was an extremely sad incident. I had met your daughter at her Uncle's, and had conceived a great love for her, as did almost everybody who came under the influence of her good and kindly nature. Little more of any consequence or importance was vauchsafed by Mrs. McCallum, who had her own reasons for writing as enigmatically as possible. The date of burial and death was enclosed, with the writer's assurance that she would be coming South, and would make an effort to visit them.

This was the last Ralph and his wife ever heard of the Nurse. Whether she ever came South or not they never knew.

The shock of his daugter's sudden end upset Hilston greatly. He had a bad turn, and passed through a serious illness. He had determined to go North and visit the last resting place of Joyce, but a long journey was out of the question. It was a

long time before he quite recovered from his illness. The journey was never taken to the North of Queensland, but he never really forgave himself for being indirectly the cause of her leaving his roof.

Time, the universal healer of the most gaping wounds, exercised his soothing influence on the old father, and the day came when he could think of the handsome girl he had lost with less poignant grief.

Excepting with her father, the memory of the bright, handsome, merry girl, who had been such a favourite throughout her native district, passed into oblivion. And such is the world. Remembered to-day, forgotten to-morrow.

XLII.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

During the long train journey to the Coast, Beverly never awakened. Several times the Doctor looked keenly at the sleeping figure. He felt his pulse, and as th result of his investigations, shook his head gravely.

Towards the close of the afternoon, the long journey came to an end. Some few minutes before, Beverly showed signs of returning life. He had been sitting up, trying to recall the events of the last twenty-four hours. Every now and then a shudder ran through his frame. A sure sign of approaching malaria.

"Had he passed through a dreadful nightmare?" he asked himself. Were the dreadful events he had passed through, of which he at present only had a confused grip, a hideous dream?" He put his hand to his forehead, trying to recall what had happened. "My God," he muttered, heedless of the Doctor's presence, "Has she gone from me for ever?" He rested his elbows upon his knees and held his head between his hands, and groaned.

The Doctor had been keenly watching him.

"Well, Mr. Beverly," he asked, "how do you feel now?"

Beverly never responded.

"Let me sound a note of warning to you," the Doctor continued. You are in for a bad attack of malaria. It is essential that you take every care of yourself."

Beverly never replied. At the time it mattered little to him what became of him.

The Doctor assisted him to gather his belongings, took his arm, and helped him from the carriage.

As they emerged from the car, a telegram was placed in the hand of each. Beverly opened his with trembling fingers. It was brief, and simply read: "Buried at ten o'clock this morning." He smothered the groan that arose to his lips.

The busy scene of the railway station, the people hurrying to and fro, had a restraining influence on his grief. The telegram had opened the wound afresh. For a second he rested his hand upon the shoulder of the Doctor.

The Doctor's telegram was almost as brief as Beverly's. It ran, "Berth booked for Beverly, Japanese steamer leaving tonight at seven. Direct to Sydney. See him aboard." Both telegrams were the work of the Nurse. She had wired the

Agents to book Beverly a berth. Once he was out of Queensland, there would be little chance of the child's birth coming to his knowledge. The Doctor's trap was waiting for him. He drove Beverly round to where the tender was lying and accompanied him aboard the steamer. He called the ship's Doctor aside, and told him to keep a watchful eye upon Beverly.

"He had just come in from the Never Never, and is in for a serious attack of malignant fever. He is a Mr. Beverly, the only son of Australia's millionaire."

Beverly had passed along straight to his cabin, even forgetting his extreme distress of mind and body to thank the doctor for his kindness and attention. He cast himself upon the bunk, re-read the telegram, and relapsed into a fit of gloom. The doctor's words were true. He was beginning to realise it. The fever was upon him. He had ever been an extremely healthy man, one who had never abused the gift of robust constitution, but during the last month he had taken liberties with his frame, that Nature resented. Nights without sleep, keeping up to the wonder of such men as Black Mac and his mate, and then after the long trying journey was over, standing for hours at the mercy of the elements, with the rain-soaked clothes hanging to his body, was more than Nature could endure. Added to which he suffered a mental distress that could not be described in words. Mentally and physically Beverly was in the throes of a serious fever. Ever ringing in his ears were the ominous words of the nurse, "Pass through that door and gaze down upon the last scene of your dreadful villainous act."

From Brisbane Richard Beverly was advised of the critical condition of his only son. Seated in his office, thinking of him, missing him sadly, almost regretting he had influenced the decision upon him to leave for Queensland, he was handed the telegram reading, "Your son aboard in a dangerous state of fever. Make all arrangements for removal to special hospital on arrival of steamer."

Richard Beverly was greatly upset at the news contained in the wire. He left his office hurriedly. Such a thing as sickness, in connection with his son, had never entered his head. He was aware he possessed a magnificent constitution. He was gravely concerned, and drove at once to McMasters. He handed the telegram to Jim to read, who was as much disturbed over its contents as the elder Beverly.

It was a sad party that awaited the arrival of the Japanese steamer on the wharf in Sydney.

As soon as the boat was berthed, Lex Beverly, looking a wreck of his former self, was carefully carried down the gangway on a stretcher. Richard Beverly broke down when he saw the dreadful state of his son's health. The younger Beverly was delirious and did not recognise anybody. Fortunately the doctor had advised Beverly to keep Lex's mother and his betrothed away. McMaster was palpably affected at the condition of his

old pal. Brain fever and malaria was what the best Australian skill had to fight. For weeks his life was despaired of; for days it hung by the tenderest of threads. Nature triumphed in the end, and the hour arrived when the corner of danger was turned He was to live, his life had been preserved. "A constitution like a horse," the doctors said, "was what saved him. His ultimate recovery to vigorous health was slow. Outside of the family circle, McMaster and his wife were ceaseless in their care and thought for the sick man. Both bore him a strong affection. Had he been her brother, Margery's feelings could not have been deeper. They considered they owed him a life's happiness. At night, when Margery knelt down to say her prayers she never omitted to pray for the recovery of the life of him, to whom she owed her preservation. During Beverly's illness, Richard Beverly, his good wife and Ann were thrown into constant intercourse and association with McMaster's wife. The constant companionship produced a great feeling of respect for Margery. From her the two other women drew daily their comfort and hope. There were times when ever the best medical skill shook its head and looked grave, when the verdict was almost hopeless, but never so with Margery. Ever hopeful, ever optimistic, she would not have there was any chance of losing Beverly. "You are not going to lose him," she would assure them hopefully, "he will be spared to you for many future happy years."

They would become contaminated with her spirit of hopefulness, with her spirit of optimism, and would bless her. During these trying days Ann and the wife of Richard Beverly grew to love her very dearly. Richard Beverly would press her hand in silence, telling of the comfort he derived from her cheerful words. He fully realised what a great comfort she had been to them all in those anxious, painful days.

There were times when their very souls were rent in twain with the agony of the suspense they endured, but the appearance of Margery, with her bright spirits, her animated presence, always lessened the burden of their grief, and allayed their anguish. The younger Beverly had been a very popular man in the city. Numerous were the daily enquiries regarding his condition. The day of convalescence arrived. Beverly, looking thin and careworn, was soon able to take open air drives. His recovery was very gradual. Day after day he was to be seen driving in Centennial Park, seated between his good mother and Ann. Months elapsed before he was restored to a state of good health. Time and care, assisted by Nature, resulted in Lex Beverly returning once more to sound health.

Not quite the good vigorous health he had enjoyed before his sickness, that would yet take time, but a health that was assured of future life.

XLIII.

ONCE MORE THE FATHER AND SON DISCUSS THE FUTURE.

Time, the great healer of all wounds, did his work well, and once more we find the Father and Son in the former's office in consultation. Lex had just come in. The Father looked up anxiously and asked. "Well, Lex? How are you to-day?"

"Quite well, I thank you," answered the son. "In fact I am feeling better every day. You asked me to call and chat over private matters as soon as I felt myself well enough. To-day finds me quite prepared to place myself at your leisure."

"I am indeed glad to hear of your improvement," replied the elder man, glancing at his watch. Picking up his appointment card and looking over it he continued, "Yes, I am quite free for an hour." He rang the bell, and to the young man who answered it he said, "Maitland, I will be engaged for an hour."

When the clerk retired and the door was closed, Richard Beverly passed his cigar case to his son, saying, "Has your taste for smoking returned?"

"Thank you, yes," answered the son, helping himself to his father's favourites. Each smoked in silence for a few moments.

The younger man opened the conversation. "I have arranged with my mother and Ann for our marriage to take place at St. Jude's, the fifth of next month." A smile brightened the face of the elder man, a smile that appeared to leave a look of relief behind it. The son continued, "I believe that the matter of our marriage is very dear to your heart. Am I right in assuming the intimation pleases you? All arrangements are made, the only thing I stipulated for being a quite wedding. We will be married in the morning, and sail for England by the Orient Company's steamer in the afternoon. I propose to make with Ann an extensive tour. Possibly we will be absent a couple of years or more. Will you mind if I take such a long holiday? I feel that only such a life will restore me to that good health I enjoyed before that dreadful sickness overtook me. Those are my plans. Do they meet with your approbation?"

The elder man during the son's discourse had sat quietly smoking his cigar, noting all the younger man had to say with keen interest. When Lex had concluded he answered:

"You ask me have your plans my approval? Most assuredly they have. Thank Providence I possess unlimited life and energy at the present time. Do not worry about me. The work to-day

is as great a pleasure as ever it was. The trip will do you immense good. It is what you really require to build your constitution up again. Need I tell you the pleasure I experience from your news. If Ann was my own daughter I could not love her more dearly. A good, pure woman, and where, in God's world will you find anything grander or nobler than a good woman and a sincere mother? In congratulating you on your marriage with Ann, I feel I can state with certainly, man has never taken a better woman to the marriage altar."

"I thank you." was all Lex replied.

Matters of business occupied the balance of their time. After the son had departed from the office Richard Beverly sat some time in deep reflection. Since the son's recovery from his sickness, a great alteration had taken place in him. It was impossible for the change to escape the eye of the father or mother. He was not the same Lex Beverly we introduced at the beginning of these pages. Everyone remarked upon the alteration. Not that he was less kind or generous in manner, but some indefinable part of the Old Lex was not there; was, in fact, distinctly missing. People remarked, "These brain attacks always leave something behind. He will never be the same again." One man, a great student of humanity and its ways, expressed the opinion, that to him Beverly looked like a man with a mind obsessed with some tragedy of the past. This man had arrived at the very conclusion that had effected the alteration in Beverly's demeanour. The past was pressing heavily upon the mind of Beverly. The nurse's words, in letters of fire, had burnt themselves into his brain. They were imprinted upon his very soul. Fifty times a day the words recurred to his mind, rang in his ears. The treacherous trick played upon him and the dead Joyce, his own heroic attempt to reach her side when that treachery was made known to him, the almost sacrifice of his own life from interest and welfare for hers. All this matter he fully realised, but the guilty knowledge was ever rapping at his conscience, that he had, in a moment of weakness, allowed passion to take possession of his being, and on its altar had sacrificed the woman he had loved dearer than life itself. It was the tragedy of the past, constantly preying on his mind, that had created the alteration in Beverly.

XLIV.

MARGERY HEARS OF HER BROTHER.

When he was quite convalescent, Beverly made an appointment with McMaster and Margery to dine with them. Margery was wonderfully proud of her bonny son. The little chap had been presented for his good-night kiss. After enduring much fuss he was quietly taken away by his nurse and put to bed.

McMaster and his guest sat down together. Both wore a concerned look. Beverly had told McMaster of Deigen's death. respecting his feeling too much to tell any more than he had fallen in with his wife's long lost brother, and of his tragic death. McMaster, with his great love for his wife, could not break the news to her. He knew her hope, that some day the black curly-headed boy she remembered so fondly, would surprise her good father and mother, and return to them. These hopes must now be ended for ever, so he had asked Beverly to break the news. He knew how well his wife thought of his friend. He was also aware that Beverly had saved her from the clutches of Clarkson.

Margery returned to the room where the two men were smoking. Beverly spoke, McMaster moved uneasily in his chair. He could not endure the thoughts of Margery's suffering. He knew the news would pain her greatly.

"In the far North, Margery, the news will be a great surprise to you, I heard of your brother."

"Oh, Mr. Beverly," she exclaimed, "what news this will be for mother and father." Beverly wore a look of grave concern upon his face. He continued:

"Margery, some news brings gladness, some news sorrow. I regret to say the word I bring you of your brother carries more sorrow than joy." At these words Margery's face assumed a very grave aspect, a look of fear passed over her features. She realised the news was not for rejoicing. She was in her favourite position, sitting on the arm of her husband's chair. She bent her head down upon his shoulder. McMaster placed his arm gently around her, to soothe her Beverly continued:

"We had a stockman named Deigen working on the station I first visited. I took a fancy to him. He and I travelled to the Never Never of Central Australia. One night, sitting at the camp fire, he asked me did I know Surry Hills. I told him not very well. He said he was born there, and told me of the trouble he got into when a young fellow. His face had always reminded me of somebody I knew, and when I had listened to his recital,

I recognised him as your brother. I told him, 'Your name is Robert Dawson.' It surprised him. I was able to tell him of your happiness, of the good welfare of your father and mother. He and I and others were working on a large drafting camp. We had passed through a strenuous time, and were finishing up. He had earned a good cheque, his mind was relieved of his trouble, and he was coming home with me. For your sake, Margery I was going to give him a lift along." Margery lifted her head from her husband's shoulder and threw a grateful glance at the speaker. "He was a great horseman, a first class stockman. Just before the work was completed, his horse fell with him. He was galloping after a steer, when in an instant both were on the ground. Great horseman as he was, he had not time to clear himself. The accident was sudden and unexpected. He was injured beyond recovery. He told me to tell you, when passing away, that his last thoughts were of you and his parents."

When he had finished speaking, Margery rose quickly and passed into her room. McMasters and Beverly sat in silence, the two men quietly smoking.

McMaster's thoughts were sad, in sympathy with the wife he loved so well. Beverly's mind was going back to the dying man under the canvas. Black Mac's words ringing in his ears, "Behave like a man, Mr. Beverly. This chap's dying." Once again he could see himself, standing over the mangled form of Deigen, with clenched hands uplifted, as if to hammer out of the prostrate form what spark of life remained in it. Eyes ablaze with passion, features convulsed with anger, he had rushed from the tent. Then the days and nights of endless riding with Mac and his mate, always restless, if they camped a second more than he considered necessary.

He had kept his word to these two wild men, and had sent them a substantial draft to Wyndham.

XLV.

BEVERLY AND ANN MARRY.

On the day that Lex Beverly had said he was to marry Ann, a party entered St. Jude's Church at Randwick.

The day was one of Sydney's most brilliant; a cloudless sky, as perfectly blue as the seas that reflected its glory, the ocean waters making a glorious picture from the hill.

The party comprised Richard Beverly and his wife Jean, Jim and Margery McMaster, and the bride and bridegroom. The ceremony was soon over. Throughout Beverly had preserved a very serious demeanour, almost painfully so. It would be hard to tell what was passing through his mind. Was it dwelling on the tragic ceremony which took place in that far Northern township? Was he comparing the beautiful day, the glorious old church associations, the happy faces surrounding him, with a small low room, the dying bride, the blackness of the night, the vicious flashes of lightning, the crashing bolts of thunder, and the torrents of rain? Were these comparisons passing through his mind? He looked pale and unwell as, arm in arm, he and Ann walked down the aisle. The few assembled remarked upon his appearance, and agreed that he was far from recovered. After a short stay at Margery's place, where the breakfast was served, the party drove direct to the Orient wharf, and boarded the big liner flying the Blue Peter. The time for saying good-bye at last arrived. Beverly took a deep affectionate farewell of his mother. He clasped her in his arms, and for the first time that day displayed some feeling. Throughout the days preceding the ceremony he had preserved a serious, dignified manner. He could not obliterate the fact from his mind, that he could not give his wife what she would naturally expect, love and affection. He had married Ann because it was his duty. He had not made any confession of the dark tragedy of the past to his affianced, relatives, or friends.

When dressing in the morning he had thought, "God help the poor girl. She little realises what a rotten bargain she is getting."

Beverly gave the subject of his marriage with Ann much mature reflection. Was he doing the right thing in going through this ceremony? He realised he was capable of giving Ann both kindness and consideration, but Love? No! Not even affection! He was like a man from whom the essence of life had parted. He bestowed much serious thought on the situation, and con-

cluded it was best for all concerned, to proceed with the matter, as his people wished.

"Let us hope," he argued with himself, "that children will come along. That event alone will reproduce my soul."

The parting between Ann and Mrs. Beverly was a sad one. Richard Beverly and his wife loved this good girl very dearly. They quite realised what a priceless gift she was to their son. The dearest wish of their hearts had been obtained, and each felt supremely happy.

The big liner drew away from the wharf. As she gradually crept down stream hands and handkerchiefs were waved continuously, until she faded out of sight.

Richard Beverly and his good wife and the McMasters turned in silence, entered their carriage, and proceeded on their way home. Margery broke the silence.

"Ann will bring him back to you," she said, addressing Richard Beverly, in the same bright buoyant spirit we knew before he suffered that fearful illness.

Mrs. Beverly kissed her tenderly. She had grown to love this bright, commonsense woman. McMaster, sitting alongside Margery, threw a look of admiration at her. Nothing in the world gave him greater pleasure than Mrs. Beverly's appreciation for his wife.

For the present we will leave Richard Beverly and his good wife; also McMaster and his bright mate, the latter growing more matronly as time passes. Much to Jim's delight and his wife's chagrin.

XLVI.

THE BEAUTY OF THE BEACH.

Time, man's greatest enemy, had been busy. The weeks, the months, the years, had passed by Four of the latter since we recorded our last chapter.

Once again our story returns to Sydney's most beautiful bay, Coogee. The day was in all respects similar to that perfect one, when Beverly married Ann at St. Jude's.

The hour was five in the afternoon, or a little later. Most of the lovers of the beach, its most constant visitors, had moved off; few only remained.

The waters of the bay were as calm as a mill pond. Not a ripple disturbed the ocean's surface. Lazily the waters lapped the glistening beach sands. Impelled by an unseen force, they slowly climb the slight incline of the beach, to reach a given point, powerless to proceed further, rush back, and mingle with the incoming waters as if in protest of their further advance. About the centre of the beach a beautiful child was frolicking. She was as well known as the beach itself, a pronounced favourite with all visitors. Passers-bye stopped and spoke to her, some familiarly, some to run their fingers through the mass of golden curls. She was a perfect specimen of glorious childhood. Her head was a golden picture of luxuriant hair. Bright dazzling ringlets clinging from all parts of it. A large pair of brown eyes, long silken lashes, a mouth that resembled a rose bud, a beautiful skin, with just sufficient tinge of tan to impart an added charm to the face, a perfect symmetry of child form as ever the eye rested upon. Such was the Beauty of the Beach, as she was generally designated. She was well-known to all frequenters of the bay. All loved to hear the merry laugh ring out, to see this beautiful child in sport.

In the stillness of the evening, her merry ripple of mirth could be heard up and down the beach. With small spade and bucket, such as children play with at the sea side, she was following the lazy waves as they receded, and racing them up the incline of the beach as they slowly forced their way along. Each time as she reached her winning post, out of danger from the waters, a merry peal of laughter would break from her.

A carriage drove down the esplanade. In it were seated a lady and gentleman. It reached the Aquarium end of the bay.

The lady occupant spoke to her companion.

"Is it not a perfect afternoon, Lex? Shall we alight and walk along the Beach? We could join the carriage at the other end of the bay."

Lex Beverly, for the occupants of the carriage were he and Ann, acquiesced. "Yes," he replied. "Certainly if you wish it Ann."

They stepped from the carriage, and walking to the beach, commenced their walk at the edge of the ocean's water. They walked along in silence, Beverly gazing abstractedly out to sea. Ann, stopping every now and then, to trace with the point of her parasol, figures upon the wet sands of the beach. As they approached the vicinity where the Beauty of the Beach was at play, clear to the ear came the joyous mirth of the golden haired child. On approaching nearer Ann was immediately struck with her great beauty.

"Do look, Lex," she exclaimed, "at this beautiful child. Have you ever seen such perfect glory of childhood? Where, in this world, could be found a more immaculate mould of His work?"

Beverly withdrew his gaze from the beautiful blue expanse and looked in the direction indicated by his wife. Ann was unable to withdraw her gaze from the child.

Beverly viewed her fixedly. After looking at her intently he turned his face, wearing a troubled expression, seawards again. "What trick is my imagination playing me?" he asked himself. "Why does the face of this child stir up all the pain and suffering of the past," he reflected.

Once more the merry laughter rang out. Again he turned his glance in the direction of the child. "My God! My God! Am I never again to enjoy any peace of mind?" he murmured almost audibly.

His wife was too occupied with the little girl to observe Beverly's perturbed state. She stayed the child in her frolics.

"Little lady," she said, "What is your name?"

The child, at the sound of the voice, turned, looking up at her questioner with her large brown eyes, and answered in her infant way, "I'se Bell."

A girl of thirteen or fourteen was in charge of her.

"Her name is Isabel," she corrected.

"A very pretty name," said Ann. "Where does Isabel live?"

"I'se live over dere" she answered, pointing with her tiny hand in the direction of a cottage surrounded with flowers.

"We live in the cottage with all the flowers," said the girl.

"Beautiful childhood surrounded with beautiful flowers. Two of God's most innocent gifts," said Ann, turning her gaze in the direction of the cottage. She had already noticed the beauty of the blooms in the well kept garden of the place.

"Does your mummie allow you to play on the Beach every day?" asked Ann.

"A look of sadness overspread the small face of the child. A longing look creeps into the eyes. "I'se got no Mummie," she replied sadly. "Nursie tell me God took my Mummie away to live in Heaven." All the mirth and fun had melted away. She stood silent for a moment, a look of intense sorrow written upon her features. "I'se ask God to send me Mummie back every night when I'se say me prayers, but," she said sorrowfully, shaking the curly ringlets slowly, "He never do."

Already the eyes of Ann were moist. A childless woman, she had prayed nightly to her God to be blessed with the glory of Motherhood. Her prayers, like the beautiful child's, had remained unanswered. When she reflected of this tiny motherless bairn, praying for her mother's return to her, she could restrain herself no longer. She took the child to her breast, clasping her tenderly in her arms, pressing her to her bosom. The girl's voice broke in again:

"She has neither Father nor Mother. She is an orphan," she said.

Beverly had moved on, and now stood looking at the scene. He knew the aching void in his wife's heart. He watched her as she held the child in her arms. He knew the tender spot Ann had in her heart for little ones. He watched her embrace the child fervently, and kiss her affectionately.

As Beverly had said on his wedding day, the only chance of his soul's reclamation was children, and this had been denied him. The child spoke in the prattle of infant tongues:

"Ise like 'oo," she lisped. "Will 'oo come and see Bell again?" She looked up into the kindly eyes of Ann.

"My darling, my beautiful child," answered Ann, "to see you I would come out every afternoon."

She kissed the child good-bye, and rejoined her husband. They walked in silence towards their carriage. The thoughts of each were filled with sadness. Once more the dreadful words of the nurse, with their ominous significance, were ringing in his ears. Ann's mind was filled with the incident of her childless life. What would she give to be the Mother of such a glorious child as the one she had just embraced? Would she ever be blessed with Motherhood? she asked herself.

Thus it was that Beverly crossed the path of Joyce's child and knew it not.

Could he have only known that she was his own flesh and blood, that this beautiful child was born of her, whose memory he so devotedly loved; such a revelation would seem to him as if the very gates of Heaven had opened to receive him. Fate willed it otherwise. It was not to be.

From a hidden point the lynx eyes of the Nurse viewed the whole meeting between Beverly and his child. The old malicious look overspread her features as she gazed upon the scene. She saw the intent look Beverly cast upon the child. She knew what was passing through his mind. Some resemblance he traced

in the form and features of the little girl had recalled the memory of the past. She watched Ann clasping the child to her breast. She had watched the carriage pass by. Well she knew who the occupants were. This astute woman had soon found out all she wanted to know about Alexander Richard Beverly; such was the name upon the marriage certificate. She knew of their craving for children, and gloated in silence over their barrenness. In withholding the birth of the child from the knowledge of Beverly she fully realised she was inflicting a heavy punishment upon him, and every time it crossed her mind she derived the grimmest satisfaction from the thought. She prayed they would pass through life a barren couple; that a blight would rest upon his soul. "May his life be a curse to him," she would utter malignantly.

A blight rested upon his existence. She never knew what distress of mind her words had caused him. This satisfaction was denied her. It must not be forgotten that the Doctor regarded Beverly's confidence as sacred. He had not enlightened the nurse respecting the true facts of the tragedy. She recognised in Beverly the destroyer of Joyce Hilston, and for the evil he had wrought bore him an unforgivable, vindictive animosity.

Beverly and Ann sat at breakfast the morning following the incident on the sands of Coogee Beach. Breaking the silence that reigned, Ann addressed her husband:

"I lay awake last night Lex," she said, "with the face of that beautiful child before me." She was looking down at her teacup. "As I told you, she is an orphan. Would you allow me to adopt her if the arrangements can be made to do so?" she asked.

Beverly had also passed a sleepless night, thinking of the dark passage of his life, awakened by the sight of the child. In some strange, unaccountable way he was also attracted by her beauty.

"Certainly, Ann, if you wish it," he answered. "Judicious inquiries will have to be instituted regarding her parentage. McMaster or his wife may be acquainted with her antecedents."

"May I call on her Nurse this morning?" asked Ann.

"Yes, Ann, if you so desire," he replied.

After breakfast Ann drove out to visit the pretty cottage. Mrs. McCallum anticipated the visit. She was on the look-out for her visitor. When she saw the carriage coming she called the young girl who attended Isabel.

"This lady is coming to visit me," she told the girl. "Tell her when you answer the door that I am out and you do not know when I will return." She retired to her bedroom.

She had ascertained from the Nurse girl all that had passed the evening before. Ann was not the first kindly disposed person to call after seeing the beautiful child.

When Ann arrived the Nurse girl answered the door.

"The lady who has charge of the little girl I spoke to yesterday, is she within?" asked Ann.

"No," the girl replied, "she is out, and I cannot tell you when she is likely to return."

"I called to see her regarding Isabel. I understood you to say she is an orphan. I and my husband would gladly adopt her if arrangements to that effect could be made. No doubt everything would be satisfactory regarding her parentage."

The Nurse, who heard the latter remark, smiled ironically.

"Will you give your Mistress this card. Tell her I and my husband will call to-morrow afternoon."

After she had left, Mrs. McCallum sat in quiet reflection. She decided to remove to Manly for a few days. It was difficult to correctly estimate what had prompted the Beverlys to interest themselves in Isabel. Had Beverly any suspicion? she queried. No! she concluded. However, she was going to be on the safe side. They would remove to Manly quietly. When Beverly and his wife called to-morrow afternoon they would find the place deserted.

Beverly and his wife called as appointed. Ann was both disappointed and surprised to find the cottage temporarily closed.

They rejoined their carriage and drove home, both in a sad frame of mind. Beverly had already commenced to think that the presence of this bright merry child would introduce a fresh interest into his life.

That day the Nurse wrote to Armitage:—

My Dear Mr. Armitage,—

Lately I have suffered much from an old heart trouble, and in the event of anything suddenly happening to me, the position of dear Isabel would be unfortunate.

I am deeply concerned over this matter, deeply worried. I have given the matter much thought, placing her interests before everything. I am of opinion it would be advisable to place her under the care of your good Aunt in England. Once there my anxiety would cease. I would be saved the distressing thought of her unhappy position, without my care and protection. I believe, on mature reflection, you will see the wisdom of my suggestion. She is a lovely child, and promises to blossom into a beautiful woman. It is only right that she should be surrounded by that refinement of living which alone influences the life in the right direction and channel, as it progresses on its way to maturity.

I will await your reply with deep interest.

Yours very sincerely,

M. McCALLUM

XLVII.

BEVERLY AND ANN VISIT McMASTER.

Lex Beverly and Ann had returned two years previous to meeting Isabel on the sands of Coogee. For two years before that, he and Ann had wandered over the world. During the first period of their wanderings, Beverly's reflections frequently dwelt upon the tragedy of the past. The hurried manner of his departure from the side of the newly-made wife increased the burden of his remorse. He was not satisfied regarding the birth or otherwise of the child. The treachery he had suffered at the hands of Connolly made him suspicious. "Then again," he would reflect, "there could be no reason for concealment." From England he wrote to the Doctor in the North of Queensland. He explained he had been unsettled in mind regarding the birth of the child. He would like to have the doctor's confirmation of the matter, as he was at the time led to believe. He had no reason to doubt otherwise, he wrote, but his mind was ill at ease over the subject. He received the doctor's reply telling him to dismiss any such suspicions from his mind. There was absolutely no doubt the child was lost with the mother. Still clinging to the hope that the doctor might be wrong, he had the Queensland records of births searched, but no trace of the registration of a child of the marriage could be found. The death was registered; also the marriage. He concluded it was as he was told --the child was lost with the Mother.

Four years had he and Ann now been married. Not a word at variance had ever passed between them, but the most glorious atmosphere that husband and wife can surround their existence with, was absent. What is there more glorious in the world than the love of a good woman for her husband, and equally so is the love of a good man for his wife. The past years of companionship had revealed the fact to Ann, that she had married a man of stone, a man existing without a soul. The world, its beauties, held no charm for him. He wandered through their honeymoon, going anywhere she wished, doing anything she desired. Whatever she asked, always the same reply, "Certainly, if you wish it, Ann." Always courteous, attentive, but always with the same machine-like manner. His sickness, she argued with herself, had changed him. He would some day return to his former self. Perhaps, when they returned, and his mind became occupied with the affairs of the business, he would change. Beverly had occupied himself for a couple of years

relieving the elder Beverly of the management, but Ann had hoped in vain for the change in her husband. The Sunday following the incident of meeting Isabel, they drove out to Jim McMaster's place at Randwick.

McMaster was making a name for himself in the legal world. Margery, bright and handsome, was romping on the lawn with her children. McMaster, smoking, seated in a cane chair, was looking on, enjoying the frolics of the young people.

When Beverly and Ann drove up, Margery and the children, anxious to meet them, were waiting for them with the gate open. They were always welcome guests, and as they entered together Ann linked her arm with Margery's. McMaster's children were great favourites with the Beverly's. How wistfully Ann would regard these beautiful children, turn her head away with a sigh, and wonder why she was not so blessed. After the maid had served tea, Beverly spoke of the beautiful child they had encountered on the beach.

"We visited the beach a few days back. Playing on the sands was a most beautiful child. We understood she was an orphan. Ann was deeply interested in her. We went to the cottage the following day, but the people had temporarily left. Do you know anything of the child?" he asked McMaster.

"You mean the child Isabel, the Beauty of the Beach. One of Coogee's most charming possessions, visitors say."

McMasters knew little of her. 'She is the ward of a well-to-do squatter, but I am not at liberty to enlighten you further," he told Beverly.

One glance at his wife, and Beverly realised how disappointed she felt. Beverly knew well if the child was the ward of a well-to-do man, adoption was out of the question.

Although they paid many visits to Coogee, they never again saw the beautiful child. Some instinct told Ann she would be childless, and it grieved her night and day. She knew her husband hungered for the sound of childish prattle in the home, for the pattering of their tiny feet on the floors of his house. At night she prayed, "Oh, God, bless our union with child life."

Beverly, deep down in his heart, suffered the childless life as a retribution upon him for his sin of the past, and doublefold he suffered, realising upon the shoulders of his wife, with her innocence of soul, fell a share of this retribution.

Beverly and Ann had lived a quiet life, accepting very few invitations to private or public functions, entertaining very little in return.

Beverly now made a sudden resolve to change their manner of life. He entered fully into the social life of the City. He commenced to entertain in a lavish style; the occupation of attending the recreations week after week, and reciprocating these civilities brought a better peace of mind to him than he had known for years.

XLVIII.

ARMITAGE DECIDES TO PLACE ISOBEL UNDER THE CARE OF HIS AUNT.

Armitage was succeeding in the pastoral world. He had added much more country to his holding, and was now the owner of a big tract of territory. He received the Nurse's letter and perused it very carefully. He had paid two visits to Sydney since he settled Mrs. McCallum and the child so comfortably at Coogee. Isabel, with her childish loveliness, had won her way deeply into his heart. He bore Joyce's child very deep affection. He had written Aunt Grace and told her all about the beautiful child he was caring for, the orphan of a very dear friend. He sent along photos of Isabel, and Aunt Grace had written ecstatically in return of the child's beauty. He knew how welcome the child would be to his good Aunt. He soon completed what arrangements were necessary to enable him to leave. He arrived in Sydney, and at once proceeded to Mrs. McCallum's. He had not seen his Aunt since they parted, and he became anxious to get away. His stay in Sydney was short. The Nurse impressed upon him the necessity for reticence regarding their proposed removal to England, and as it concerned no one of whom he was aware, no mention was made of the matter. Geoffery placed the house in the hands of an agent for sale, and the first Orient liner carried the three of them on their way to England. When well out of Sydney's beauty spot, Port Jackson, the Nurse breathed freely. She did not know what suspicions had been awakened in the breast of Beverly. He may have been struck with the likeness of the child to the dead mother. Isabel, excepting her eyes, was the living image of dead Joyce. She smiled at the way she covered up her tracks. She had not registered the child until she had reached Sydney. She had affirmed its birth in that city as having been born there. "Let him search," she muttered grimly to herself. "Much good it will do him. Much he'll find from the Queensland records."

Aboard the great liner Isabel soon became a general favourite. A beautiful child, possessing a bright, sparkling nature, a face universally wreathed in smiles, who could help loving her? Armitage was very proud of her. He had developed a deep affection for her. He had a very soft nature. It was easy to reach Geoffery's heart. He was much disturbed at the thought that he really had no right to the control of the child. "What," he often reflected, "if the father turned up and claimed her?" This

was always a very painful thought with him. At night time, when the great ship was ploughing its way through the mighty deep, he would lean over the rail of the ship, and allow his thoughts to rest upon the dead mother of the child. "Would he ever forget his love for her?" he wondered. "Could the mother, from her place up above, see her child? Was she happy, knowing the child was well cared for? Such were the nightly train of his reflections.

The pleasant voyage came to an end. Aunt Grace was at the Docks to meet them. Six years Geoffery had now been absent, and the meeting between he and his aunt was a very affectionate one. The six years had made a wonderful alteration in Armitage. The outdoor life of the far West had bronzed his complexion, filled out his frame—turned a youth into a stalwart man. He placed Isabel in the arms of his aunt, saying:

"I hope, my dear Aunt Grace, the presence of this beautiful child will in some measure compensate you for my absence from your side." She kissed the child affectionately, gazing with admiring eyes upon her beauty.

"And this, Geoff, is your beautiful ward," she said. "In bringing me this lovely child you have brought a new joy into my life."

That night, seated in the comfortable old English home, Geoffery had told her all he knew concerning the child and its mother. He told Aunt Grace of his silent love for the dead mother, of her sudden end, of the shock he had received when he discovered she was a wife. He told of the absence of the child's father in America, as he had understood from Mrs. McCallum, of his callousness regarding the fate of the infant. He explained the Nurse had promised the dead mother to care for the child. The Nurse was without means to provide for her, and enlisted my sympathy on her behalf. I had loved her mother as only a member of our family is capable of loving, and accepted the responsibility to provide for the child. I already love the little woman, and will take the place of a father to her."

"It is indeed a sad, sad story. Poor little lady," answered his Aunt, and tears fell from her eyes in sympathy for the sad end of the unfortunate Joyce Beverly and the lonely condition of her child. "Geoff," she said. "I already love her. Her presence will introduce a new interest into my life I will be to her what I was to you."

"I thank you deeply," Geoffery answered. He rose and kissed his Aunt affectionately on the cheek. "Under your guidance, dear Aunt, her future will be a happy one."

Afterwards, when she entered the child's room to kiss her good-night, Isabel was lisping her prayers.

"And, peese God, send me me Mummie back from Heaven." The words dropped softly from the lips of the child, and fell as softly upon the ears of Aunt Grace She stood watching the

beautiful picture of innocence, with closed eyes, the tiny hands clapsed, the face up-turned to Him above, in pure supplication.

A couple of months was all that Geoff could spare. Once more the parting word had to be spoken.

Isabel had grown very fond of him, and at parting clung to his hand and sobbed very distressfully. That night she cried herself to sleep in Aunt Grace's arms, who was already busy weaving her romance around the future of their lives.

"Child," she murmured, looking at the beautiful head resting in innocent slumber upon her arm, in sixteen years you will be twenty; he will be but forty. Who can tell what the world holds for them. Geoff had grown equally attached to his ward, as he now designated her, and had concluded whatever else he had to live for, she would always be his first care.

XLIX.

THE BOSS OF BANDOMILE COMES TO TOWN.

The Boss of Bandomile was in Sydney. Since the opening chapters of this book were written, many changes had taken place. Ralph Hilston's good wife had passed away. Six months after her death a large legal looking packet reached Hilston at Bungimeggra. The contents were easily mastered. His father, the old vicar, had succeeded to the elder brother's title, both his nephews being lost in a yachting accident. Ralph's eldest brother had gone the way of all profligates, and had met with an ignominous end. Hilston had been recalled as next in succession. He had sold his property to his friend and neighbour Tom Wells, and the Boss and his son Tom, the latter now a married man with a family, had accompanied him down to complete the transaction and wish their old friend and neighbour, bon voyage.

Hilston was greatly affected when departing. Holding his friend's hand within his own, he had said, with moist eyes, "Wells, you cannot realise what I feel at leaving the one I love dearest on earth, my poor, handsome Joyce. Somehow, now the time has arrived for me to leave, I feel I neglected the duty I owed the poor girl, in not visiting her last resting place." Both the Boss and young Tom were affected at the mention of Joyce's name. The old chap walked sadly up the gangway. The big liner pulled away, the last good-byes were waved, and the Boss and young Tom moved off the wharf with the rest of the throng. The mention of Joyce's name had recalled to both the tragic end of the bright young life, throwing each into a sad vein of thought.

"Richard Beverly is travelling,' the Boss remarked, "but we will go around and call upon the son.'

When Wells asked for Mr. Beverly he was told he was engaged, but would not be long. The clerk took his name in, and immediately returned, intimating they were to go into the private office.

"This is indeed a pleasure, Mr. Wells," Beverly said, rising. "I have never had the opportunity of meeting you personally, but have heard much of you from my Father."

"The whitest man Australia ever held, Mr. Beverly," said the Boss.

"Meet my wife, Mr. Wells."

After hand-shakings were over the conversation flowed on general channels, the seasons, grass and water.

Meantime young Tom and Mrs. Beverly had been conversing. Ann was rising to leave. "Have you any engagement for to-night?" she asked.

"Oh, no," replied the Boss.

"Will you dine with Mr. Beverly and myself."

"Thank you, Mrs. Beverly. It will indeed be a pleasure."

They were a quiet party. McMaster and his wife were of the party. For a time the conversation ran on wool, the price of cattle, seasons—matters always dear to the hearts of pastoral people. The Boss changed the subject. "We have just seen an old friend and neighbour off to England," he said.

"Going home for a trip, I presume," replied Ann.

"No," the Boss answered. "He is going for good. His father has just succeeded to his brother's title and estates, and he is next in succession. He had an elder brother, but he died some time ago. We purchased our friend's property, which adjoins ours.

"Who is your neighbour, Mr. Wells," Beverly asked.

"Mr. Ralph Hilston," the Boss replied.

The sudden start Beverly gave, together with the change that passed over his features, was unnoticed by those seated around the table.

"He was very much cut up at leaving, Mrs. Beverly," Wells continued. "Some years ago his daughter, a bright handsome girl, paid a visit to her uncle in the far North of Queensland, and died suddenly of typhoid fever. The old chap was unwell for a long time afterwards, and really never properly recovered from the loss. Joyce was her name. She was a grand girl, and one of the best horsewomen I have ever seen. The Boss's voice carried a sad note as his memory took him back to the good-looking girl they had all loved so dearly.

"Inexpressably sad, Mr. Wells, responded Ann. Was her mother alive at the time?

"No. She had died some years previously, and the father had married again. Joyce could not reconcile herself to her step-mother, although a good woman, and left on this visit, thinking the travelling and change would benefit her and enable her to see things in a better light. It really did so, and she had written home admitting her fault and conveying her love to her step-mother."

"The action of a girl of sound principle," said Ann. "What do you think, Margery?" she appealed to her friend.

"Undoubtedly a good, right thinking girl," replied Margery. I cannot imagine anything sadder than this bright girl, dying away from a father she loved so dearly, a stranger in a strange land."

Beverly sat in silence. Young Tom Wells joined in the conversation.

"We had been little ones together," he said, "almost reared together. I handled all her ponies before she rode them. Together we grew up, and just before she left, I proposed to her. I asked her to be my wife. As long as I live, Mrs. Beverly, I will never forget that night. It was as bright as day. I thought I had only to ask to obtain her consent. My proposal surprised her. She had a great affection for me, but it was the affection of a sister for a brother. With her hand resting kindly upon my shoulder, she told me I had imposed upon her the most painful duty of her life, that of giving pain to her dearest friend. She was indeed a lovely girl, Mrs. Beverly," and even now the young chap, married as he was, felt a lump rise in his throat as he thought of her tragic death."

Beverly had sat in silence, with every incident of the tragedy of the past fleeting through his mind. How well he remembered one day, seated upon the top of a big boulder, Joyce telling him of Tom Wells, what a fine fellow he was, of his proposal to her, and how it hurt her to give him pain.

Dinner was over. Ann and Margery took possession of young Tom, anxious to hear more of the handsome ill-fated Joyce. Little did any of them dream the chief subject of the night's conversation was Lex Beverly's first wife. Little did they realise what he suffered during that dinner hour. In the quietness of the evening, after the guests had departed, Ann asked Beverly was he quite well.

"I thought you looked ill at the table, to-night," she said, looking at him.

"It was nothing," he answered, "a passing spasm of pain."

ANN'S DANGER.

Two years had lapsed since Beverly had visited McMaster and his wife, seeking information about the Beauty of the Beach. Margery and Jim, in the quiet of their home, often spoke of Beverly and Ann. They talked of the change in Lex since his illness, and the impassive character of their childless lives.

"Had anybody forecasted such a change in Beverly," McMaster said to his wife, "I would have laughed at him." Jim was sitting in the lounge chair, and Margery loved to sit on the arm of it, with her arm around Jim's neck. She always filled his pipe and lit the matches. This was great fun for Margery. They had been married now for seven years, and were a happy pair. Margery's family now romped in to say good-night. Five merry children nurse carrying the baby. Good-nights said off they all scampered. The greatest blessing a home can possess is the joy of child life.

One day McMaster arrived home and Margery knew at once that something had happened to upset him. She was a wise wife and waited till tea was over, and the children in bed before she said anything. She was sitting in her favourite position.

"Jim," she said in kindly tones, pressing her lips to his head, "What upset you to-day?"

He puffed away silently for a second or two, and replied, "Yes, Margery, I was upset, very much so. You are a clever woman, Margery, and I wish you to know what upset me so much. I was at the Club this afternoon, and overheard a conversation that caused me great concern. It was about Lex and Ann. It was carried on by two men who visit Beverly's. They were coupling the names of Ann and Barrington. One was speaking. He said, 'Sydney will get the shock of its life when the thing materialises. Any morning the bomb shell is likely to drop. What gets beyond my comprehension is that Beverly does not observe it!' 'He had always a good moral character as a young chap,' the other answered. 'It would be about the last thing that he would think of.' 'It is too palpable,' the other continued. The other night Barrington appeared unable to leave her side.' 'Well,' his friend said, 'she is a great musician and so is he. Both are born artists. The instincts of the one appeal to the instincts of the other. Besides, you must remember, Beverly is a soulless man. To me he appears more like a machine than a being. Cold as ice, not an ounce of love for his wife. Married her to please his old people. Man and woman cannot live that existence. Sooner or later a woman will cross his path who will

stir the latent fires in him, the same as a man has now crossed the path of his wife.' The conversation ended then. I was boiling with indignation, but what could I do, what could I say?"

During the whole time Jim was repeating this conversation. Margery had listened with keen attention.

"What do you think of it, Margery?" Jim asked.

"There is no doubt," Margery answered, "Barrington is infatuated with Ann. Those men were correct. Beverly is very machine-like with Ann. There is no doubt about that. If Ann's nature responds to the other's appeal, danger there certainly is. danger that every effort of loyal friends should help to preserve her from. We will go to their affair to-morrow night. Ann must be saved at any cost. Lex and she must be saved," she said reflectively.

Beverly was entertaining as only the son of a millionaire could. It was known amongst many that his father could be Sir Richard Beverly, but he never assumed the title. Richard Beverly and his wife were travelling on the Continent, and Lex and Ann were occupying their house. It was a sore disappointment to Lex's father and mother that no children had been born to him and Ann. The assembly was one of Sydney's most brilliant. Jim and Margery arrived early. They were privileged guests to come and go, when and how they liked. The grounds were beautifully illuminated. Men in evening clothes, and women in costly raiment, strolled in the grounds under the many coloured lights. Dancers whirled away to the strains of Sydney's best music.

Margery was keeping a wary eye open. At any costs she was going to save Ann, if possible. "The time has come for me to pay Lex for my own salvation," she soliloquised. so Margery watched, and was rewarded.

Ann was a most brilliant musician, and so was Barrington. Both were pianists. Ann had many musical admirers, who would press her into the music-room, for "just one number." Word would go round that Mrs. Beverly was going to play, and the room would soon fill to inconvenience.

Ann had held her audience enraptured, and when she completed the number she was greeted with a loud burst of applause. Margery saw Barrington start forward, and then restrain himself. As he stopped Ann's eye rested upon him. Margery noted at his glance a tinge of colour suffused her cheeks. The appreciation bestowed upon her by the well-dressed men and women was unnoticed. She played to reach the soul of this one only, and knew when her eyes looked into his, that she had succeeded. "Ah," thought Margery, her keen woman's instinct taking in the position at a glance, "there is indeed danger. God help her if her heart has gone out to this man, bright, sparkling, and animated, the direct anthithesis to him, to whom she is bound for life! At any cost she must be saved, for her own good sake. and for the sake of our dearest friend, her husband."

The gathering melted away, some to the ballroom, some to the card room, others to stroll in the beautiful gardens, and gaze upon the glistening waters of the harbour, each ripple of its waters reflecting the glory of the full moon's beams.

Margery kept close watch upon Ann. She watched Ann stroll towards a shrubbery, in the midst of which there was an alcove. Margery at once knew that her rendezvous in that place must have been pre-arranged. Concealing her evening dress under a dark cloak, she slipped around the back of the alcove, and by listening intently, could plainly hear the subdued voices of Ann and Barrington conversing.

Barrington was pleading fervently for her to fly with him. Ann, with all the strength she could command, was resisting his passionate entreaties. "How is it possible to exist," Barrington exclaimed, "with my very soul craving for you, your own crying out for mine?"

"Hush," she whispered. "Hush, Frank. Let us bear our cross with fortitude."

"I cannot restrain myself, Ann. I feel as though I must clasp you in my arms."

"My cross is indeed a very heavy one to bear. Make it, I beseech you, no heavier," she implored. Her voice was choked with emotion.

Passionately he continued to entreat her. His distress of mind, his utterances, the story of his very manhood being consumed by this great love for her, his reference to the man of marble to whom she was married, eventually wrung an emotional consent from her to elope with him. The hour was arranged for the night following the morrow. The meeting place was selected. He told her he would attend to all details, bring a cab to meet her at the appointed hour, then the mail train to Adelaide, and the Orient steamer home. He was excited at the prospects of winning her, and attempted to embrace her. This she would not suffer.

"No, Frank," she said, with a white set face. "It is a dreadful step I have decided upon. Until I leave my husband I cannot bear, whilst I remain under his roof, the sin of your embrace."

"God help us both," she continued. She allowed her hand to linger in his. His whole nature was afire with the love he bore her. Margery glided away. She had heard all she required to hear. The fashionable assemblage, like all others of its character, came to a conclusion, carriages arrriving in quick succession to carry away the departing guests.

The next day the society columns were ringing with accounts describing the luxuriance of the soiree. They praised the charming hostess. They dwelt on the liberality of the host. They wrote of what the world of music had lost, referring to the gifted accomplishments of Beverly's wife, little dreaming of the dark cloud hanging over the host and his lady.

LI.

MARGERY REPAYS LEX BEVERLY.

Margery and Jim drove to their Randwick home in silence. This astute wife was thinking of ways and means to save Ann.

"Marry old Jim," Beverly had said to her ocross the bar, "and the gates of Heaven are open to you." She had found his words come true. He had saved her. and she must save his wife.

Next morning at breakfast she told Jim. He looked very concerned when his wife told him how she had listened to them making their arrangements for flight.

"Margery," Jim had said seriously, "as a guest, my dear, I do not like the idea of you following your hostess and eavesdropping."

"Ah, Jim, to save her and Lex I would be guilty of worse doings."

"Yes, Margery," he agreed, "they must be saved, if possible. What is the next step you propose to adopt?" he asked her.

"That requires much mature reflection," she replied. "I have thought deeply, and cannot determine a satisfactory or definite action. Ann cannot be approached, for to know that her intrigue has been discovered would only intensify her desire to flee with her lover. Beverly does not love her; I do not believe that he possesses an ounce of affection for her. When he discovers all, as he must, there will not be wounded love to enrage him. I am determined to save her, Jim."

The evening when Jim returned from the city, Margery had made up her mind what course to follow. After tea when the pipe was filled. and Margery perched in her favourite position, Jim asked,

"Well, Margery, what have you decided to do to save Ann?"

"I am going to-morrow afternoon to see Lex. He was my salvation, and it will be my privilege to be the salvation of his wife. I propose to put the whole position before him."

"Margery, you must have a heart like a lion. I could not undertake such a business."

When Margery arrived at Beverly's office she found him engaged. She was told he would not be long.

Beverly a few minutes before had been visited by a respectable looking, well dressed stranger. When this man had been shown into the office he addressed Beverly.

"Good day, Mr. Beverly. You do not remember me?"

"No," answered Beverly. "I cannot rceall you."

The other had smiled. "I was breaking in horses on your big cattle ranch in Central Australia when we first met," he said.

"I now remember you." answered Beverly, shaking hands.

"I was passing through Sydney," the breaker said, "and could not resist the temptation to call upon you. I thought it would be some satisfaction for you to learn that your kindly action to me was not wasted. I followed your advice and got over to the Argentine, where I have a fair property. I have come over to take an old sweetheart back with me."

"I am indeed glad to hear of your prosperity. I saw some few years ago where the true facts of the case for which you were sentenced, came to light. At the time I assisted you I believed you to be an innocent man."

"Once more, Mr. Beverly, my most grateful thanks. I realise you are a busy man. I will not take up your time." He proffered his hand, which Beverly shook in a friendly parting.

Beverly sat reflecting upon the episode. A smile passed over his face at the remembrance of the Inspector's chagrin when he discovered he had surrounded a log, instead of, as he expected, the sleeping form of the escapee. He remembered the perplexity of the police officers regarding the manner in which the news was communicated to the gaol-breaker; that the police were upon his tracks. He was in the middle of these reflections when Margery was shown into his presence.

"This is an honour you rarely pay me, Margery," he said, rising to hand her to a chair. "Need I tell you how pleased I am to see you. Quite by yourself?" he continued.

"Yes," she answered. "I just left Jim busy at the office."

"And what honour am I indebted to for this pleasant, unexpected visit?"

Margery's face wore a very serious expression. By nature a bright, animated creature, she fully realised the serious nature of the mission she had ventured out upon, but the determination was there, to leave no stone unturned to save Beverly and his wife from the dreadful disaster that overshadowed their lives.

"Lex," she commenced. "I have called to talk over a very private matter with you. Are we free to converse without being overheard?"

"Well, yes," he responded, wonderingly. "But I have a private room for conversation of the strictest character or confidence."

"I would prefer to discuss the matter with you in there," she said.

He rose and opened the door for her to pass through, closing it carefully after they had passed through. They sat at a table, facing each other.

"I have much to say to you of the gravest importance; a matter that concerns you deeply. It is likely that what I have to communicate to you will cause you both distress and pain. Once you rendered me a life-long service. Before my mind this

moment, Lex, is the scene at Coogee, when I was struggling to escape from that scoundrel who sought to entrap me."

Beverly was wondering why, after so many years, this episode was referred to.

"Coupled with the liveliest feelings of gratitude your goodness has always remained green in my memory, and if I made a discovery concerning your own welfare and happiness, and made no attempt or effort to assist you, I would not deserve the name of being what I trust I am, or at least what I try to be—a good woman."

Beverly's mind at once flew back to the tragedy of the past. If Margery had made any discovery of that dark episode, he would rather she let sleeping dogs lie

"As to being a good woman, Margery," he said, "you are one of the best."

"Thank you, Lex," she answered. "I know I have always possessed your good will." Margery's face still wore the serious expression, mingled with a look of determination to go on wit the business.

"The night of the ball at your place," she commenced, "I made a discovery that concerns you very gravely, and in placing this knowledge before you, Lex, I am actuated by one motive—to assist to my uttermost, yourself and another. That evening, Lex, I discovered that Frank Barrington loves Ann passionately."

"What!" exclaimed Beverly, his face assuming a most serious aspect. "A favourite guest in my home. Surely, Margery, you are mistaken. I would not wrong a visitor to my house, a welcome one, a friend of my wife's, by such unworthy suspicion."

Whilst he was speaking, Margery was regarding him keenly.

"I would not visit you here, Lex, unless my mission was of the gravest importance. Allow me to place all the information I have at your disposal. I feel confident, after I have told you all, you will at once see the wisdom of the course I have adopted. Before I proceed to lay the facts before you, I must ask you to remember this: That you have never, from your marriage day, displayed an ounce of love for Ann. Were you right in marrying her and shackling her to the life of a man, whom people say had lost his soul?"

He sat listening thoughtfully to Margery's conversation. He had possessed ever a deep regard for his friend's wife. Had she been a younger sister, his respect could not have been greater. He had always appreciated her sound common sense, and knew in this case he could offer no contradiction to her reasoning.

Then Margery told him the story from the beginning, repeating, word for word, the conversation her husband had heard at the club. She told him of the projected elopement. He sat throughout the recital with a face betraying little or no emotion.

At the conclusion Margery said, "To save her as you saved me, have I done this."

"Margery," he said, in calm tones, "you have repaid me twenty-fold."

She rose to leave, coming over to the side of the table where she stood, he took both her hands in his own. The glistening drops were stealing down her cheeks. She realised Ann was saved.

"Margery," Beverly said, looking down into the sincere face, "you have indeed made me your debtor."

He showed her to the door, opening it for her to pass through. A kind pressure of the hand assured Margery how much he thought of her action.

LII.

ANN IS SAVED.

After Margery had left Beverly returned to the privacy of his office. "Life is strange," he muttered. "For McMaster I found Heaven; for myself Hell."

He sat in deep reflection. If his feelings were ruffled during Margery's recital, he was now perfectly composed. He was thinking of Margery's words. "Were you right in marrying her, shackling her to the life of a man whom people say has lost his soul?" Her association with him had been of the coldest character. He realised when he wedded her, as far as he was concerned, love could play no part in the union of their lives. He returned home as usual. He waited, dressed for dinner, for his wife's entrance into the elegantly furnished dining room. Ann sent down her apologies. "She would take tea only, in her room," the maid explained. "Mrs. Beverly was suffering from a severe headache."

He smiled sadly, sat down, and proceeded with the dinner. After he had finished he retired to the library. Selecting a book from the well-stocked shelves, he commenced to read. At intervals he raised his eyes, carefully noting the hands of the clock. When they pointed to a certain time he arose, turned the lights low, and walked through a private door into the grounds. He picked a certain spot and took his stand in silence. He stood alongside a huge magnolia. Did his vigil remind him of the one he had kept in the far North of Queensland, with eye intent upon the low light burning in the window of a small iron house? He had not long to wait. A vehicle drew up at the small side gate. A figure alighted, and hastily approaching the gate, opened it and walked straight to where Beverly silently stood. His figure was hid by the trunk of the magnolia tree. Barrington, for it was he, stopped close to where Beverly stood. He was startled to observe a movement. Before he could speak, Beverly stepped into the moonlight and addressed him. "I am here to meet you in place of my wife," he said.

Immediately Barrington drew a firearm. He was of much smaller stature than Beverly, and realised he was no match for the well knit frame of the injured man.

"Put that weapon away," commanded Beverly. "I have not met you here to quarrel or fight, or to deal out retribution or ask for justice or satisfaction for the wrong you intended to inflict upon me. I have met you here to tell you to continue your

intended journey alone. To tell you to go on your knees every night for the rest of your life, thanking Him who gave you that life for the preservation of the honour of the woman you love. To-morrow, when your gaze rests upon the awakening dawn, reflect on the fact, your love still sheds its light upon the head of an honourable woman, not a dishonourable one. For the remainder of your life, let this hour be your sublimest; the hour that she whom you loved, whom you would have destroyed, was preserved for a life of purity, instead of one associated with shame and dishonour. Go your way," he concluded, in stern tones, with arm outstreached and forefinger pointing in the direction of the small gate.

Barrington essayed to speak, but no words came. He slowly walked away. The sound of the cab wheels had barely died away when, by the light of the moon, crossing the grounds like some guilty thing, Beverly saw the form of his wife.

She approached the glade where Beverly waited. She thought Barrington was there, and came forward timidly, looking down.

"Frank," she commenced, "I have had my fight and won my battle. All day I have prayed to God for strength to resist this, the greatest temptation of my life. I have won, Frank. I cannot leave my husband. Take this letter," she continued, holding it out to him, "it contains my last word between us."

She looked up, cast a fear stricken face upon him whom she had been addressing. "Lex!" she exclaimed, and fell in a swoon at his feet.

His face bore no signs of anger, resentment, or bitterness. A look of sadness spread o'er his features as he gazed down upon the unconscious form at his feet. Well he realised how much he was to blame for her position. Had he bestowed any love, any affection upon her? These thoughts passed through his mind as he stood gazing sorrowfully at the slight form. In the first dawn of their married life, when she had rested with her head pillowed upon his breast, smouldering within her was a deep affection for him. Had his nature in the slightest degree been of a responsible character, had his soul possessed any animation, sufficient to produce the slightest reciprocation, the bright flame of love would have quickly developed, to be his until death separated them. He, this man without feeling, had lived by her side, incapable of effort. The shouldering spark of affection lingered in her breast until the coldness of her husband's nature extinguished it. He had permitted it to die out. He gathered her tenderly in his arms. There was a seat not far distant, to which he carried her. He placed her gently on the seat, allowing her head to rest upon his breast. When she recovered from the swoon she found herself reclining on the seat. Around her waist she felt her husband's protecting arm. Collecting her thoughts she realised the incidents of the last few

minutes. She looked up at the kindly, sympathetic face gazing down upon her, and burst into a violent fit of sobbing.

He allowed her emotion to subside, clasping her tenderly to his side. When she recovered sufficiently to address him she asked, "Lex, how can you ever forgive me?"

"Ann," he answered, "have I nothing to ask forgiveness for? I have much indeed. Listen, girl, until I unfold some pages of the past. For years I have carried the burden of a dark page in the book of my life. It has overshadowed my existence like some evil thing.

There in the silence of the bright night, seated under the spreading boughs of the sweet smelling magnolia tree, with the full moon's beams playing gymnastic feats through the gently-waving leaves of the big tree, Beverly told her of the tragedy of the North. When he told of Joyce's death, in womanly sympathy she sobbed upon his breast.

"It was this load of sorrow that weighed upon my conscience, that made me appear the man of stone you were justified in thinking me," he told her.

Together they entered the house, each possessing a deep sympathy for the sufferings of the other.

From that hour Beverly and his wife lived, still without love in their home, but with a feeling and understanding between them that made the life of each more tolerant to the other. Margery had more than repaid for her salvation.

Some few months had elapsed since the episode, when Beverly received a letter from Barrington.

In it he wrote: "Ever green in my memory will live the nobility of your attitude on that memorable night. Equally so, live your words: 'For the remainder of your life, let this hour be your sublimest; the hour that she whom you loved, whom you would have destroyed, was preserved for a life of purity, instead of one associated with shame and dishonour.' Ah, Beverly," he continued to write, "To-night I sit beside my good old mother. I gaze upon her snow-white hair, her Godly face, and thank Him for your intervention. Carried away with the feelings of deep passionate love, the only one of my life, I was blind to the criminal folly of my action. I thank God the memory of the past love is of a pure woman. A shudder passes through my frame, when I truly realise the narrow escape I had from a dreadful fate. Standing on the brink of Hell's blackest pit, prepared to plunge into its bottomless depths, and drag down the pure soul of another being with me, is it any wonder, Beverly, that every day of my life I feel thankful my conscience is not loaded with the double sin. I would ask you to believe I bear you the greatest gratitude. No words I could write would tell you how deep this feeling is for you. Farewell, farewell. Yours in sorrow for the past.—F. Barrington."

Beverly had received this letter during the day in his office. After he had perused it, he rested with his head between his

hands. "Would to God!" he murmured, "somebody's intervention had saved the woman I loved. Hell's blackest pit," he soliloquised. "Had we been saved, what a world of sorrow and suffering she would have escaped. The thoughts of the past wrung a groan from him. He was saved on the very brink of Hell. I found its very depths, and dragged down with me the soul of the noblest woman in the world," he continued.

After dinner, on the same day, he and Ann were quietly reading in the library. He took the letter from his pocket book, and passed it over to her. She read it in silence. After she had perused it, she as silently passed it back to him. He held it over the grate, where the fire was burning, and watched it as the flames consumed it. Man and wife realised, that page in the history of their lives, was closed for ever.

LIII.

GEOFFERY'S AUNT FORMS A SUDDEN RESOLVE.

Man's enemy, Father Time, had again been busy with his scythe, mowing off the weeks, the months, and the years. Almost twenty of the latter had he scored off against humanity's account since the beginning of this story. Since the incidents of the last chapers were recorded, a span of fourteen years had passed, and once again we must take our readers across the mighty deep and pass the picturesque house on the road, just outside the town of Dorset, looking as bright and well preserved as the first day we introduced it.

Seated on the very verandah where Geoffrey and his good aunt sat, when the first presented them to our readers, was the upright, comely form of the same good aunt, Grace. Her hair was now almost white, but the eye was still bright and clear, the complexion still as fresh-looking as ever.

She had just received the Australian mail. She was sitting, with the letter she had just perused in her hand, on her countenance a look of profound disappointment.

"Well, well," she soliloquised, "I am disappointed. Never so much so in my life. What ever has made him change his plans," she murmured. "I am truly vexed." She looked down the road and a concerned look appeared upon her face.

Side by side, a gentleman and a lady were riding in the direction of her place.

"If he could only see her I believe the rest would be easy," she murmurmed to herself. "They have nothing in the county showing so much of the thorough-bred lady," and her looks rested admiringly upon the approaching form of the lady on horseback.

"A fitting wife for the best in the land. "Oh," she muttered, in tones of deep disgust, "It is too aggravating."

The riders stopped at the gate.

"Will you come in and take tea," the lady enquired of her companion.

"Thank you, Isabel, with the greatest of pleasure," he replied. He helped her to alight, opened the gate, and gave the horses to the groom.

"Did you enjoy your ride, Isabel," Aunt Grace asked.

"Thank you, Aunt Grace, greatly. We had a lovely spin," replied Isabel.

The maid came along with the tea. They made a very handsome picture these three. The reader will guess who Isabel is. She has just reached her twentieth year, and, as McCallum had portended, she had developed into a beautiful woman. Excepting for the eyes, which were brown, she was the living picture of her dead mother. Her figure resembled the dead Joyce's to a remarkable extent, just if anything a little taller. She possessed the same straight bearing and handsome features, the same affability of demeanour, and on horseback, like her dead mother, looked perfect.

Aunt Grace had watched her mature into handsome womanhood. Often in silent admiration had her eyes rested upon the form of Geoffrey's protege. Moving in the same atmosphere as the country's best families, the query had often been asked, "Who is that handsome, wellbred-looking girl?"

Invariably the answer would be "A Miss Beverly. A niece of a distant relation of Miss Harlands."

Beyond that no further knowledge of her ancestry was known.

Aunt Grace had often wondered from whom had she inherited the natural airs and instincts of a lady. Her great grandfather, the profligate Sir Roger Beverly, in his day had been one of the most polished, debonair members of London Society. The blood had ran in the immaculate veins of Sir Roger was the same blood that flowed through the veins of Isabel Beverly.

As Aunt Grace had said, "Fit to be the wife of the best in the land."

Her companion, Sidney Trevors, a few years her senior, was the only son of Sir Gregory Trevors, one of the richest men in the county. He and Isabel had been boy and girl pals, and excepting in a higher social scale, it was Tom Wells and Joyce Hilston over again. Mothers with eligible daughters, with envious eyes viewed young Trevor's devoted attention to the handsome Isabel.

"Who is she?" they were always asking. "It is all very fine for Aunt Grace to say she is Mr. Armitage's ward, but where does she come from, and who were her parents?" This was information Trevor's mother had so far failed to extract from Aunt Grace.

Trevors had already intimated to his parents his wish to make Isabel his wife, but the old baronet had shaken his head.

"You should know that you cannot bring a wife into the house whose ancestors are shrouded in mystery. It is impossible, my boy."

His good mother advised him. "Be prudent, Sidney," she asked him. Miss Beverly is all I could look for in a daughter, excepting so little information is forthcoming regarding her antecedents. Aunt Grace does not know, or will not tell. I have asked her pointedly, and told her my reasons. Always

the same evasive replies. It would look as if she is fencing. Who Miss Beverly is must be cleared up, that surely you realise, Sidney."

"I want your word," the father once had said to him, "that you will not make any declaration of your affection until I am satisfied you can bring her into this house a fitting daughter."

The young man had given a very reluctant consent.

Tea was over and Mr. Trevors had taken his departure.

Isabel at once turned to her Aunt, "Aunt Grace, dear," she said, you are annoyed. What is it, dear Aunt?" she asked.

"I truly am annoyed. Never more so. The Australian mail is in, and Geoffrey calmly writes to tell me he has changed his plans regarding his visit to England. Did you ever hear of such an aggravating thing?" she said, angrily. "I am dreadfully disappointed."

She handed the letter to Isabel to read. Aunt Grace watched her closely whilst she perused it, the unmistakable signs of disappointment were as evident with Isabel as they were with herself. There was a suspicion in the mind of Aunt Grace that Isabel had developed a deeper feeling for her nephew than the ordinary affection a young girl would bear the man who stood in the position of guardian to her. If this was so, it was the dearest wish of her heart to see the match materialise.

She knew of Geoffrey's love for the girl's mother, and had woven her own romance around their lives. She could not quite define Isabel's feelings towards Sidney Trevors. If Trevors proposed, would the girl turn down such a brilliant offer? Not a girl in the county would. Would Isabel? She could not feel too sure.

She was weighing the situation up, thinking deeply. Isabel had retired to her room. At length she came to a sudden resolve.

"Isabel," she called. The girl came out.

"Yes, Aunt Grace," she said.

"Do you know what I have resolved to do?"

Isabel waited for her to explain.

"I have made up my mind to visit Australia. Geoffrey will not come home. Goodness knows when he proposes to visit me. I will beard the lion in his den; we will have no trouble in leasing the property for twelve months."

"Truly, Aunt. Will you really go out to Australia?" excitedly exclaimed Isabel.

"Yes. Once I make up my mind to do a certain thing, I never change it," she said.

It was soon known right throughout the county that Miss Harland was going out to Australia, and had leased her place for twelve months.

A few days afterwards Trevors rode up. He passed through the gate, giving his horse to the groom, who came out to take it. Isabel was on the verandah.

"Sit down," she requested. "Aunt Grace will be here in a minute."

"Do I hear rightly, Isabel. Are you and your aunt going out to Australia?" he queried.

"Quite rightly," she answered. "Aunt Grace is very anxious to see Mr. Armitage. It is impossible for him to come for some considerable time. To use Aunt Grace's own words, she has decided to 'beard the lion in his den,' and go out to Australia."

He looked down and flicked his boots with his riding whip.

"Will you take tea?" she asked.

"No, thank you, Isabel," he replied. "Your early departure for the land of the Southern Cross," he continued, "has prompted me to come to a decision, that under other circumstances I would not have formed so suddenly. "That decision that I refer to Isabel, is to ask you to be my wife. We have almost grown up together since I have reached manhood's estate, the boy and girl sweetheart feeling, that I always experienced for you, has ripened into strong love. Isabel, can you love me well enough to be my wife?" he asked, his voice full of the emotion he felt.

Isabel looked him straight in the face. "Need I tell you how deeply sensible I am of the honour you have conferred on me. I realise to the fullest extent the great tribute you have offered me, in proffering your love, the love of a good, honourable man. No greater compliment could I receive." There was a deep pathos in the tones of her voice. It reflected the sincerity of her feelings.

"I cannot love you as one should love the man to whom she gives her hand in marriage. I would be wrong in accepting you for your rank, wealth, and station. As a friend, I possess a deep regard for you. The affection of one friend for another is all I can offer. I am aware my refusal pains, but if it was otherwise, I would not be honest to myself, nor would I be honest to you."

He rose, put his hand out, with head aside, saying, "Goodbye, I thank you for your words, and for the manner in which you have expressed them."

He rode straight home and entered his father's study.

"Father," he said, "I am sorry. I broke my word. I proposed to Miss Beverly."

The old Baronet stormed up at once. "It was a dishonourable thing to do. Your word to anybody should be your bond. A man without a word of honour is a despicable creature. "I never imagined you could be guilty of breaking your word," he continued.

"There is no occasion for a storm. I was wrong, I know. But out riding this afternoon I accidently discovered Isabel was leaving for Australia. On the spur of the moment, I could not resist the temptation to ride over and ascertain my fate."

"Oh, your fate," angrily responded the old man. "Anybody could tell you what that would be."

A sad smile passed over the young man's face. The mother had entered and had heard most of the conversation.

"I am sorry to say, mother," he addressed that parent, "that Isabel turned me down."

"What," uttered the old Baronet. "Do I understand you to say she declined your offer?"

"Yes," the younger man said, sorrowfully. "Her words were beautiful, mother, and the tones of her voice reflected the sorrow she felt at causing pain. She displayed a nobility of soul, possessed by very few women. Lucky, indeed, will be the man who wins her hand. He will win a life's devotion."

The old Baronet was beginning to experience some feelings of regret that his son had lost this noble girl.

"I would like the matter to drop," said the younger man. "I feel certain no word of the matter will ever be mentioned by Isabel or her aunt."

And it was so. The county never knew that young Trevor had proposed and was refused. As time went on and not a breath of rumour floated, the Baronet expressed the opinion to his good lady, "That Miss Beverly was one in a thousand."

Aunt Grace, from her position just within the hall, had heard almost every word. When Isabel's last word was spoken, and Trevors had departed, she walked out and wrapped the girl in her arms.

Everything was arranged, and before long, Aunt Grace and Isabel had left for the land where the sun evelastingly shines.

LIV.

THE REASON GEOFFERY CANCELLED HIS VISIT.

Let us return to Geoffrey Armitage. He has prospered in the Pastoral World of Australia, and was now a rich Queensland squatter. He was a well-known figure in Brisbane, one of the Queensland Club's most popular members, and equally so at the Union in Sydney. Geoffrey had reached the mature years of forty, and was still single. He was a much sought after man, due to his riches, good looks, and affability of manner. Women with marriageable daughters looked longingly at him. Men spoke of him as a strictly honourable man. Although he never raced, he was passionately fond of the game, and was a constant visitor at the Queensland Turf Club's Annual Meetings. He was a prominent figure on the lawn at Ascot. Geoffrey had a wonderful leaning towards the Australian girls. "All," he had once said to a friend, when duscussing them. "surround themselves with such an atmosphere of brightness." His thoughts often turned to one, who he considered has been the brightest of them all. He was well known as a champion for the girls of the land of his adoption. He possessed a great admiration for them. Many beautiful and handsome girls had crossed Geoffrey's path during the intervening years, girls who would adorn the best home in the world. The subject of marriage often crossed his mind. For a time he would reflect on the matter, but dismiss the subject as utterly impossible. With him, the memory of the dead Joyce was as green to-day as when she passed away.

He was now a big holder of territory in Queensland, Merthon, the big run owned by Richard Beverly at the commencement of this story, was now held by Armitage.

It was at the old homestead, where Lex Beverly directed the ill-fated letter to Joyce Hilston, that he had his headquarters. Megson had long ago sold out and returned to England.

Armitage had made all arrangements to pay England a lengthy visit. Twice he had been home since his first visit with Isabel. He now expected to leave any day for an extensive holiday. The mail had just arrived. He had just opened the bag, and had turned the letters out on to the office table. His face lit up with pleasure. The English mail was enclosed in the bag. The oversea mail was always keenly appreciated by Geoffrey. Picking out his English letters, he commenced to

peruse their contents. A smile passed over his face when he read of his aunt's anxiety to hear of his departure for the Old Country. He read how keenly she and Isabel were looking forward to his visit. The last time he visited them Isabel had just turned thirteen. He perused Aunt Grace's last written injunctions "To hurry along and catch the steamer Homeward bound," as she put it.

There was a packet of photographs. He cut the string that held the packet together. There was a photo of his good aunt, almost as white as snow. Geoffrey gazed affectionately at the kindly form of her, who had been more than a mother to him. He put it aside reverently, and took up the next one. It was a picture of Isabel, just turned twenty. He looked earnestly at the handsome face. It held him fascinated. Holding the photo. in his hand, he allowed his head to rest upon his arm upon the table. Something like a groan escaped his lips. He raised his head and again gazed upon the good-looking face. Whilst he looked long and ardently at the picture, like a revelation, the fact burst upon him, the love he had nourished for the memory of the mother, was born afresh within his breast for the daughter, intensified by the passion of matured manhood.

"How can I?" he muttered to himself. "How can I go home to suffer the torture of seeing her wooed and won by a younger man? I am safer here with thousands of miles between her fascinating presence and me. To be in the same house, to see some one nearer her own age, an accepted lover, would be more than I could bear with equanimity. As I went on loving the memory of the dead mother, so must it be with the living daughter."

That was the reason Geoffrey altered his plans, so much to the annoyance of Aunt Grace.

In a few months time, Geoffrey got a letter from Aunt Grace that created grave concern in his mind. It was brief, and ran as follows:—

My Dearest Geoff.,—

Apologies for brevity. By the time you receive this letter, we will be well on our way to the Land of The Southern Cross. How well I can imagine the look of surprise on your face, as you read this intelligence. Hurry down to the great City of Sydney of yours, and lease a house for twelve months, for that is the time we are going to intrude our society upon you. As the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain. Isabel is a great horsewoman, and if you are exhibiting this year, reserve her some mounts. I believe we arrive just in time for the Great Royal Show. Good-bye, my dear Geoff. Isabel sends her love.

Ever yours,

AUNT GRACE.

Armitage received this intelligence with very grave looks. This was the very last thing he expected to hear His aunt taking this long, tedious journey. Whatever induced her to undertake this trip? he wondered. However, there was only one thing to do. Go to Sydney and prepare a welcome for her. With a very grave face, he went about his preparations to leave the station.

LV.

AUNT GRACE ARRIVES IN AUSTRALIA.

The trip out to Australia was not without incident. Amongst the passengers was a famous member of the House of Commons. He was a young man, with brilliant prospects, spoken of in the English political world as a coming man.

Partly for health reasons, partly for official reasons, he was making the trip to Australia. Aunt Grace soon perceived that her handsome charge displayed a decided preference for the young Parliamentarian's society. He was a brilliant conversationalist, a popular favourite aboard.

Aunt Grace watched events with a very jealous eye. Warren Hadstone possessed a charming personality, came of a very old English family, and was what the world would call a very attractive man. Any woman would have felt flattered receiving the attention he was bestowing upon Isabel.

One trait in Isabel's character pleased Aunt Grace. She was always very self possessed. No matter who composed the company, she was always well contained. Nevertheless, Aunt Grace was wishing the long ocean journey would reach its termination.

Like all voyages, the end arrived. When the big liner berthed at the Circular Quay, Armitage was waiting on the wharf to welcome them. Geoffrey gazed up at the handsome face of Isabel, smiling her welcome down upon him, and felt himself, as old Tom the Cook would have put it, "Gone a million again."

With jealous eye, he watched the attentions a clean-shaven young man was bestowing upon her, and concluded his troubles had already commenced.

He and his good aunt met affectionately. He turned to Isabel, taking both her hands in his own, and complimented her on her advancement. She was thirteen when he saw her last.

She simply said, "I am gratified if you are pleased."

Geoffrey had secured the lease of a fine residence at Double Bay. They were soon at their new home, and in a day or two settled comfortably.

Aunt Grace was soon in love with the sunny land. Geoffery told her the longer she remained the deeper she would love it. You will find the Australian people a very bright race, possess-

ing a wonderful love for their glorious country, equalled in its sincerity and depth by their loyalty to ours.

The Royal Show was only a few weeks off at the time of their arrival. Geoffrey had already arranged several rides for his ward. Like her mother, she was a great horsewoman, and Armitage knew she would win her share of the laurels.

The Show was on, and the most interesting events, the jumping, were in full progress. Isabel was already winning fame for her riding. Armitage face glowed with the pleasure he experienced. After each round, Isabel's fine work would be cheered to the echo.

Beverly had been unavoidably detained, and he had hurried out to be in time for the jumping events. When he arrived, the ring side was resounding with applause, that marked some specially fine work. Hurrying to the stand, he enquired from a friend. "What is the applause for?"

"The English girls' riding," his friend replied. "She is a champion.

He was a great admirer of accomplished riding, and immediately placed himself in full view of the ring. He watched her as she took jump after jump magnificently. For a moment his heart stood still. He heard the applause ringing in his ears, but a mist was before his eyes. The figure and form of Isabel was the counterpart of the dead Joyce. Once more he was in the far North. Again he saw the figure of Joyce Hilston, clearing the gate in front of the Shanty.

He was called away on important Show business, and for a time had to devote his attention to the official affairs of the Society.

"What strange trick is my imagination playing me?" he asked himself. "This rider, the living image in form and figure of her whom he remembered so well. What connection," he queried himself, "could there be between this English girl and his dead wife? No connection," he concluded; "absolutely none."

Some strange resemblance had once more stirred those reminiscences of the black post. If Beverly was struck with the resemblance between the English girl and his dead love, a greater shock awaited him that night at Her Majesty's Theatre. A popular English Opera Company were performing at the big theatre. It was packed from floor to ceiling. Geoffrey had engaged a box on the left wing of the theatre.

His party consisted of himself, Isabel, and Aunt Grace.

That night Isabel looked a veritable blaze of beauty. The triumphs of the day had left a pronounced colour in the handsome face. Eyes and glasses were directed towards the party as they took their seats. Shortly after, Lex Beverly and his party arrived, and entered a box opposite. One of Beverly's friends remarked to him, "What a handsome girl, Beverly. She

who rode so well to-day? Sitting in the same box as Armitage opposite."

Beverly turned his eyes in the direction of Armitage's box. He found the eyes of the girl were fixed upon him. She immediately withdrew them, and entered into conversation with Geoffrey.

"Who is that fine-looking man opposite, Mr. Armitage?" she asked "Do you not think he wears a very sad expression?"

"That is Mr. Beverly," he replied. "The same name as yourself. He is one of Australia's richest men. He is noted for his great generosity."

"I would take him to be a good man," she answered. "A man to whom it gave pleasure to extend kindness to others."

Beverly had in the meantime been passing his hand vaguely across his forehead, as if suffering from some mental defect.

"Lex," Ann remarked, "Mr. Graham has addressed you no less than three times without acknowledgment. "Are you not well," she inquired, in anxious tones.

"I am sorry, Mr. Graham," he said, turning to his guest. "I had a nasty turn."

He returned his gaze in the direction of the box opposite again. Once more he withdrew them, confused in mind.

"What was wrong?" he asked himself. "What was wrong with his mind? Was his imagination at fault? Was he suffering from hallucinations?" He asked to be pardoned and withdrew from the box just before the curtain rose. He entered the vestibule and tried to think. Had the dead girl came to life? Who was this girl, the living image of the memory that was still green within his breast?"

He became more composed, and re-entered the box. He sat well back, and spent the evening with his eyes glued on the handsome face in the opposite box before him. He knew Armitage well, but Isabel and Aunt Grace he had never before seen. He made enquiries next day, and ascertained that the elderly lady was the younger one's aunt. Some relation to Armitage. He was also told they were paying Mr. Armitage a visit, he being a near relation of the elderly lady, and would remain in Sydney some months.

LVI.

MARGERY DELIGHTS AUNT GRACE.

Three months had passed away since Aunt Grace and Isabel had arrived in Australia. As Geoffrey had told them, the longer they lived in the sunny land the dearer would it become to them.

Warren Hadstone, the brilliant Member of the House of Commons, still lingered in Sydney. Rumour was busy with his name and Isabel's. It was freely stated, although he arrived single, he would return married. He and Isabel had met repeatedly at evening functions, and his devotedness to her was extremely marked. He was a source of great annoyance to Aunt Grace.

"Have I brought her this long journey to have, in the end, the dearest wishes of my heart frustrated?" she asked herself twenty times a day. She devoutly wished some crisis would arise at home in the House of Commons, compelling Hadstone to return to his Parliamentary duties.

That Hadstone was deeply in love with Isabel, there could be no doubt. The attention puzzling the mentality of Aunt Grace was, "Is Isabel in love with him?" He was a popular man in all circles in the city. Any girl must feel flattered with his attentions. No girl would ever repel them. Were they, too, acceptable to Isabel?

Poor Aunt Grace was a worried woman. Geoffrey was an enigma to her. She knew how loyal the family blood was to its first love.

"Was Geoffrey never to fall in love again? Were all the castles she had built in the air regarding these two she loved best in the world to come with a crash to the ground?"

He was now on the eve of leaving for the North. "Important station matters requiring his attention," he explained.

"Important fiddlesticks," impatiently answered his aunt. "Rediculous this idea of yours running away after the distance I travelled to have the pleasure of your company."

Geoffrey was not worried a great deal about the station matters. What upset his peace of mind was the apparently acceptable attentions of Hadstone to his ward. He was miserable in mind. He realised he was out of the running. No hope at forty, he told himself, with a touch of bitterness.

It was in the cool of the afternoon. Geoffrey and his aunt were conversing on the topics of the day. Suddenly his aunt

asked him, "Geoff., do you ever intend to marry? I hope so," she continued; "it would be a pity to let the direct line of the family die out."

"There are plenty of branches to keep it going," he replied.

"You are only a young man," she answered; "really in the prime of life. It is only right that you should marry," she said pointedly.

"I must be candid with you, my dear aunt," he said. "I will never marry."

"Rubbish," she said. "You have no right to come to such a foolish decision. With your wealth, your popularity, and I am sure you look no older than thirty, you could marry well."

Do not continue the subject, Aunt," he replied. "It is not a pleasant one with me. I have firmly decided not to marry."

His Aunt looked dreadfully disappointed. Geoffrey knew he had pained her. It was the last thing in the world he wished to be guilty of, but he spoke truly The subject was a disagreeable one with him He could only think of the bonds of matrimony with one form before him. Regarding that match as absolutely hopeless, he had made up his mind, as he had told his Aunt, to remain single.

The weeks slipped by, weeks that were full of pleasure and gaiety. The important social function of the year was on the eve of eventuating, the Annual Government House Ball.

Geoffrey and his party, the Beverlys and McMasters were invited guests. McMaster was now an important figure in the political world of the city.

Beverly was late in arriving. The first figure that his eye rested on was the form of Isabel. From a secluded spot he studied it in every detail.

"If God had sent her back to the world," he muttered, "the likeness could not be more unmistakable. The face and form of Joyce was before his mind."

Isabel was dancing at the time with Warren Hadstone.

"A comely couple," he thought, as his looks rested upon them. He, like the rest of the Sydney world, regarded their future as being linked. Isabel's disposition, like her mother's, was a truly responsive one, but with such a nature there exists an unbridgable gulf between the response to love and the response to ordinary friendship.

It was later in the evening. Couples were floating around the large ball-room to the strains of seductive music. Armitage was dancing with Isabel. He was still a good-looking man, carrying his years well, looking not more than thirty-two or thirty-three.

That day he had suffered from a bad headache, a touch of northern malaria. During the dance with his ward, it increased in violence.

"Isabel," he said, "do you mind if I rest. My head is simply splitting?"

She threw a quick-concerned glance up at his face, a look that told volumes to any experienced eye that chanced to catch it.

There is a time, unknown to the being, when the eye reflects the feelings of the soul. There was one experienced eye that caught the upward look, and also heard the words of Geoffrey.

McMaster and his wife were floating around, quite close to Isabel and Armitage. His complaint of his head clearly reached the ears of Margery. Her quick eye detected the anxious look Isabel threw up at Armitage.

"Oh, oh," chuckled the astute woman to herself, "is that how the land lies. What a surprise awaits old Sydney's gossips. The House of Commons' man is not in the running."

Her husband looked down at her, saying, "Margery, are you speaking?"

"Not quite, Jim. I have just made a wonderful discovery. It is good reading. I will tell you all to-morrow at breakfast. It will keep until then."

At breakfast in the morning, McMaster asked his wife, "Well, Margery, what was this wonderful discovery you made last night?"

"Something startling, Jim. Good cheerful revelation. No mistake about it being genuine. You would never guess its nature."

"Well, do not keep me in suspense. What is this good news?"

"The handsome Isabel Beverly is in love with your elderly friend, Mr. Armitage."

"Margery, do you truly tell me so?" exclaimed McMaster in surprised tones.

"Quite alright, Jim. No doubt whatever. An absolute fact," she replied.

"Well, Margery, you are rarely wrong. I know that from experience. I do sincerely hope you are quite correct," he answered. From what do your draw your deductions?" he asked.

His wife explained the scene of the previous evening.

"I verily believe, Margery, your eyes are everywhere," he answered. "You apparently miss very little. Although I was your partner at the time, the whole business passed absolutely unnoticed, as far as I was concerned."

A feeling of deep friendship had sprung up between Margery and Aunt Grace. The refined Englishwoman had taken a great liking to this bright Australian of her own sex. Margery reciprocated the good feeling felt for her by Aunt Grace. Armitage's Aunt held a high appreciation of the good common sense of the Cabinet Minister's wife. She liked her conversation, always free from the frivolous gossip that her sex delight

ed to exchange with one another. She had found Margery a woman who would creat interesting subjects to discuss, without introducing the names of intimate associations.

They were taking tea together. Aunt Grace was complaining of Geoff.

"Mrs. McMaster, I am deeply disappointed in my nephew. Fancy making this long and tedious journey, thinking for a full twelve months I was to enjoy his society. All at once he decides that there are pressing station duties requiring his attention, and he must leave for the North. Is it not aggravating. I am anxious for him to marry. He is the direct line of the old family. It is natural I would like to see it preserved. But he informs me, apparently without interest, the subject is distasteful to him. He has decided not to marry."

Margery, with her natural astuteness, takes in all Aunt Grace pours into her ears, and smiles benignly to herself.

"I would not worry about the prospects of Mr. Armitage marrying," answered Margery. "He will marry for a certainty."

Aunt Grace looked up with an incomprehensible expression written upon her face. "Your confidence astounds me," she said. "I am sorry I cannot share it."

The smile still played about the features of Margery.

"I could pass some information along to you that would incline you to my opinion," answered Margery.

"You are on the enigmatical side, Mrs. McMasters," replied Aunt Grace. "Still, you are aware how deeply interested I am in all that concerns my nephew, and if your information would give me any hope of Geoff's. possible marriage, need I tell you how delighted I would be to have it in my possession."

Margery's eye expressed a merry twinkle. She knew how welcome the news would be to this good, staid English lady.

"Would you be surprised to learn that Miss Beverly loves your nephew?" she said.

Aunt Grace jumped up from her chair, exclaiming, excitedly, "Oh, Mrs. McMasters, do you truly think so?"

"I do not think" answered Margery. "I am absolutely certain of the matter."

"Oh, this is the best news I have ever heard. No wish is dearer to my heart, than these two should marry. You can easily realise, Mrs. McMaster, how deeply concerned I am regarding the matter?"

"There is no doubt," continued Margery, "the disparity of years given in, Miss Beverly loves your nephew."

"How do you know, Mrs. McMaster? What do you base your opinion on?" I have, for some years, been doing my very mental best to solve the very question you have been discussing with me. I am quite aware you never make random statements. You always have a good sensible foundation for all you say."

Margery told Aunt Grace the episode of the ball. "There could be no mistake," she said. "The lovelight never shone from any woman's eyes, if it did not shine from Isabel Beverly's that night."

Aunt Grace sat with a pleasant reflective smile upon her face. "I do hope your deductions are correct. The greatest happiness of my life will be to see them united. I have always had a snspicion Isabel bore him a deeper feeling than the ordinary feeling of ward for guardian, but I wanted to be absolutely certain of the matter one way or the other, and that was the reason I decided to come out to Australia. The visit gave me an opportunity of bringing them together."

"The trouble now will be," Margery said, "to get Geoffery to realise the state of Isabel's feelings. He has no idea this bright handsome girl has fixed her affections upon him. Some planning will be necessary to bring them together. I feel certain Mr. Armitage loves Miss Isabel, but, on account of the difference in their ages, does not give himself a chance. I think if you leave the matter in my hands, I believe I will be able to bring the affair to the happy conclusion so dear to your heart."

Aunt Grace listened to the latter part of the conversation with great interest. When Margery had concluded, she embraced her affectionately, saying, "You are so clever, dear. I will leave everything in your hands."

After they had parted, Aunt Grace sat for a long time, the pleasant expression on her face, indicating the agreeable nature of her reflections.

LVII.

MARGERY AND RIDDLES.

A few nights subsequently to the conversation recorded in the last chapter, the opportunity presented itself to Margery to enlighten Armitage of the fact that he was beloved by Isabel Beverly. She was aware she had a delicate matter to handle, but Margery was not wanting in tact.

It was at an evening party, held in a fashionable house at Potts' Point. Margery was waltzing with Armitage. Complaining of a slight indisposition, she requested Geoffery to escort her to a quiet place to rest for a few moments. From a point of civility, after finding a quiet corner, he had to remain by her side. The conversation turned to the handsome appearance of Miss Beverly.

"Quite the handsomest girl in the City," remarked Margery.

"Yes," he agreed. "She is indeed a splendid specimen of budding womanhood.

From where they sat the ball-room and the dancers were in full view. Isabel and Hadstone floated by.

"Are they not a handsome couple?" remarked Margery.

"They are, indeed," he replied. "Lucky the man who wins her heart," he continued.

"I believe it could be said, with truthfulness, that her heart is already won," said Margery.

She saw his lips twitch, the nervous movement of the mouth, the face grow a little paler. Margery, as her husband had said, missed very little.

"Yes," he answered, with a slight strain of bitterness in his tone. "It is generally understood Warren Hadstone will take her back to England as his wife."

"Yes," Margery replied, "if you would be guided by Sydney, the match is already made."

"No," he said. "Not quite as far as that. As her guardian I would have to be consulted. Hadstone is too much of a gentleman to omit to approach me in the first place."

"Mr. Armitage, to be candid with you," Margery said, "I do not consider Warren Hadstone has one chance in the world of winning the hand of Isabel Beverly."

"I do not understand," he said in surprised tones. "I understood you to infer the match was as good as made."

"You are wrong, Mr. Armitage," she answered. "I told you Sydney gossip inferred that. I certainly do not consider Mr.

Hadstone will ever take Miss Beverly back to England as his wife.

His face wore an anxious look. Was there a lover in the field with whom he was unacquainted?" he asked himself. He thought of the tragic death of the mother, her secret marriage. Was history going to repeat itself with the daughter? His features wore a grave look.

"I cannot follow you, Mrs. McMasters. Isabel is my ward. All that concerns her is of the deepest interest to me and Aunt Grace. We love her very dearly, her future happiness means much to us. I would beg of you to be as candid as possible with me."

"Oh," replied Margery, in careless tones, "I am aware she is your ward, and might be much more, if you so desired, but of course in that direction your interest does not lie."

He turned and fixed his gaze upon her, saying testily:

"Madam, you speak in riddles."

"Well," answered Margery, with the merry twinkle well marked in her eye, "if that is so, here is another riddle for you to solve. Miss Beverly loves a man very deeply. His age is about forty; he looks about thirty-three. Solve the puzzle and you will find who is the lucky man who has won her heart."

Her words had puzzled him. She rose, saying, "There is my husband. I will join him," and was gone before he could offer to escort her. He remained sitting in silence. He knew McMaster's wife. Had often dined with them, and was much struck with her sagacity and common sense. Society said she was a clever woman. He thought over her words: "His age is forty, he looks about thirty-three." The words came back to him. He rose and took a good look at himself. Did she really infer that Isabel was in love with him? The very thought of such a possibility sent the hot blood thrilling through his veins. He must think, he told himself. Again he rose and took a long look at himself in the large plate mirror attached to the side of the wall. "Yes," he concluded, "he was well enough preserved to look thirty three."

"Could Mrs. McMasters be right," he contemplated. "Could it be possible that Isabel loved him?" he again queried. His body glowed at the very thought. He recalled the conversation that had just passed between them. He thought of her unusual proposal to retire to a quiet corner, a custom indulged in by women inclined to a harmless flirtation. She had induced him to come to this corner to make this revelation to him. But how was she aware of the fact if such was the case? She might be wrong. He hoped to God not. He was beginning to see daylight. Mrs. McMasters had made a discovery, and had placed the character of it in his hands. If she was right he would bless her for the rest of his days.

However, one thing he was now fully determined to do. He would propose to Isabel before he went North. He would

ask her to be his wife. If she turned him down, well, he would take his gruel like a man.

The day before he was to leave he found himself alone with her. Aunt Grace was resting. The times were strenuous, she explained. Easily faced at Isabel's age, not quite so with her years.

"Isabel," Armitage said, "to-morrow I am returning to the North. It will be some time before I will be able to get away again. I have had a good holiday. There will be much requiring my attention when I get back."

"Must you go so soon, Mr. Armitage?" she answered. "You have been so good, so wonderful. I will miss you greatly."

"Will you miss me?" he queried, looking down into the handsome face.

"I would be ungrateful if I did not," she answered simply.

"I will also miss you, Isabel. I will miss your bright presence, your laughter, your dancing. Do you know, Isabel, since your arrival in Sydney, your presence has given me great pleasure. Isabel," he continued, looking down with a tender expression on his face, "I have grown to think very deeply of you." He regarded her fixedly.

"I am so glad, Mr. Armitage. I have tried to be worthy of your goodness, of your protection. I have often wanted to ask you a question. Something, indefinable, I never could understand what it was, has always prevented me from so doing."

"What is the question, Isabel?" he asked.

"Mr. Armitage, did you ever know my father?"

"No," he replied. "There was some mystery about him only your poor old nurse could have cleared away. As you are aware, the good old soul died suddenly in her bed."

"She was wonderfully good to me, and loved my mother very dearly. She had passed through a lot of trouble in her time. She told me my mother prayed at the graveside of her bairns. She spoke very bitterly of my father. Once she said to me, 'Live my child, as if you have not a Father. He who is your Father is not worthy the name.' It was rarely she mentioned his name; when she did, a very bad expression would pass over her face. She appeared to bear my father a very bitter hatred."

Armitage had listened to Isabel's remarks with great interest. He had often wondered who Isabel's father was. On this subject the Nurse was always the same. "I have told you, Mr. Armitage," she would say, "Isabel was born in wedlock; no more can I tell you at present. At some future time I will throw more light on her parentage."

"I am sorry to think it is now out of her reach to elucidate the mystery. I have not the remotest idea who your father was. I understood at the time of your Mother's death he was in America."

"He could not have been a good man," she answered thoughtfully, otherwise he would have been at my Mother's side. Does he know I am in the world?" she asked, looking up at Armitage.

"That for certain I could not say. I think not, unless the Nurse acquainted him with the fact, which is unlikely. For your sake Mrs. McCallum appeared to think it was best he should not know."

"Nurse always dwelt much on your goodness to me, of your friendship for my poor Mother. I remember, when quite a little child, I called you Guardy. For a long time it was the only name I knew you by. Mr. Armitage," she continued in sincere tones, "I would like you to know how deeply I appreciate all you have done for me. I often wonder, 'Can I ever repay you for your great kindness, your generosity'?"

"Isabel," he said, his voice unsteady with emotion. "There is a way that I could be paid, a thousand times over, if the sacrifice on your part is not too great."

A blush suffused her cheeks. Her woman's instinct told her what he was going to ask for.

"Isabel," he continued, "I loved your Mother as very few men love a woman. I was young at the time, little older than herself, but I loved as ardently as mature manhood ever loved. She was the wife of another. She passed into the presence of her Maker. I knew it not. I had never breathed or whispered a word of my love to her. For years I loved her memory. When you grew up, the very image of the Mother I had loved so passionately, my love for the mother was born afresh in my breast for the daughter. I love you as dearly as it is possible for man to love woman. Will you be my wife, Isabel?" he asked in anxious tones. "Before you answer," he continued, "be honest with yourself my dear girl. Do not let any feeling of gratitude sway or influence your answer to me. If you prefer it, take a week for mature reflection. Send your answer to me in the North."

Whilst he had been addressing her in passionate tones she had kept her eyes fixed upon the ground—the tell-tale blush was still on her cheeks. When he had finished speaking she placed her hand upon his arm, and looking up intently, with her handsome brown eyes, said:

"My answer does not need time for reflection, Geoffery. You ask me will I be your wife? My answer is Yes, because I love you as dearly as you love me."

"Isabel, can this really be true?" he exclaimed, his face beaming with the pleasure he felt, his whole frame thrilling with the thought. He drew her gently to his breast and kissed her tenderly.

"Yes, Geoffery," she answered, "ever since I was a little girl I could only think of one, and that was you. As I grew up my thoughts became more intently fixed upon you. It is as my Mother would wish, I told myself. I felt very happy when my

thoughts were of you. I will be as good to him some day as he is to me now. Everything and everybody assisted me to love you. Your own goodness, my poor old Nurse, Aunt Grace, and Geoffery," here she let her voice drop to a soft whisper, "I sometimes think the Spirit of my Mother."

He folded her again in his arms, telling her of his great happiness. She allowed her head to rest upon his breast, a contented smile adorning her features.

Who can tell? Was this the Godly blessing of hope that the Spirit of Joyce Beverly whispered in the tiny ear of the new life as it winged its flight to another world.

Aunt Grace was resting in her room. She derived a lot of confidence from the remarks of Mrs. McMasters, but so far nothing had eventuated. She was reflecting this afternoon, perhaps, after all, this shrewd woman was wrong. The best misjudge and make errors sometimes. What a load it would be off her mind if the matter was only fixed, and Geoff and Isabel engaged. She would give almost anything to see the matter finalised one way or the other. "Why does not Geoff ask her straight out, and get his answer 'Yes' or 'No'?" Such were the train of her reflections when a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," replied Aunt Grace.

Geoffery walked in with his arm around Isabel.

"Aunt," Armitage said, "Isabel has promised to be my wife."

The staid old English lady sprang out of her chair, displaying a marvellous activity for a woman of her years, and embraced them both. Hugging, squeezing, telling in between each embrace they had made her the very happiest woman in the world.

No house in good old Sydney held that night three happier hearts.

LVIII.

HADSTONE CALLS ON ISOBEL.

It was the afternoon of Isabel's acceptance of Geoffery. Warren Hadstone was announced. He asked for Aunt Grace, and was shown into her presence in her private sitting room. It was her favourite room. She had christened it her snuggery.

After the usual greetings had passed, Hadstone lost no time in making known the object of his visit. He had come to ask for Isabel's hand. "Was he right," he asked Aunt Grace, "in approaching her before addressing Mr. Armitage on the matter."

"Under the circumstances," she replied, "perfectly." Aunt Grace reflected for a moment.

"Warren," she said, "what you ask for is impossible to obtain." He was about to speak, but she put her hand up, indicating her wish to continue. "The news will pain you, but it is better for you to learn it now. Miss Beverly became engaged to my nephew only as late as yesterday afternoon."

"Engaged to Mr. Armitage? Her guardian, and so much older. It is impossible. It cannot be."

"Mr. Hadstone," Aunt Grace said in austere tones, "if you reflect upon your words, you will realise they are wanting much in civility." The tone and the words recalled his mental balance, which for the time had been disturbed by the intimation he had received of Isabel's engagement.

"May I see her?" he asked.

"Certainly, you may," she replied. She rang for the maid and told her to take Mr. Hadstone to Miss Isabel.

Isabel was sitting in an alcove away from the verandah, supremely happy, gazing down at the jewel on her finger, Geoffery's gift to her that very morning.

She rose as Hadstone approached. "Good afternoon, Mr. Hadstone," she said. She offered her hand in salutation. He accepted it, observing the ring that encircled the finger. He was impatient, impetuous. "Miss Beverly," he said, "Is it true, as I have been told this afternoon, that you have allowed yourself to become engaged to Mr. Armitage?"

Isabel looked up at his face. "Allowed myself!" she repeated. "Your words are ill-chosen, Mr. Hadstone. Uncomplimentary to my future husband, reflecting upon my own honour. Do you not realise, did I not love Mr. Armitage, I would not have promised to become his wife?"

"I am sorry," he said, in apologetic tones. "My sincere congratulations, and may you be very happy."

"I thank you. Her offended feelings softened at the thought of his disappointment.

He bowed and walked slowly away. His chagrin was deep. He had felt assured of acceptance. Very few girls would have refused the brilliant Hadstone with his alluring prospects.

The next afternoon he left for England. The notice of the departure of the brilliant English politician appeared at the same time as the engagement of Armitage and Isabel was announced.

LIX.

THE END OF THE "QUEER WOMAN."

A few months previous to Aunt Grace deciding to visit Australia, Mrs. McCallum had separated from her and Isabel. Her end was not far off, and she expressed the wish to return to her native town in Scotland, and there pass the few remaining days left to her in this world.

Both Aunt Grace and Isabel strongly protested against the proposal, but she was adamant. Nothing they could say could influence her to change her wishes. They were very loth to see her depart, to die away from them, but she would not have it otherwise.

Isabel was greatly upset at the parting. Sorrow and trouble had hardened the woman's nature, but she had felt a deep and true love for Joyce Beverly, and if it was possible, a greater love for Isabel. Isabel only saw the kindly side of her disposition, excepting at times, when in her childish innocence, she had enquired after her Father. At the mention of his name the same old malignant look would take its place upon her features.

Her health was in a very feeble condition, and a few days before the end came she made a discovery by accident, that gave her food for much serious reflection.

As a keepsake she had always retained the small Japanese cabinet left behind by Joyce. On this particular day, by accident she dislodged it from where it stood on a small dressing table. It was of fragile structure, the fall to the floor knocked it to pieces. Stooping down with difficulty, she was gathering the pieces together, when from the back of the cabinet she observed papers protruding. Extracting them with nervous fingers, realising she was on the eve of making a discovery, she discovered the ill-fated letters that Beverly had written to Joyce and her uncle; also Connolly's letter to the girl.

She devoured every word with the deepest intensity. Again She devoured every word with the deepest interest. Again she read them with concentrated interest. After she had completed the second perusal, she sat in silence, reflecting deeply. She held the letters in her hand. She realised now why Beverly never appeared, but again the old look of scorn settled on her fatures. "What a comparison," she muttered to herself, "between the loyalty of the woman and the loyalty of the man." The woman prepared to sacrifice her life for her faith in her lover, the man allowing every ounce of faith and trust he had

in the woman he loved, to be shattered by the words of a shanty keeper. "Bah," she muttered contemptuously, "He still deserves to suffer."

She sat down at the table, and commenced to write. She addressed the first letter to—

JAMES McMASTER, ESQ.,
"Wentworth Court,"
Sydney.

Sir,—

I enclose herewith a sealed packet, knowing you to be a strictly honourable man. I am making a request of you, to do a certain service for me. I am the Nurse who reared the child Isabel, the ward of Mr. Armitage, your client, Squatter of Queensland.

When this young lady is twenty one, open this packet. If before she reaches that age a sufficiently important reason exists, such, for instance, as marriage, open this packet I enclose herewith. On your honour as a man, on no other pretence, interfere with it. By the time this letter reaches your hands, I will be no more. I have been but an instrument in the hands of the Almighty.

M. McCALLUM.

She sealed this letter up after enclosing the packet referred to in her letter. The packet was unaddressed. Having carefully attended to the registration and posting of the packet, she returned to her lonely room. Here a few days afterwards she was discovered dead in her bed.

When this letter reached McMaster, he read it very carefully. He was never impressed very much with matter that carried an air of mystery. A strictly straightforward man in all his dealings, any matter otherwise did not appeal to him. He placed the letter in his safe, and concluded he would consult Armitage regarding the affair when he came down from Queensland.

By the same English mail he received a brief letter from a Presbyterian Minister, advising him of the passing away of Mrs. McCallum. It was short:

Dear Sir,—

The late good woman, Mrs. McCallum, requested me to inform you of her death.

To the hour of her death she maintained she was doing as her Maker directed. For his dreadful sin, Beverly must be punished. She had loved Isabel dearly. She had trained the girl's mind to look with contempt and dislike on the father. Not knowing the true facts of the case, until she discovered them by chance, she had concluded Beverly had heard of Joyce's precarious condition and had gone through the marriage ceremony as a balm for his own conscience knowing the worst must happen. Her mind was always full of the monomania of hate for the girl's destroyer. As such she could only regard him. When she

discovered that black treachery had been practised upon them she realised her condemnation of Beverly had not been justified, but her animosity was so intense for Beverly she decided not yet would she lift the burden of worry he carried. "Let him still suffer a little longer," she muttered, with the old look of grim satisfaction passing over her features.

Six months after she had been with Aunt Grace, she had written to Armitage, and informed him that information had come to hand, proving the surname of Isabel to be Beverly. Geoffery noted the matter, never thinking to connect the rich and influential Beverly's of Sydney with the unfortunate Joyce Hilston, as he kne wher.

He had also received a brief note from the Nurse.

My Dear Mr. Armitage,—

My end is near. To-day I made a discovery of importance to Isabel. The time is not ripe to make any further disclosures. My action regarding the child, now grown into a beautiful woman, I justify in my own sight. He who caused all the pain and suffering of the Mother, must himself suffer. No more at the present time can I say. For the many kindnesses I have received from your hands, I thank you. I have trained the girl's mind to look upon you for what you are, a straightforward, honourable, kindly gentleman. By the time this reaches you I will stand before my Maker.

M. McCALLUM.

He also received a short note from the parson, telling him Mrs. McCallum had passed away.

He sat in quiet reflection, thinking over the contents of the Nurse's letter. His mind rested upon the strange character of the woman. The nurse had behaved as she had written Armitage. She had always impressed upon the mind of Isabel that Armitage was all that was good and honourable. Many times had she told her of his great love for her Mother.

In denying Beverly the knowledge of the existence of his child, in heaping this retribution upon his head, she consoled herself in the belief that she was doing what was right.

She fully realised what unction to the soul of Beverly the association of this beautiful girl would be, his own flesh and blood, the daughter of the woman he had so passionately loved, and realising this, she daily gloated over the fact that she was the influence that withheld that knowledge from him.

LX.

THE "QUEER WOMAN'S" REVELATIONS.

The second morning following Geoffery's engagement to Isabel, he waited upon McMaster at his office. When Armitage was shown into the office, Jim looked up, surprised to find him such an early visitor. Geoffery looked twenty years younger.

After exchanging the morning's greetings, Armitage said, "I have great news for you, old man. You would never guess its character."

"Out with it," replied McMaster. "Do not keep me in suspense."

"Miss Beverly has promised to become my wife. Could I bring you anything better than that?" he asked.

"From your point of view, I believe not. But I cannot see anything sensational in the tidings. I could have told you, or at least my wife could have done so, a fortnight ago, that Miss Beverly was in love with you." There was a merry twinkle in the eye of McMaster as he volunteered this information.

"I owe my good fortune to your wife, McMaster, and will ever regard her with eternal respect and gratitude."

"However, let me offer my best congratulations," said McMaster. May both your lives be blessed with good health and happiness."

"I thank you," said Armitage. "I thank you indeed for your good wishes."

Then like a flash a serious look overspread the features of McMaster. "By Jove, Armitage," he said in grove tones, "there is a matter concerning you that I have neglected to attend to. About three months ago I received a letter from Scotland. It was from the Nurse in whose care you placed your ward. I decided to leave the matter until I had an opportunity to confer with you, but the matter appears to have slipped my memory, an omission I am rarely guilty of." McMaster went to his safe, extracting the letters therefrom. He handed the Nurse's letter to Armitage to peruse. Armitage, realising the contents referred to Isabel, read the letter through with deep interest. After concluding its perusal he said, "Well, the time has arrived to break the seal of that package, and as she is to be my wife, no better opportunity than the present is likely to present itself.

McMaster broke the seal of the packet and let the contents drop on to the office table. It was also a sealed packet, addressed to

ALEXANDER RICHARD BEVERLY,

endorsed, to be delivered at once, on my instructions to James McMaster, Esq.

Both men read the address, and in silence gazed at one another. Could it be that Lex Beverly was in any way connected with Isabel Beverly? What strange mystery was about to be disclosed? These were the thoughts that were passing through the respective minds of McMaster and Armitage. The faces of both were grave. McMaster was the first to speak.

"Do you know anything of her antecedents?" he asked.

"Absolutely nothing," Armitage replied, "except that her name is Beverly. The Nurse wrote to me after she had been in England some little time, stating she had discovered that the child's surname was Beverly. The other name I gave her myself. The Nurse was the only person who was acquainted with the sad history of the mother. The only information she would volunteer was that the child was born in wedlock, and the father was in America at the time of the mother's death; had, in fact, deserted the Mother.

"And this handsome girl, as a child, played on the sands of Coogee Beach?" queried McMaster.

"The same," answered Armitage. "The Nurse appeared to have some reason for reticence regarding the proposed residence in England, and consequently you were never appraised of the child's removal to the care of my Aunt."

"I often wondered, as many others did, regarding her sudden disappearance. What had become of her? Whither had she flown? She was indeed a glorious child," continued McMaster.

McMaster stood reflecting, holding the packet in his hand.

"I think, McMaster, you should take that packet around to Beverly without delay," Armitage said.

"I think not," Jim answered. "As her future husband, it is your duty." He handed the packet to Armitage.

Armitage walked straight to Beverly's offices and found him disengaged. He was admitted, Beverly requesting him to be seated.

"I am the bearer of a letter addressed to you," commenced Armitage, "from a woman who was the death-bed of Joyce Hilston when she passed away in a township in the far North of Queensland. Did you know such a person?" Armitage asked, looking Beverly straight in the face.

Beverly was already wondering what Armitage knew of his first wife. "I met the person you refer to but once," he responded.

Geoffery handed him the sealed addressed packet. He examined the inscription carefully, as if trying to recall the handwriting. He broke the seal and several papers rolled out on to

the table. The first paper he unfolded was a letter written to him by the Nurse just after she had found the papers concealed in the small cabinet. He commenced to read it. The more he read, the greater became his agitation. With the keenest interest he carefully examined the other documents. The certificate of birth, his own ill-fated letter. Connolly's letter to the dead girl. When he had concluded his examination, he said to Armitage:

"My God! My God! For twenty years I have been robbed of what would have been a Godly blessing to my weary mind.

Armitage sat in silence still mystified.

"Mr. Armitage," Beverly said, "these papers tell me the young lady you have in your care is my daughter."

"It appears impossible," answered Armitage. "If such is the case, Alexander Beverly, what excuse do you offer for the tragic death of the Mother, dying in a tin hut, away from the precincts of civilisation, a doctor with a broken arm, the only skill within miles."

For answer Beverly pushed the bundle of papers towards him.

Armitage straightened out the crumpled letter that Beverly had read. It ran as follows:—

To Alexander Richard Beverly.—

I am on the point of death, and I am aware of it. All my life I have born you an implacable hatred. Woman never in this world bore a man the same malignant animosity that I bore you. I have prayed your life would be childless, that your wife would bring dishonour upon you. I have prayed to God to visit a heavy retribution upon your head. I hid the birth of the child from you so that your conscience could gain no solace from the fact that you were caring for her child. Every hour of her sufferings I cursed you in silence. My hatred became a monomania with me. I watched you on the beach the afternoon you and your wife stopped and spoke to the child. Ah! I thought with grim satisfaction, what would you give to know that this beautiful child, that everybody raves about, was her child, your own flesh and blood? The sight was indeed goodly unction to my soul. Next day your wife came to see me. I was inside and heard the conversation. I told the girl to tell her I was out. She told the girl her mission. If she adopted the little girl she would take her youthful nurse too. Some enquiries, she had said, would have to be made regarding her parentage. Her parentage, I smiled. Do you wonder. I would have sooner cast her over te cliff rather than she should become a second's comfort to the destroyer of her Mother. How I hated you. The sight of that patient, suffering girl, prepared to sacrifice her life for you, for the cowardly hound I considered you to be, hiding your foul carcase away, knowing you had put her on her word of

honour to keep your love a secret, knowing she would play the game to the last. Is ti any wonder, thinking this, that I loathed you? "He is not here," she would say, "but I am as certain he is blameless, as I am the sun will set to-night." The day the letter arrived from America she was seized with her sickness. The rest you know. All that I have written is what I have felt for you. An hour ago, by accident, I knocked a small cabinet off my dressing table. It had belonged to her. I had kept it as a keepsake. It was fragile and almost came to pieces with the fall. I discovered at the back of it a small secret receptacle in which there were some papers. ! examined them, read them. I enclose herewith all there were. I have read everything very carefully many times. Even to my prejudiced mind, your behaviour appears less foul than I have always considered it. By you honourable reparation was intended, but on your conscience, all your life, must remain the stain that you destroyed her.

M. McCALLUM.

Armitage read everything with great care. The birth certificate he examined. He realised how this astute woman outwitted Beverly.

"Beverly," Armitage said, "this is the very saddest thing I could imagine.

Beverly, in great distress at the contents of the Nurse's letter, had been resting with his arms on the table, his head upon them. He lifted his head and spoke:

"How was it, Armitage, that you came into Joyce's life?"

"I was young at the time of her death. I had only been out in the Colony a couple of years. Her Uncle and I were neighbours, and personal friends. I was frequently at her uncle's place. They called it "Bonnie Doon," after the place the unfortunate woman's husband came from. They had suffered dreadful misfortune on the place. I fell as deeply in love with Joyce as yourself. After shearing Megson and I made a big deal in sheep. To escape the wet weather we had to get a prompt start. We placed a man in charge of both places. Megson took Miss Hilston to the Change next morning and saw her off in the coach for the Railway Head, as we understood, to return to her father in New South Wales. We both wanted to have a look at the country. We had a long trip, got held up with floods, and were twice as long on the road as we should have been. When we eventually arrived back, the first thing we heard was the dreadful news, that Joyce had succumbed to typhoid fever. I left immediately, and rode day and night to reach Mrs. McCallum's to ascertain the truth. I was standing in the passage of the small home, upset and excited, when the tiny cry of a child reached my ear. I noted the start the Nurse gave when she realised I heard the cry. I brushed past her, and there, lying on ts back, was a beautiful babe." Beverly groaned aloud. Armit-

age continued in subdued tones, in which there was a trace of sorrow for the suffering father. "I knew at a glance whose child it was. The likeness was unmistakable. The Nurse would tell little. The only information I could obtain from her was the child was born in wedlock, understanding from the meagre information she supplied, that the father was in America and had deserted his young wife. She claimed the child by right of gift from the dead mother. Her father was never to know of her secret marriage or of the existence of the child. All this the Nurse explained to me. She had resolutely made up her mind that the Father would never know that his wife had left the babe behind. She blamed him for all the girl's sufferings, and as she tells in this letter, bore him an implacable animosity. She asked me, 'Would I be a friend to the child of the dead girl? As you have loved the Mother, will you befriend her child. She needs a friend.' I agreed, sent them to Sydney, afterwards taking them home and lacing the little one in the care of my good Aunt. Of her parentage I was totally ignorant."

"Beyond doubt, you are Isabel's father," he continued, after a pause, "and only yesterday she consented to be my wife."

At the words, "Beyond doubt you are Isabel's Father," uttered by Armitage, a new light came into the man's face; the black clouds of the past were rolling away; the sunshine of life, after all those dark years, was once more reflecting its joy within his being. He longed to fold his child in his arms, exclaiming, "My child, my child, Joyce's child, the daughter of her whose image lives as green in my memory this day as the first hour I loved her."

Armitage was once more intently perusing and investigating the letters and documents. "We must reconcile her to the new order of things," he said. "Mrs. McCallum," he continued, "has instilled into her mind dreadful ideas regarding the character of her father. Her mind will have to be disabused of these before you come together. Then there is the world generally. How are we going to publicly explain, without bringing shame down upon the head of the dead Mother? Mr. Beverly, we will have to proceed in this matter with great prudence. No matter what there is to do, the memory of the dead mother must be respected, the fair name of the daughter untarnished."

Beverly sat in thoughtful attitude during the remarks of Armitage. "Fate has played hardly with me, Armitage," he said. To be separated by treachery from her, whom I loved dearer than life itself, and then to be deprived of a life's association with my child, whilst my very soul was hungering for such consolation, seems pretty rotten luck." The words were uttered in a heart-broken, sorrowing tone.

"It is inexpressably sad, Beverly. The saddest thing I have ever heard of." So Armitage spoke. He looked over at this man, whom he knew bore such a wonderful character in the city for his generosity. He realised how such a man must have suffered.

Of kindly, generous nature like his Father, ever out to help in every case of need, no matter who applied, providing the case was a genuine one, whether it be private individual, priest, parson, or some society, the cheque-book ever open; with such a nature, to step aside from the beaten track of righteousness, and by such a step bring humiliation and shame and painful suffering, ending in death, upon one whom he had loved so dearly; was it any wonder he became a changed man?

"The first opportunity that presents itself to acquaint Isabel of to-day's discoveries I will take advantage of," said Armitage. "A little time and tact will place her in your arms." They shook hands in silence.

LXI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER MEET.

The opportunity to reveal to Isabel the existence of her father presented itself a couple of days after Geoffery had visited Beverly with the Nurse's letter.

Isabel and Geoffery were sitting together, conversing. Isabel spoke. "Do you know, Geoff, lately I have been thinking much of my father. Wondering whether he is still alive? Was he a bad man? Perhaps treachery was at work to keep him from my Mother's side? I often think perhaps my Nurse was unduly prejudiced against him. I cannot conceive Geoff, my good and noble Mother (Nurse always told me how good she was) could love a bad man.

Whilst Isabel was speaking Armitage was waiting for her to conclude. This he knew was the opportunity to reveal to his betrothed the news that her father existed, and who he was.

"I am glad you have opened the subject, Isabel," he said. There is much in your reasoning. I have been waiting for an opportunity to talk to you about your father. Some information has come to light that shows the character of your father was not as the Nurse represented. There were many facts concerning your father and mother that the nurse was totally ignorant of. It appears your father was at the bedside of your mother before she died. As your mind suggests, treachery was at work, treachery of a very foul nature, that separated two loving hearts—your father's and your mother's. He was led to believe that your mother had acted in a very heartless manner. In a fit of disappointment and distraction he went to the Never Never of Central Australia. The tragic death of a stockman brought the whole plot to light. This man confessed on his death bed to suppressing a letter that your father had written to your mother, an important one, to which in all fairness your father should have had a reply. He was told the letter had been personally delivered to your mother. When he discovered that treachery had been practised upon himself and your mother, he rode day and night to reach her side. He reached her the night she died and you were born. The sleepless night of travel, the exposure of heavy storms, the grief he suffered at the loss of your mother, brought on a serious illness. For months his life hung by a thread. The nurse bore your father an implacable hatred, and took the opportunity of his illness to smuggle you out of Queensland. She enlisted my aid to assist the friendless child of the woman I had

loved, misleading me as to your parentage. I was only too anxious, never realising I was assisting to rob a good man of his child, and you of your parentage. She registered your birth in Sydney. When your father asked of you, she told him, like the mother, the child was lost to him for ever, hence he always mourned you as being lost with the mother. When he recovered from his dreadful illness, he caused inquiries to be made in Queensland, but no trace could be found of the registration of a child of his marriage with your mother. The nurse, having conceived a monomania of hate for your father, believing him to be guilty of your mother's death, swore he would never know you were alive, believing in thus punishing him she was but an instrument in the hands of her Maker. Your father's life has been spent in mourning for the loss of your mother. The unfortunate woman robbed you of your legitimate birthright and robbed your father of his daughter."

Isabel had listened to Geoffery's recital with looks of deep interest. At the mention of the tragic death of her mother tears stole down her cheeks.

"We must not forget, Isabel," he continued, "that the poor woman had suffered dreadful misfortunes. She was known for a long time as the "Queer Woman." Many did not consider her quite right in her head."

"She loved the memory of my mother devoutly." At the thought of my mother a sad look would steal over her face, at times the tears would fall from her eyes, but if I mentioned my father's name a dreadful angry look would pass over her face. The mention of his name would upset her, and she would command me never to ask of him." Continuing Isabel asked, "And my father, Geoff? Is he still alive? Is he in Australia?"

"To all your questions, Isabel, I can say 'Yes.' Your father is alive and is in Australia."

"Do you know him Geoff?"

"Yes, Isabel," he replied, "I have known him for many years, but was not aware until a day or two ago that my ward was his daughter."

"Geoffery, will I see him? That is, if you think it is right that I should do so."

"Your father is a good man. One of the most generous the city holds, respected and esteemed by everybody for his great goodness and benevolence.

She looked up at him, saying, "Is that so, Geoffery. You cannot realise what a consolation it is to my conscience to know my father is a good and honourable man. I was already feeling the burden of responsibility, thinking he was what I have always been led to believe—a dishonourable man. Also wondering, whether I was doing right in attaching myself to you, with this taint upon his name."

He drew her tenderly to his breast, as if the very suggestion of losing her was too painful for reflection.

"Isabel," he said, looking down at the wealth of luxuriant hair as her head rested on his shoulder, "your father, dear, is Alexander Beverly, the great Australian Squatter."

She started from him in amazement, with looks of incredible surprise written upon her features. She uttered no word, but stood looking up at him, as if the information was unbelievable.

"It is quite true, Isabel," Armitage continued, "indisputable proof is forthcoming that shows you are his only child, a great heiress." She placed her head again upon his shoulder and sobbed. He waited until her emotion had subsided, and continued, "From the hour your father discovered he had a child living, the daughter of the woman whose memory he still cherishes within his breast, the load of his sorrow has lightened. Anxious is he to clasp you to his breast, to tell you what a bright spot in his life your existence will be to him in the future."

She raised her head. Looking up at him she said, "Is it not strange, Geoff, I have always been attracted to him? The grave sorrowful expression that he habitually wore, always produced a feeling of symathy for him within my breast. At the Governor's Ball, when I turned my looks in his direction, I found him gazing upon me with such a pained expression upon his face."

"He was struck with the likeness you bear to your mother. Excepting that your eyes are brown, and hers were grey, you are the very picture of her." He told her how upset he was at the show. You rode so like your mother that the suffering past was recalled to him. Again at Her Majesty's, they had a box opposite ours. He said 'Had your mother came to life again, the resemblance could not have been greater.'"

"The expression upon his face always conveyed to me the feeling that he had at some period of his life suffered some great sorrow," she said.

"The sad expression you see written upon his face," Armitage answered, "is the reflection of his sorrow for your mother."

Arrangements were made for Isabel to meet her father quietly. Geoffery took her up to the big house on the shores of the harbour. He entered with Isabel on his arm. Lex Beverly advanced and wrapped her in his arms. "My child, my child," he said. "I thank you, Oh, Lord, for this great blessing." He kissed her tenderly upon the cheek, and once more drew her to him. Isabel's heart had already gone out to the stricken father who had suffered for years, whose conscience was seared with the black pages of the past.

Beverly led the beautiful girl to an inner room, where Ann waited, as anxious as Beverly to hold her husband's daughter in her arms. There, in one another's arms, Beverly left them. Beverly had taken McMaster and his wife into his confidence. He had related the sad story to them, carefully refraining from any mention of Deigen's implication. Ann had invited Margery over, and by-and-bye the three, Ann, Isabel, and Margery, strolled through the hall and out into the grounds. Beverly and Armit-

age stood at the open window watching them. The newly-found daughter in the middle, the two older with their arms affectionately around her. It was a good picture to look upon.

No publicity was given to the matter. Aunt Grace and Isabel removed to Harbour View. little importance was attached to this. The house at Double Bay was released. In view of the early marriage of Isabel, it was generally accepted she would be married from Ann Beverly's. Armitage was now stopping at his club.

Lex Beverly had the most painful task of all before him, which was to acquaint his aged father and mother with the fact that they had a grand-daughter living. At their beautiful home at Cocgee, Beverly, sitting between his father and mother, told as much of the tragedy in the North as could be truthfully told, without giving the old couple any pain. The story of the secret marriage, of the early death of the young wife, of the suppression of the birth of the child, of the death of the nurse, her revelations disclosing the existence of a child that the father thought had been lost with the mother, needless to say created both wonder and surprise.

The following day Lex Beverly drove his handsome daughter out to meet her grandfather and grandmother.

Richard Beverly advanced with outstretched arms: "My dear child! My dear child, you will bring a new joy to our old hearts. We are in the winter of our time, but your bright presence will turn our thoughts to spring."

Lex Beverly looked on at the affectionate greetings his good father and mother bestowed upon his daughter. A peace of mind had now come to him that he had not known since he awoke from his illness twenty years ago.

LXII.

CONCLUSION.

Ralph Hilston, now Sir Ralph, was written to and informed that his daughter had married secretly whilst in Queensland. It was now ascertained she had left a daughter behind. The more the old chap read, the more amazed he became.

His bright, handsome Joyce married, he a grandfather, and never to be acquainted with it! What was the world coming to? he asked. He wrote pleadingly to Isabel, asking her to visit him and make a prolonged stay.

Armitage and Isabel, after a short engagement, were quietly married. After a pleasant tour through Tasmania they returned to Sydney. Isabel was keen to accompany her husband on his Northern visit. They passed through the township where Isabel was born, now a thriving, prosperous place. Together they visited the grave of the ill-fated Joyce Beverly. No sign remained of the lonely house on the other side of the river. It had long since been sold and removed. When Armitage and his wife returned to Sydney, after a short stay on Merthon, Alexander Beverly persuaded him to join him in the big pastoral business. He explained to Armitage, "It is only a matter of time, being a younger man than I, you will have to take your share of the management; Isabel is my sole heiress. You might as well commence now. The most urgent reason I have for your acquiescence to my request is the fact I will see so much of Isabel. Make your home with us. The house is too lonely for Ann and I. We are getting along in years. Brighten our lives with your association."

It became settled. Armitage fell in with Beverly's views. There is now no dearth of childish prattle and pattering footstels. The old house sounds with the ripple of childish laughter. There is a beautiful girl called Joyce. Every day a gentleman on horseback can be seen, leading a dapple pony through Centennial Park, with this pretty little lady proudly sitting on its back, growing every day more like the handsome girl we introduced to our readers at the commencement of these pages. Beverly looks down at the face of the child and smiles. In the form of his grandchild he recognises the spirit of the dead Joyce.

Shakespeare wrote: "Conscience doth make cowards of us all."

Ah, let us remember, "Circumstances will often create the conscience that makes a coward of us."

Of the friends we have followed through this story, very little remains to be told.

Aunt Grace, supremely happy at the agreeable termination of all her romancing, received a letter from an old cousin, asking her to sell him the old home in England. He had made a big rise on the Stock Exchange in England. To the delight of Isabel and Geoffery she consented, and became, as she styled herself, a Colonial. She lived for many years to enjoy the association of their children.

Old Tom Wells, hale and hearty, still lives on, surrounded by a crowd of young stockmen all his son's children. Nothing delights the old chap more than to see each as he reaches a suitable age, getting his first lesson in horsemanship.

Geoffery and Isabel paid old Sir Ralph the promised visit, and gladdened the old man's heart by making a prolonged stay with him. When his eyes rested upon the handsome face of Isabel, he exclaimed, "How like my handsome Joyce." When time compelled them to leave the old man, he was much cut up. In parting he had said, "I cannot tell in words what a solace your bright presence has been to me. It would seem as if the past has been a dream. That I have awakened to find my dear child once more by my side." At parting he said with moist eyes, "God bless you both!"

The brightest spot in the lives of old Richard Beverly and his good wife was the presence of his great grandchildren. The old couple, seated in basket chairs on the lawn in front of the pretty house at Coogee, derived the pleasure of their old age, watching the gambols of the little folk.

We have passed through many dark scenes during the course of this narrative. Let us now, with this bright picture before us, draw the curtain.

[THE END.]

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